

“Only once in a generation or so do we come across a theological work that makes such a compelling argument that it renders virtually all other treatments on the topic obsolete. Such is the case with *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics*. The industrial-strength exegesis in this volume provides a solid foundation on which the edifice is built. The years of assiduous labor that went into its production, the integrity, almost superhuman comprehensiveness, and penetrating persuasiveness of its arguments (no straw men here!), the clarity of its case, the charity of its interactions, and the obvious devotion of these two scholars put *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* in a league of its own. Accolades from all quarters have labeled this book ‘masterful,’ ‘compelling,’ ‘remarkable,’ ‘exhaustive,’ ‘monumental,’ ‘magisterial,’ and the like. It is all of these things and more. And what ties it all together is the spiritual force of Bowman and Komoszewski’s *magnum opus*. This publication peels back the curtain of the Holy of Holies just enough to give us a peek into the brilliant splendor of the Lord Christ who shares the throne with God the Father. There is only one book I know of that can *almost* rival this one: Bowman and Komoszewski’s earlier offering, *Putting Jesus in His Place*. But this latest volume is on a new plane. It is clearly the finest defense of our Savior’s deity in the twenty-first century and perhaps in all of Christian history.”

—Daniel B. Wallace,
Senior Research Professor Emeritus of New Testament Studies,
Dallas Theological Seminary

“It’s hard to imagine a more appropriate time to reexamine the person of Jesus than *right now*, and there isn’t a better book for the task than *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics*. Bowman and Komoszewski have created an immensely accessible yet strikingly thorough book that examines the divinity of Jesus from all possible angles. Every Christian should have this book in their collection of essential resources.”

—J. Warner Wallace,
Dateline-featured Cold-Case Detective;
Senior Fellow at the Colson Center for Christian Worldview

“This remarkable book works on two levels at once. At a quick read, it delivers solid arguments and evidence for the deity of Christ in a memorable way. The authors make their case, show their work, and equip believers with immediately accessible resources for meeting objections and dialoguing with the doubtful. It is thus an effective tool for apologetics and Christian instruction. But at another level, when studied more thoroughly, this volume is a kind of miniaturized research library or an index of the best and most current research on Jesus. I know of no other book that manages to function at both levels simultaneously with such expertise, good judgment, and poise. Highly recommended, both for reading and for keeping on hand as a reference tool.”

—Fred Sanders,
Torrey Honors College, Biola University;
Coeditor, *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Intermediate Christology*

“This book is a gift to the body of Christ! In a spiritual climate in which the deity of Jesus is challenged from all sides, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is the definitive and comprehensive rebuttal to all attacks against this cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. I hope every Christian will add this to their library as a resource they can turn to again and again whenever they encounter objections to the clear teaching of Scripture that Jesus is God.”

—Alisa Childers,
Host, The Alisa Childers Podcast;
Author, *Another Gospel?* and *Live Your Truth and Other Lies*

“Christology is the lifeblood of the Christian faith. That’s what makes *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* so important. The authors take a full look at Jesus’ divine activity, critiquing other views of Jesus by showing that they fall short of all that Scripture reveals about what Jesus said and did. By doing so, the book places the roots for this faith where they belong, with Jesus himself. This is a book to be read, studied, and referenced for what makes Christ so unique. I give it the highest recommendation.”

—Darrell L. Bock,
Executive Director of Cultural Engagement,
Howard G. Hendricks Center,
Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies,
Dallas Theological Seminary

“Who is Jesus? Throughout the ages people have viewed him as a good teacher, a wise prophet, a failed revolutionary, an angel, a second-tier ‘god,’ and in still other ways. There is no shortage of answers. Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski deftly respond to these misunderstandings from such religions as Unitarians, Mormons, Muslims, and Jehovah’s Witnesses in order to defend the church’s historic answer from the Scriptures that Jesus is the eternal, divine Son of the living God. Though the size and scope of the work might be initially daunting, any and all effort spent understanding Jesus Christ, in whom are ‘hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Colossians 2:3), is well worth the investment of time and energy. Pastors, theologians, and laypersons alike would therefore be well-served to add this to their library.”

—Geoff Ashley,
Pastor, Reformation Church, Allen, TX

“*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is a welcome addition to recent scholarly work on what is typically called ‘early high Christology’ (or, better, ‘trinitarian Christology’). It is truly a *tour de force* through virtually every New Testament passage (and Old Testament passage, for that matter) that touches on the full divinity of God the Son while also maintaining a keen eye towards his full humanity. It fits perfectly between shorter introductory works to the topic and more narrow technical monographs on specific topics or passages. The *HANDS* acronym from the authors’ earlier work remains incredibly useful as a teaching device (honors, attributes, names, deeds, seat). What really sets apart this book—beyond its more comprehensive coverage and exegetical rigor—is the depth with which it engages charitably but critically with views that oppose traditional orthodox Christology (e.g., from higher critics, Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, and so forth). This even-handed treatment of diverse perspectives makes this volume not only a go-to textbook but a very valuable apologetics guide.”

—Gregory R. Lanier,
Associate Professor of New Testament, Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando);
Author, *Is Jesus Truly God? How the Bible Teaches the Divinity of Christ*

“*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is one of the most important and impactful books I’ve ever read. Once you’ve seen the vast number of ways in which Jesus and His followers claimed He was God, you will never read the Gospels the same again—I know that’s been the case for me. This book belongs on the short list of apologetics books *every* Christian should have.”

—Natasha Crain,
Speaker and Podcaster;
Author, *Faithfully Different* and *Talking with Your Kids about Jesus*

“From his birth, people have been misreading Jesus. Such wayward readings span the spectrum from utterly erroneous to insufficient and incomplete. Included among such readers are political and religious assassins, perplexed disciples, crowds of witnesses, family members, ancient and contemporary Bible-reading church leaders, theologians, historians, and subscribers to personality-driven Christian subcultures in which celebrities compete with the Lord Jesus Christ for first place. There exists no shortage of alternative interpretations of the person and work of Christ. The annals of history from the New Testament to one’s favorite social media platform are full of them. Both Jesus and Paul testify to the earliest presence of competing concepts of ‘Christs’ and ‘Gospels.’ Yet, too, Jesus and the apostles in the writings of the New Testament bear witness to a shared, authoritative, archetypal Christology, the doctrine of Jesus, proclaimed by Christ himself from the Law and Prophets, that he transmitted to his disciples and that they embedded in their proclamation. From thorough and close readings of the biblical texts paired with critical analysis of a kaleidoscope of religious, philosophical, and historiographical traditions concerning Jesus, Bowman and Komoszewski provide a faithful and rigorous portrayal of the apostolic teaching on the divine nature of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In part and in whole, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* rewards its reader with insight into the mind of Christ concerning himself.”

—D. Jeffrey Bingham,
Research Professor of Historical Theology, Jesse Hendley Chair of Biblical Theology,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“As many Christians today beat a hasty retreat away from an early and well-established doctrine of Christ’s deity, Bowman and Komoszewski make an impressive case for the antiquity of this doctrine in our earliest sources. In addition, their book carries on a constant point/counterpoint argument against alternative Christologies, including skeptical, Muslim, progressive Christian, Mormon, Jehovah’s Witness, Unitarian, and Oneness Pentecostal. One cannot help but admire how they have taken the acronym *HANDS* as a useful way of categorizing and recalling the extensive evidence. Expansive in scope and deep in historical and theological reasoning, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is one of the best sourcebooks I know for understanding the breadth of early Christian assessments of Jesus’ significance.”

—David B. Capes,
Director, Lanier Theological Library;
Author, *The Divine Christ: Paul, the Lord Jesus, and the Scriptures of Israel*

“I have owned and studied Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski’s earlier book, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, for more than a decade. In this new, far more thorough work on the same subject, they have simply outdone themselves. By utilizing the latest scholarship and dealing with the specific Christological teachings of religious groups such as Muslims, Mormons, and Jehovah’s Witnesses, among others, this extensive volume will be my go-to guide when I want to understand issues involving the deity of Christ. Every serious Christian ought to own a copy and become familiar with its pages because, as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:4, false versions of Jesus do exist. What could be more important than understanding how Jesus is more than just a good guru, prophet, angel, or teacher—as other religions tout? Until a person grasps who the authentic Jesus of Nazareth is, God cannot be worshiped both in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). I don’t believe that there is any better single volume on Jesus than this.”

—Eric Johnson,
Mormonism Research Ministry (mrm.org);
Author, *Introducing Christianity to Mormons*

“One might not think that unitarianism represents much of a threat to Christian theology today. But that would be a grave mistake. As Bowman and Komoszewski show, there are a wide variety of unitarian theologies today that challenge Christian belief, preeminently Islam, the second largest religion in the world, as well as various sects and cults, not to mention Christian unitarianism. It is vital that Christian theologians be able to provide a robust biblical defense of the deity of Christ, which is a dagger in the heart of unitarianism. Fortunately, that case is not merely available but has proven itself convincing to the wide majority of New Testament scholars today. In this panoramic book, Bowman and Komoszewski marshal the full range of arguments that have convinced scholars that the New Testament and, indeed, the primitive Christian church out of which it came believed firmly in the full deity of Jesus Christ.”

William Lane Craig,

Visiting Scholar of Philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University;

Professor of Philosophy, Houston Christian University;

Author, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus*

“In an age where Jesus is understood as fiction, a good teacher, an angelic demigod, a swear-word, one of many gods, a construct, and more, this book is a brilliant defense of the deity of Christ. Engaging superbly with biblical texts and theological writers, Bowman and Komoszewski take readers on a journey that leads to the only possible solution considering the evidence—Jesus is God the Son. Great theology should lead to worship, deeper love for others, a desire to live out God's Word as Jesus did, and then to tell the world about him. This book does this outstandingly. This writing should be added to reading lists for Christians in churches and seminaries across biblical studies, history, theology, worship, evangelism, comparative religions, and apologetics. It should be translated into multiple languages and distributed throughout the world. It is exceptional.”

—Mark J. Keown,

Senior Lecturer in New Testament, Laidlaw College, Auckland, New Zealand;

Author, *Jesus in a World of Colliding Empires*

“In today's post-truth culture, the person of Jesus has been defined and redefined in the eyes of the beholder, through the distorted lens of individuals as well as of religious groups. Rather than looking deeply and contextually at the originating authoritative source of Scripture, many have co-opted and reimagined Christ for their own purposes. In response, Bowman and Komoszewski have meticulously refuted many aberrant views of Jesus which compromise his person and deity, restoring a proper, theologically orthodox understanding of Jesus Christ in his rightful place as God and Lord of all. Anyone who is interested in countering false doctrines and developing a grounded, biblical understanding of Jesus will find this work to be immensely helpful.”

Jana S. Harmon,

Teaching Fellow, C. S. Lewis Institute, Atlanta;

Author, *Atheists Finding God*

“Some authors write long books because they enjoy putting words on a page (or screen). Some authors write long books because the subject demands a careful consideration of complex questions. *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* belongs to the second category. The claims of Jesus and about Jesus have been controversial since the first century, and more often than not it was not cranks but well-intentioned and even pious scholars who questioned the classic Christian conviction that when Christians speak of God, they speak of Jesus Messiah at the same time. The subject of Jesus' divine dignity touches on the foundations of Christian faith and practice and thus deserved to be treated in a long, comprehensive, carefully argued volume. Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski have written an important book which deserves to be read and

studied by scholars, pastors, students, and, indeed, everybody who cares about what the New Testament texts say about Jesus specifically and about Christian doctrine more generally.”

—Eckhard J. Schnabel,

Mary F. Rockefeller Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies,
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary;
Author, *Jesus in Jerusalem: The Last Days*

“Does *the Bible* teach that Jesus is God and, if so, did *Jesus* claim to be God? The former is an exegetical question, the latter is a historical one. Bowman and Komoszewski address both questions in this grand volume. They give keen attention to linguistic elements in the Christian, Jewish, and Greco-Roman literature and their historical method is sound. Their knowledge of the relevant literature is encyclopedic with no major scholar who has written on the topic ignored. Moreover, their interactions with scholars with whom they disagree are both substantive and refreshingly respectful. This book is a treasure trove for scholar and student alike. For specialists, abundant data are provided that are carefully argued without overreach. Yet all are presented in a manner easily accessible to nonspecialists. Although other excellent literature on this subject exists, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* may be the finest book on the deity of Christ ever written. If I could have only one book on Christology, this would be it!”

—Michael R. Licona,

Professor of New Testament Studies, Houston Christian University;
Author, *Paul Meets Muhammad: A Christian-Muslim Debate on the Resurrection*

“*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is a reader-friendly treatment of a difficult topic. I am very pleased to see its appearance. Bowman and Komoszewski clarify the issues, focus on the key passages, and mount an impressive defense of a cardinal Christian doctrine—the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. Highly recommended.”

—Craig A. Evans,

John Bisagno Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins, Houston Christian University,
Author, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*

“*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is an incredibly timely book. Here Bowman and Komoszewski respond to the growing plurality of views concerning the identity and significance of Jesus. This comprehensive study takes those different positions seriously, while rigorously working through the biblical texts that support the traditional understanding of Christ being fully God and fully human. Despite the complex issues under consideration the authors present their case with great lucidity and clarity. This book is a pleasure to read, it is full of insights for all, and it should be widely consulted by everybody who wishes to be better informed about what the Bible claims concerning Jesus and how those claims undergird the traditional views of the Christian faith held for two millennia.”

—Paul Foster,

Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity,
School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh;
Author, *The Apocryphal Gospels: A Very Short Introduction*

“This massive volume truly is a ‘comprehensive’ defense of the deity of Jesus Christ. I wrote a volume of similar length called *Christian Apologetics* that claimed to be a ‘comprehensive case for biblical faith,’ but it was not a comprehensive defense of the deity of Christ! However, my book drew on the authors’ earlier book, *Putting Jesus in His Place*. Although I have written three books on Jesus, I learned a great deal from that book as it opened up the riches of Scripture

about the divine and unique identity of the One I began to follow, by God's grace, in June of 1976. This new book likewise possesses the virtues of thorough and meticulous scholarship, clear and compelling writing, and apologetic cogency. Not only is the deity of Christ rigorously defended through the helpful *HANDS* acronym, the true teaching of Scripture is defended against the competing and fallacious Christologies offered by Mormonism, Islam, Progressive Christianity, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarianism. It is no overstatement to affirm that *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is a monumental piece of scholarship that will long serve the true church in her defense of and worship of Jesus Christ, as Lord and God! It will be of immeasurable help to those, like the late Emily Komoszewski, who want their 'life so closely intertwined with the Lord that when they talk about me, they have to talk about Christ.'"

—Douglas Groothuis,
Distinguished University Professor of Apologetics and Christian Worldview,
Cornerstone University; Author, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* and *On Jesus*

"If the authors' earlier book, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, was masterful, this new book, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics*, is magisterial. Its scope and breadth will enable growing Christians to better love God with their mind, it gives pastors and Bible teachers extensively researched insights into key passages of Scripture, and it arms apologists in their defense of the bedrock truth of Christ's divinity as they contend against the claims of Islam, historic heterodox movements, and progressive Christians. I can't recommend it enough."

—Loren Pankratz,
Pastor, The Bridge Community, Centerville, Utah

"*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is truly a comprehensive defense of the deity of Jesus. It is not an overstatement to say that this is a masterful contribution to Christological studies, for the world of apologetics, and for the local church. I am grateful to Bowman and Komoszewski for the years they committed to researching and writing this book. It lays out a defense for the deity of Jesus and responds to the most common and pressing objections against it. Although this book is massive, I wish every Christian would work through it carefully. We would then better understand the biblical case that Jesus is God and be prepared to offer thoughtful challenges."

—Sean McDowell,
Associate Professor of Apologetics, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University;
Coauthor with Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*

"The deity of Christ is no peripheral issue; the claim is not to be taken lightly, and the evidence favoring it is indeed quite strong. With all the gods being propagated at the universities and our culture surging with polytheism, this book by Bowman and Komoszewski nails their coffins shut. A mammoth work, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is at the top in accessibly marshaling the case for the deity of Christ."

—Corey Miller,
CEO/President of Ratio Christi;
Author, *In Search of the Good Life: Through the Eyes of Aristotle, Maimonides, and Aquinas*

"*The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is an exegetically responsible, theologically nuanced, and remarkably complete argument for the deity of Christ—a fundamental doctrine of the church that needs to be defended and reasserted in every generation."

—Douglas J. Moo,
Professor of New Testament Emeritus, Wheaton College;
Author, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*

“Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski have written an excellent resource to help the non-believer understand Christ’s deity, the unorthodox ‘religious’ person see the problems with their inadequate view of Jesus, and the Christian who is going through a crisis of faith. *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* makes a compelling case—lovingly and in-depth—for the biblical view of the deity of Christ. The graduate students in my husband’s Theological Apologetics course say that Bowman and Komoszewski’s earlier book, *Putting Jesus in His Place*, is their favorite text. Now there is an even better book with much more to like. This book is a keeper!”

—Donna Morley,
Adjunct, The Master’s University;
Co-Founder of Faith and Reason Forum;
Author, *Evidence for the Bible and the Book of Mormon Compared* (forthcoming, 3 vols.)

“Bowman and Komoszewski make a cumulative-case argument that Jesus the Messiah is God the Son. Their argument is clear, memorable, extensive, informed, and compelling. It leads me to exult in and worship our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

—Andrew David Naselli,
Associate Professor, Systematic Theology and New Testament,
Bethlehem College and Seminary, Minneapolis;
Author, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*

“To the question posed by Jesus, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ there have been countless, often conflicting, answers given. The response of this remarkable and exhaustive treatment of the biblical evidence is: ‘He is God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity in human flesh. He is both God and Man.’ *Putting Jesus in His Place*, the authors’ first book on the subject, was itself a rigorous and persuasive defense of the deity of Jesus Christ. This second book provides an even more in-depth answer to that eternally important question. Of the many books that address the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, this one must now be given pride of place at the head of the list. I highly recommend it.”

—Sam Storms,
Enjoying God Ministries

“How do you improve on a classic? Bowman and Komoszewski’s book *Putting Jesus in His Place* has achieved such a status since its publication in 2007. Yet the authors have actually improved on their own classic defense of Jesus’ full deity in this new book by bringing it up to date (since critics always rework their arguments) and by sharpening and expanding the exegesis of key texts. You will never need another work on the deity of our Lord Jesus if you get this book!”

—William Varner,
Professor, Biblical Languages and Bible Exposition, The Master’s University;
Author, *Philippians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*

“In an age dominated by social media, Christians are being bombarded by challenges to the deity of Christ. Perhaps we should do some bombarding of our own, using the same technology to show the world that Jesus is Lord. If you’d like to join me in this task, grab a copy of *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics*, learn the *HANDS* approach, and start sharing!”

—David Wood,
Director, Acts 17 Apologetics

"I have repeatedly used Bowman and Komoszewski's earlier book *Putting Jesus in His Place* in my courses and recommended it to those who have asked for a thorough yet user-friendly book that addresses what the New Testament says about Jesus of Nazareth. This new book far surpasses the earlier one. It retains the strengths of the earlier volume, such as clarity of expression without the loss of depth or scholarly rigor, charitable treatment of those with whom the authors disagree, and the very helpful *HANDS* acronym. Yet it still manages to treat a host of additional subjects and authors. Bowman and Komoszewski are to be applauded for going beyond their earlier work to produce a significantly more valuable resource. If you have that book and you're wondering whether you should buy *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics*, my answer is, 'Yes, by all means!'"

—Robert B. Stewart,
Professor of Philosophy and Theology,
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary;
Coauthor, *When Did Jesus Become God? A Christological Debate*

The
INCARNATE
CHRIST *AND*
HIS CRITICS
A BIBLICAL DEFENSE

Robert M. Bowman Jr. & J. Ed Komoszewski

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL F. BIRD



The Incarnate Christ and His Critics

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In memory of Emily Komoszewski (2004–2021)

The night before her heart unexpectedly stopped beating,
she wrote in her journal:

*“I want my life so closely intertwined with the Lord
that when they talk about me
they have to talk about Christ.”*

Emily acknowledged Jesus’ rightful place in her life.
May we do likewise.

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FOREWORD

Several years ago, I came across the most amazing book by Rob Bowman and Ed Komoszewski on the deity of Jesus in the New Testament. It was *Putting Jesus in His Place*, an eminently readable volume, buttressed by thorough research and detailed analysis of the topic. I found their acronym *HANDS* to be a very useful tool, a terrific mnemonic device, for teaching lay people and seminary students about the deity of Jesus. Their approach was memorable and correctly captured the sum of apostolic claims about the Lord Jesus who is *vere homo et vere deus*, true man and true God. The book was a wonderful mix of erudition and accessibility for nonexperts.

Now Bowman and Komoszewski have followed up that book with an even better one. Structured around the same *HANDS* acronym, *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is an entirely new book that offers a comprehensive study of biblical Christology in defense of the incarnation. Such a book is needed because we live in an age when the identity of Jesus is increasingly under scrutiny, misinterpretation, denial, denigration, or even deliberate distortion. Whether it is Jesus “mythicists” who deny that Jesus ever lived, a strange resurgence of Unitarians in some quarters of the USA who reduce Jesus to a mini-god, Muslim views of Jesus as only a prophet, or religious scholars who want to erect a wall between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, many people have something to say about Jesus, or wish to bring Jesus down a notch, or take it upon themselves to correct the misguided devotion of his erstwhile contemporary worshipers.

That is why *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is such an important book. Bowman and Komoszewski explain to us what the early church believed about Jesus and why they believed it. They do not forget either why this question matters for Christians today or, indeed, for anyone who takes upon themselves the challenge or, even dare I say, the risk of exploring *Who is Jesus?* The topic is as arresting as it is haunting, almost intoxicating, and certainly unforgettable. Bowman and Komoszewski show us why—why Jesus matters and what is at stake in understanding Jesus as the God-Man.

The scholarship on the study of Jesus—human, historical, divine—has not abated, and neither have our two energetic authors in their quest to sift

the latest research, to tackle the emerging issues, and to take on the newest critics. The amazing achievement of this book is just how informed it is by a variety of different fields of study. Whether that is ancient religion, Hebrew and Greek language, Second Temple Judaism, philosophy of religion, Christian origins, comparative religion, American religious culture, the church fathers, ancient heresies, or modern theology, Bowman and Komoszewski have a working familiarity with all of it, thankfully, so we do not have to. It is amid the swirling and often intensely technical and almost esoteric debates that Bowman and Komoszewski take readers methodically through the New Testament witness to Jesus as a prophet, priest, and king; a man, the Son of God, and the eternal second person of the Holy Trinity. Yes, there are a few things I would have done differently, but the overall argument is compelling and enjoyable to follow. What is more, I've been studying Jesus from every angle for twenty-five years and even I'm learning new things from these two learned authors, and you will too.

Alas, my extended encomia to the book should now come to an end so that readers can get to the business of reading the book for themselves. Let me finish by saying that this book is, *HANDS* down, one of the best you will ever read on the deity of Christ. It will be a reference resource for pastors, a primary text for apologists, a teaching tool for professors, and a refreshing read for anyone who wants to understand what it means to say to Jesus, "My Lord and My God!"

—Rev. Dr. Michael F. Bird (PhD, University of Queensland),
Academic Dean at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia;

Author, *Jesus among the gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World*

PREFACE

The subject of this book is the doctrine of the incarnation: the teaching that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son, God by nature, come in the flesh as a real human being. Our purpose is to provide a rigorous, fact-based defense of this doctrine, popularly called the deity of Christ. We argue both that the deity of Christ is the teaching of the New Testament writings and that it is solidly based in the facts about Jesus.

Some explanation is in order concerning the relation of this new book to our 2007 book *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ*. We originally planned to produce a second edition of that book (and still do, in future years); however, the needs of the day have led us to go far beyond that original goal. *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is an entirely new book of about three times the length of our earlier book, though organized using the same five-point outline featuring the HANDS acronym (Honors, Attributes, Names, Deeds, and Seat). *Putting Jesus in His Place* is a semipopular defense of the deity of Christ aimed primarily at a general readership. In contrast, the *Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is an academically oriented treatment, though written in a manner that is hopefully accessible to all motivated readers.

The literature relevant to the deity of Christ has expanded dramatically in the years since *Putting Jesus in His Place* was published. We estimate that relevant *serious* literature has more than doubled since that time (not to mention the less-than-serious material with which cyberspace is now awash) compared with all of the relevant literature published in the previous two centuries. In our notes we cite more than four hundred books and articles published since our earlier book. Although we are painfully aware that there is much more we did not reference, we have made it our aim to bring readers reasonably up to date with works that are representative of the mass of relevant studies.

The Incarnate Christ and His Critics systematically engages biblically oriented arguments and objections from a wide variety of scholars and religious movements that reject the traditional Christian doctrine of the incarnation. To keep the result manageable, we engage seven alternative perspectives on Christology. One of these perspectives is nonreligious (what we call

skepticism), one is an entirely different religion (Islam), one is a revisionist approach found in many traditional Christian denominations (theologically “progressive” Christianity), and four are advocated in nontraditional or sectarian movements that identify as Christian but are religiously separate from traditional Christianity (Unitarianism, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostalism). See chapter 1 for descriptions of these movements. We have included skepticism for two reasons: advocates of the other six approaches draw on skeptical scholarship (usually with great selectivity) to buttress their own positions, and many people in the twenty-first century are abandoning their religious beliefs (be they Christian or not) and falling into skepticism.

The need to engage broadly secular and more specifically skeptical arguments against the biblical basis for traditional Christology in turn necessitates giving much more attention to what is known in academia as historical Jesus studies. Increasingly, people question the idea that Jesus is God incarnate because they think he did not say or do the things that the Gospels present as revealing or intimating his deity. Therefore, throughout this book, but especially in Part 4, we present historical evidence showing that Jesus spoke and acted in ways that at least implied his deity. We show that Jesus spoke as no mere prophet would, that he performed miracles in ways that exhibited inherent divine power and authority, and that he conquered death by his crucifixion and resurrection.

In short, this book is a cross-disciplinary study of biblical Christology, comparative religion, and historical Jesus studies. By integrating these disciplines as we have done here, we hope to present a truly comprehensive presentation of the biblical evidence for the incarnation. Because the book responds to what alternative Christologies and skeptical views of Jesus say about the teachings of the Bible on the subject, we have given it the subtitle *A Biblical Defense*. Thus, this study is concerned with the interpretation of the biblical texts in their ancient contexts. We do comment on issues in historical theology, systematic theology, and philosophy of religion in appropriate places, but our focus is on the biblical material.

Our use of the term *defense* will be understood as indicating that the book is a work of Christian apologetics. We have no objection to such a categorization as long as it is understood that apologetics and biblical scholarship are not mutually exclusive. Most writings on Christology reflect a specific viewpoint that their authors seek to advance, whether they are skeptics, Muslims, or advocates of an alternative form of Christianity. We do not dismiss their efforts on that basis. Our intention throughout this book has been to take the arguments of critics of the incarnation seriously by seeking first to understand them, working through those arguments as fairly and thoroughly as we can, before responding respectfully and substantively, just as we would hope others would do for the arguments we present (see Prov. 18:13; Matt. 7:12).

ABBREVIATIONS

BIBLICAL ABBREVIATIONS

ASV	American Standard Version (1901)
BBE	Bible in Basic English
CEB	Common English Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
EHV	English Heritage Version
ESV	English Standard Version
GNT	Good News Translation
JST	Joseph Smith Translation
KJV	King James Version
LEB	Lexham English Bible
LES	Lexham English Septuagint, 2nd ed. (2019)
LXX	Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the OT)
MT	Masoretic Text (standard medieval Hebrew OT text)
NABRE	New American Bible (Revised Edition)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (2020 rev. ed.)
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation, 2nd ed. (2019)
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (2021)
NT	New Testament
NWT	New World Translation
OT	Old Testament
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNK	Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society, 1985)

JOSEPHUS

<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>J.W.</i>	<i>Jewish War</i>

PHILO

<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De cherubim</i> ("On the Cherubim")
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De decalogo</i> ("On the Decalogue")
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat</i> ("That the Worse Attacks the Better")
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i> ("On Drunkenness")
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i> ("On the Embassy to Gaius")
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis</i> ("On the Life of Moses")
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i> ("On the Creation of the World")
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i> ("That Every Good Person Is Free")
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis</i> ("On Dreams")
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i> ("On the Special Laws")

OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

<i>1 Clem.</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>
<i>Abr.</i>	Book of Abraham (LDS scripture)
<i>ABRL</i>	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>AGJU</i>	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
<i>AnBib</i>	Analecta Biblica
<i>ANF</i>	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , ed. Roberts and Donaldson, rev. Coxe (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903 [1885])
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>AYBC</i>	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary (formerly Anchor Bible)
<i>AYBD</i>	<i>Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary</i> , ed. David Noel Freedman, 6 vols. (formerly <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , Doubleday, 1992; reprint, Yale University Press)
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeological Review</i>
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin of Biblical Research</i>
<i>BCOTWP</i>	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Wisdom and Psalms
<i>BDAG</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , based on Bauer's <i>Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch</i> and previous English editions by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, ed. F. W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago, 2000)
<i>BDB</i>	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Clarendon, 1906)

BDF	F. Blass and A. Debrunner, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago, 1961)
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BIOSCS	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
<i>bis</i>	twice (i.e., a word occurring twice in the same verse)
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BYU	Brigham Young University
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CJO	<i>Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries</i> , by L. Y. Rahmani (1994)
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
CRINT	Compendium Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CTM	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
D&C	Doctrine and Covenants (LDS scripture)
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EEC	Evangelical Exegetical Commentary
EGGNT	Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FARMS	Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies
FoSub	Fontes et Subsidia ad Bibliam Pertinentes
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>ITQ</i>	<i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i>
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentaries
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSJSup	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>

JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSP	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JTISup	Journal of Theological Interpretation, Supplements
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Jub.	<i>Jubilees</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LDS	Latter-day Saint(s)
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
loc. cit.	<i>loco citato</i> (“in the place cited”)
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
margin.	marginal note
NA28	<i>Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece</i> , ed. Aland et al., 28th ed. (UBS, 2012)
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement
NTL	New Testament Library
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTSD	New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> , ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Doubleday, 1983)
par.	parallel passage(s), e.g., in the Gospels
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
Q	Qur'an
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLGNT	<i>The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition</i> , ed. Michael Holmes (SBL, 2013)
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPhiloA	Studia Philonica Annual
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature (Peter Lang)
s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> (“under the word”)
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
THGNT	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> , produced at Tyndale House, ed. Jongkind (Cambridge, 2017)

TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TrinJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
UBS	United Bible Societies
v(v).	verse(s)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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Fifty years ago, Christ worked through two students with Campus Crusade for Christ (now called Cru) to share the truth about him with me. Their witness started me on my relationship with Christ and a serious quest to understand who he really is. One of those men, Michael Cozzens, is today both a friend and supporter.

That quest was intensified by encounters I soon had with Jehovah's Witnesses. For me, the challenge of alternative viewpoints was not something to fear but rather an opportunity to learn. Strange as it may sound, I am grateful to the members of other religions who engaged me in dialogue for those opportunities. My assessment of their Christologies as biblically deficient should not be misunderstood as animus toward their members.

Evaluating the way such groups use the Bible required above all the study of biblical hermeneutics. Daniel P. Fuller and Vern Sheridan Poythress were instrumental in my hermeneutical education and by far the professors whose teaching most influenced me. Vern and his wife Diane have remained good friends over the years.

My interest in the Christologies of heretical religions eventually led me to participate in a number of apologetics ministries beginning with the Christian Research Institute under its founder Walter Martin. Several members of CRI's staff from that period, now serving elsewhere, have enriched my life and ministry, especially Ken Samples, Craig Hawkins, and Paul Carden. In 2008, I joined the staff of the Institute for Religious Research (IRR), where in 2022 I was honored to become its president. I am extremely grateful to its founder, Roger P. Hansen, a successful businessman who poured his heart and his resources into IRR's ministry to Latter-day Saints and other religious groups.

Between my years at CRI and IRR, I was blessed to co-author five books with Kenneth D. Boa, who became my most trusted mentor, and one with Ed Komoszewski—*Putting Jesus in His Place*, the precursor to this book. In addition to his extensive knowledge of the biblical texts and academic literature, Ed brings a pastor's warm heart and ability to express passionately the importance of honoring Jesus as Lord. My dear friend Ed makes me want to be a better Christian.

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Finally, I'm grateful to my wife Catherine and our children Beth, Robbie, John, and Maria. They teach me every day that Christology is not merely an academic subject but is about the Christ who taught us to love one another as he loved us.

—Robert M. Bowman Jr.
Trinity Sunday, 2024
Cedar Springs, Michigan

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Kaitlyn made me a father twenty-two years ago this month. She inspires me to pursue truth at any price and love at all costs. I treasure her more than words can say.

My daughter Emily—taken from this life at the tender age of 17—now beholds the face of God the Son. I miss her fiercely. But we'll embrace again when the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ says it's time. It's to her memory that we've dedicated this book.

—J. Ed Komoszewski
Memorial of Saint Athanasius, 2024
Dallas, Texas

INTRODUCTION

DEFENDING THE INCARNATE CHRIST

Who is Jesus? That is the central question of the New Testament (Matt. 16:13–16) and of Christianity. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of confusion on this question today even among people who profess belief in Jesus.

WEAKENING GRASP OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST

In September 2022, Ligonier Ministries released its fifth biennial *The State of Theology* survey, in which Lifeway Research surveyed about three thousand Americans regarding their religious and ethical beliefs. The responses that evangelicals gave from 2014 to 2022 to proposed statements about God and Christ are of special interest for us (see Table 1). For each statement, the percentage given includes those who somewhat or strongly agreed. Not all questions were asked in all five surveys, and in some cases they were reworded. The survey found that many of the respondents were confused about how to view Jesus Christ. Majorities of those surveyed agreed both that Jesus was “the first and greatest being created by God” *and* that he was fully or truly God. In each year, over 90 percent of evangelicals agreed with a statement affirming the doctrine of the Trinity, calling Jesus Christ “God the Son,” yet in 2020 and 2022 large minorities of evangelicals agreed with a statement saying that Jesus “was not God.” The percentage agreeing with that particular statement denying that Jesus was God jumped to 43 percent in 2022.¹

We should explain that the survey analyzed responses according to two different definitions of “evangelicals.” According to one definition, an *evangelical* is anyone who agreed with four statements of belief affirming the Bible as the highest authority for doctrine, Christ’s death as the only sacrifice for sin, Christ as the only Savior, and the importance of encouraging non-Christians to trust in him as their Savior. The survey also classified responses by church affiliation, including those affiliated with evangelical churches—excluding historically Black Protestant churches, which gives the unfortunate

1. See *The State of Theology*, at <https://thestateoftheology.com/>. In this book, URLs for web pages will sometimes not be given in full since they tend to change over time.

impression that most Black Protestants in the United States are not “evangelicals.” In the 2020 survey, 83 to 93 percent of individuals affiliated with historically Black Protestant churches agreed with the survey’s four litmus test statements defining evangelicalism by belief, whereas 83 to 90 percent of individuals affiliated with evangelical church bodies agreed with those same four statements. Clearly, if we use those four statements as the standard, Black Protestant churches are just as “evangelical” as the “evangelical” church groups, if not more so. In the table, we have used the numbers for evangelicals defined by their statements of belief, but the numbers are roughly the same for those affiliated with “evangelical” churches.

Table 1. Evangelicals and God in <i>The State of Theology</i> Surveys					
	Percentage of Evangelicals Agreeing				
	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
“There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”	91	94	93	96	97
“Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.”		53	71	65	73
“Jesus is the first creature created by God.”	18				
“Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.”				30	43
“Jesus is truly [fully] God and has a divine nature, and Jesus is truly [fully] man and has a human nature.”	78	84			

If one considers these statistics worrisome, their comparable 2018 survey in the United Kingdom (the most recent one available so far) makes America look theologically vigorous. Only 29 percent of British respondents (including 53 percent of Protestants) affirmed the Trinity, though 92 percent of persons who the survey identified as evangelicals affirmed the doctrine. On the other hand, a whopping 74 percent of British “evangelicals” agreed with the statement that “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God,” even more than the “evangelicals” in the United States (56 or 65 percent in 2018, depending on the definition of “evangelical”).

The large number of “evangelicals” in America who agreed with the statements that Jesus is the first being God created and that Jesus was a great teacher but not God has attracted significant attention. Given the fact that more than 90 percent of American evangelicals affirmed the Trinity, it is unclear how many of these people actually hold to the incompatible claim that God made Christ as the first of his creatures. On the other hand, perhaps the large percentages of people who agree either that Jesus was the first creature or that he was a great teacher but not God raises doubts that they understood what they were affirming when they agreed with the statement about the Trinity.

The numbers are generally as worrisome if not more so for persons affiliated with other forms of Christianity. The survey asked Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, and members of historically Black Protestant churches the same questions. Half or more of each segment of Christians surveyed agreed that Jesus was the first and greatest creature and that Jesus was a great teacher but not God, even while about 80 to 95 percent of the same people affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity.

However we might try to reconcile or explain these conflicting data, there is clearly a great need for all Christians, including those in the most biblically conservative churches, to be more thoroughly educated in what the Bible actually teaches about Jesus Christ. One would think it obvious that the person of Christ ought to be the focus of Christian teaching since Christ is without a doubt the central figure and focus of the New Testament. Unfortunately, there is much evidence, even beyond the Ligonier survey, that Christian churches tend to take it for granted that their members have a sound understanding of who Jesus is.

One factor undermining the historic Christian view of Christ even among conservative churches is a broader cultural temptation of seeking to make Jesus seem more “relevant” to today’s cosmopolitan, pluralistic, postmodern tastes. Non-Christians are becoming increasingly guarded and even hostile toward traditional Christian beliefs. As a result, some Christians are bending over backward to make Christianity—and Christ himself—more “approachable” by emphasizing Jesus’ humanity. They may not personally or consciously deny the deity of Jesus, but in practical terms his humanity sometimes overwhelms his deity in their thinking. In the end, though, a lack of appreciation of Jesus’ identity as our Lord and our God makes him *less* approachable. As New Testament scholar Grant Osborne warns, some of us have lost the holy reverence and awe that we should have toward Jesus:

Christians are guilty of the syndrome “Your Jesus is too small.” We have made Jesus our “big brother” and “friend” to such an extent that we have lost the sense that he is also our sovereign Lord. We must recapture the realization that he too is our God and worthy of worship at the deepest level.²

If we are to experience a healthy relationship with God, we need to be intimately acquainted with the biblical teaching about the divine nature and status of Jesus. This involves more than merely knowing about and agreeing with the doctrine of the deity of Christ, though that is certainly important. It must become more to us than a line we say in a creed or a sentiment we express in a praise song. We need to know what it means to affirm that Jesus is Lord and why it matters. We need to appreciate the significance of his deity for our relationships with God and others.

2. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 266.

GROWING DENIALS OF THE DEITY OF CHRIST

As appreciation for the truth and significance of the deity of Christ is weakening even in traditional Christian churches, many people are consciously abandoning the doctrine. A significant number of former evangelicals have been abandoning the traditional doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation and embracing some form of Unitarianism, which teaches that only the Father is truly God and that Jesus Christ is an exalted creature. In 2018, Bill Schlegel, a professor of biblical studies at The Master's University extension in Israel (IBEX), announced to the faculty that he no longer believed that Christ was God or a preexistent divine person.³ In 2019, an employee at Answers in Genesis, the most popular evangelical young-earth creationist ministry, resigned because he had embraced a non-Trinitarian form of Messianic Christianity.⁴ Aaron Shelenberger, who received a master's degree in Christian apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary, announced in early 2019 that in 2016 he had also accepted a Unitarian view of Christ. According to Shelenberger, his apologetics education at the seminary strengthened his confidence in God's existence, the Bible's reliability, and Christ's resurrection, but failed to support the Trinitarian view of Christ as God incarnate.⁵ He was helped to move in the direction of Unitarianism by the Filipino sect Iglesia ni Cristo, which has some three million or more adherents worldwide.

Unitarianism is not the only theology or religion that presents itself as a form of Christianity but that denies the orthodox view of Jesus as the eternal divine Son incarnate. Other such religious movements would include, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter-day Saints or "Mormons" (members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), and Oneness Pentecostals (e.g., the United Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World). All of these groups consider Jesus Christ to be the central figure of their faith and affirm that he died as an atonement for sin, but they advocate varying interpretations of what the Bible teaches about his identity.

Still other religious movements profess belief in Jesus but do not consider him to be the exclusive source of salvation or the only way to God. For example, theologically "progressive" Christians view Jesus as an enlightened teacher who showed the way, but (for almost all such advocates) not the only such teacher. Muslims, whose religion of Islam is the second-largest world religion after Christianity, view Jesus as a great prophet who had been born of a virgin and was exalted to heaven without dying.

We will discuss these different religious movements in more detail in the first chapter of this book. What we want to point out here is that representa-

3. See the "IBEX Update" on the matter at <https://www.masters.edu/ibexupdate.html>. Schlegel's website is <http://www.onegodreport.com/>.

4. Seth Moore, "Why I Left Answers in Genesis," *After Thine Own Heart* (blog), Feb. 6, 2019. Moore's blog is found at <https://www.afterthineownheart.com/>.

5. Aaron Shelenberger, "Former Trinitarian Apologist Testimony," YouTube.com, Feb. 10, 2019.

tives of every one of these many diverse belief systems appeal to passages in the Bible to validate their view of Jesus Christ and to argue against the traditional Christian view. As we will seek to show, the problem is not the Bible. The problem is that unorthodox religions misread the Bible. These groups either grasp only part of what the Bible teaches about Christ or they read what the Bible says through an interpretive lens that distorts its teachings.

Of course, it is easy to make such a charge but not necessarily easy to back it up. The purpose of this book is to defend the deity of Christ as understood in traditional Christian theology by presenting a comprehensive overview of the biblical basis for this doctrine. Contrary to popular opinion, the case does not depend on a small handful of proof texts but arises from a pattern of doctrine found throughout the New Testament. We will be drawing from almost every book of the Old Testament as essential background to the New Testament, and we will be drawing from every book and from almost every chapter of the New Testament. Along the way, we will compare the biblical teachings to the views of the various unorthodox movements, showing that on numerous points their views do not line up with Scripture.

SOURCES

As we have just stated, our defense of the deity of Christ will appeal to the Bible, especially the New Testament, as the sources for what Christians should believe about Jesus. The reason for focusing on the New Testament, beyond its traditional authority as Scripture in all of the major branches and denominations of Christianity, is simply this: In our quest to know who Jesus was and is, we must give careful attention to the understanding of Jesus presented in the sources closest to him. Beyond any reasonable controversy, those earliest sources are the books of the New Testament.

People did write other books in the early centuries of Christianity that viewed Jesus in ways differing greatly from the New Testament. In recent years much has been made of these “lost scriptures” and of the “lost Christianities” they represent. However, these so-called “scriptures” are not historically credible sources of information about who Jesus was or what he did. They all originated after the New Testament writings.

The inferiority of the noncanonical texts to the New Testament writings as sources of information about the historical figure of Jesus is not merely a polemical claim by conservative Christians. It is a commonplace in mainstream biblical scholarship, by which we mean the published works of credentialed scholars in the field inclusive of conservative, liberal, and secular scholars. For example, James Tabor, a skeptical historian, admits that “our most reliable sources for reconstructing what we can know about Jesus are the New Testament gospels themselves.”⁶

6. James D. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 43.

One simple reason that the New Testament writings about Jesus are considered more reliable is that they are earlier. Jesus' birth is generally dated about 6 or 5 BC and his death in AD 30 or 33 (we think the latter date somewhat more likely).⁷ Most scholars date Paul's epistles in the 50s and early 60s, the four Gospels from the 60s through the 90s, and most if not all of the rest of the New Testament writings also in the first century.⁸ By contrast, scholars date most or all of the noncanonical "gospels" and similar texts in the second century or later.⁹ The one potential exception to this generalization is the Gospel of Thomas, which has been dated as early as the mid-first century and as late as the end of the second century. However, current scholarship heavily supports a range of likely dates for the Gospel of Thomas in the second century.¹⁰ The early church quickly and rightly settled on the New Testament books as the earliest and best sources for what Jesus said and did as well as for what the earliest Christian leaders taught about him.¹¹

In this book, then, we will be examining what the New Testament writings say about Jesus' deity. In doing so, we will take certain things for granted. This does not mean we merely assume these things with no reasonable basis, but that for the sake of space we will not be presenting arguments for these things here.

First, we will not be arguing in this book for belief in the God revealed in Scripture as the Creator and Lord of all things. Thankfully, there is a wealth of superb books presenting evidence for God's existence and answering objections to this belief.¹²

Second, we will assume that Christians may (and should) confidently base their beliefs about Jesus on the New Testament. We will accept as extremely reliable the Greek text of the New Testament as preserved in the extant manuscripts and represented in modern critical editions,¹³ while taking

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7. See Harold W. Hoehner, "The Chronology of Jesus," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, eds. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 3:2315–59, and the references cited there.
 8. See, e.g., the entries on the NT books in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), hereafter *AYBD*; Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
 9. E.g., the survey of seventeen such "gospels" in Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7–89.
 10. See the survey of dates scholars have proposed in Simon J. Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, TENTS 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 125–27.
 11. See Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Gospels? Probing the Great Gospel Conspiracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). On the "Gnostic" gospels, see Darrell L. Bock, *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities* (Nashville: Nelson, 2006); Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). See also Michael J. Kruger, *The Question of Canon: Challenging the Status Quo in the New Testament Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013).
 12. E.g., William A. Dembski and Michael R. Licona, eds., *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); Tom Gilson and Carson Weitnauer, eds., *True Reason: Confronting the Irrationality of the New Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013).
 13. The main printed edition today is *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, based on the edition by Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, ed. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos,

proper notice when there are variants (verbal differences) in the manuscripts affecting the meaning of a specific passage.¹⁴ In general, we will treat historical statements in the New Testament as reliable without debate.¹⁵ In some cases, we will offer reasons to accept what the New Testament says as reliable without claiming to “prove” every detail. Although as evangelicals we regard Scripture as the inspired, inerrant word of God, our arguments do not require the reader to accept that view of Scripture in order to see the cogency of our case for the traditional view of Christ as God incarnate.

Third, we will assume that Christian beliefs about Jesus should be historically grounded to be worthy of acceptance, and we will take as given certain historical facts about Jesus that are generally conceded even by many non-Christians, including that he was a real human being.¹⁶ On the other hand, in Part 4 we will present in some detail the historical basis for believing that Jesus spoke in ways that intimated his deity, that he performed miracles, and that he died on the cross and rose bodily from the grave.

Finally, we will seek to interpret the New Testament writings using appropriate methods for understanding their statements in their historical, cultural, and literary contexts. You do not need to be a scholar to have a good grasp of the Bible’s teachings, but if you are going to argue about the proper understanding of the Bible you should become familiar with biblical hermeneutics (the study of how to interpret the Bible)¹⁷ and with background information

Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, American Bible Society, United Bible Societies, 2012), cited as NA28. This is the edition we follow unless stated otherwise. Two other critical editions of note are Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature; Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2013), cited as SBLGNT; and Dirk Jongkind, ed., *The Greek New Testament*, produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge, assoc. ed. Peter J. Williams (Wheaton, IL: Crossway; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), cited as THGNT. A modern edition closer to the Greek text on which the KJV and the NKJV were based is Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, comp., *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform 2005* (Southborough, MA: Chilton, 2005). The reliability of the NT text is such that the differences among these critical editions of the Greek text will rarely even need to be mentioned.

14. On NT textual criticism (dealing with the history of and differences in the manuscripts), see Daniel B. Wallace, ed., *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and Apocryphal Evidence*, Text and Canon of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011); Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger, eds., *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Elijah Hixson and Peter J. Gurry, eds., *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).
15. For an excellent overview of the subject, see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament: Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs*, B&H Studies in Christian Apologetics, ed. Robert B. Stewart (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).
16. See Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, “The Historical Jesus and the Biblical Church: Why the Quest Matters,” in *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History: Criteria and Context in the Study of Christian Origins*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 17–42.
17. Two excellent introductions to biblical interpretation for general readers are Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 4th ed.

about the Bible's ancient historical and cultural settings.¹⁸ Clear, fair-minded thinking about how to interpret evidence and how to evaluate the arguments of those with whom you disagree is also important.¹⁹

JESUS AND THE TWO TESTAMENTS

The Christian doctrine of the deity of Christ maintains that the New Testament reveals Jesus to be the incarnation of the God of the Old Testament. Consequently, it is crucial that we understand how the New Testament uses the Old Testament. The New Testament teaching about Jesus appeals to numerous Old Testament quotations, reflects themes or motifs of Old Testament teaching, and uses wording that comes from passages throughout the Old Testament without being explicit quotations. Two factors complicate the use of the Old Testament in the New.

First, the Old Testament was originally written almost entirely in Hebrew (with short portions in Aramaic). The “Hebrew Bible” was preserved and transmitted in manuscript copies over the centuries almost exclusively by Jews, and its text was formalized by early medieval scribes known as the Masoretes—hence the Masoretic Text (MT). Beginning in the third century BC, Jews translated these Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. The Greek translation of the Torah, or Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy), was called “the Septuagint,” referring to the seventy scribes thought to have produced the translation (LXX). The rest of the Old Testament was eventually translated into Greek, and Christians came to use the term *Septuagint* inaccurately for the whole body of Greek writings in their Old Testament—which often included Jewish books (called “the Apocrypha” by Protestants) that the Jews did not consider Scripture. Scholars more technically call the earliest Greek Old Testament translations the Old Greek (OG), but the term *Septuagint* is also still commonly used.²⁰ The New Testament books, written originally in Greek, usually (but not always) quoted the Old Testament from the Septua-

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), and J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020). Among the many academic textbooks and studies on NT interpretation, we will mention just two: Craig L. Blomberg, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*, with Jennifer Foutz Markley (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), and D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

18. A standard reference work is Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).
19. For an excellent primer on assessing arguments of relevance to a subject like ours, see Robert B. Stewart, “Judging What They Say about Jesus: Instructions for Assessing Historical Arguments,” in *When Did Jesus Become God? A Christological Debate*, by Bart D. Ehrman, Michael F. Bird, and Robert B. Stewart (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2022), 1–35.
20. For a standard textbook, see Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), and for a general-level introduction, see Gregory R. Lanier and William A. Ross, *The Septuagint: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

gint. This means that when we want to consider the Old Testament texts as sources used in the New Testament, we need to look at both the Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX or OG) texts, with the Greek usually having a more direct connection to the New Testament texts.²¹

The second complication is that the New Testament writers did not use modern methods for informing readers of the sources they used. They did not have printing presses, did not have complete, compact Bibles to which they could quickly turn to find a passage, and did not use footnotes. The New Testament contains more than two hundred explicit *citations* from the Old Testament—quotations introduced with formulas such as “it is written” (Rom. 10:15) or “Isaiah says” (10:16). In addition, there are a hundred or more *quotations* not introduced explicitly as such, and still more numerous places where Old Testament wording is used in something less direct in form than a formal quotation. This last category of usage, which scholars call *allusions* or *echoes* (sometimes distinguishing these and sometimes not), can get especially controversial. Briefly, we need to *show* that a New Testament text is alluding to a particular Old Testament text by giving reasons for drawing this conclusion. There are various ways to establish an allusion: the use of very unusual wording, instances of the same Old Testament text being explicitly quoted to the same effect, a clear thematic connection, and the like.²² We may illustrate the different sorts of uses of the Old Testament with Joel 2:32, which says, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Now consider the following New Testament passages:

“But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel. . . . ‘And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” (Acts 2:16, 21)

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” (Rom. 10:13)

“Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

Acts 2:21 is a clear *citation* of Joel 2:32; Peter even introduces the lengthy passage of Joel 2:28–32 as having been “uttered through the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). Romans 10:13 is a *quotation* of Joel 2:32, even though Paul does not

21. See, for example, Gleason L. Archer and G. C. Chirichigno, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).

22. The trail-blazing treatment of how to identify such allusions is in Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 29–32. A growing body of academic literature has built on Hays’s work and engaged in technical debates on the subject. See the discussion with extensive references in Adam W. Day, *Jesus, the Isaianic Servant: Quotations and Allusions in the Gospel of John*, Gorgias Biblical Studies 67 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018), 16–30.

mention Joel or introduce the quotation with a formula such as “it is written.” Finally, Acts 22:16 is an *allusion* to Joel 2:32. We have at least three pieces of evidence supporting this conclusion. (1) Acts 22:16 uses the fairly distinctive wording “calling on” and “name.” Note that this fact by itself would not prove an allusion specifically to Joel 2:32 (the wording can be found elsewhere). (2) The purpose for Paul “calling on his name” is to be saved (“wash away your sins”), as in Joel 2:32. (3) The book of Acts has already cited Joel 2:32 explicitly, as we just saw (Acts 2:16, 21). The cumulative effect of these three pieces of evidence from Acts is to make the allusion to Joel 2:32 fairly certain.

The use of Joel 2:32 in the New Testament turns out to be a rather significant example for our study of the deity of Christ, as we will explain in detail later in this book. For now, we simply want to emphasize that much of the case for the deity of Christ depends on a sound reading of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament.²³

THE CASE FOR THE INCARNATION

Many of us were taught to defend the deity of Christ using one or two verses, such as John 1:1 (“and the Word was God”) or John 20:28 (where Thomas calls Jesus, “My Lord and my God”). To be sure, we will say something about these important texts. But there is so much more. The biblical evidence for the incarnation is not limited to a few verses but covers a wide range of closely related truths about Jesus taught repeatedly in one biblical book after another. The incarnate Christ is therefore a major theme throughout the New Testament. Recognizing that theme in all of its many expressions will not only equip you to defend the doctrine of the incarnation, but it will also help you in your faith in Jesus and make your understanding of Scripture much richer.

Throughout this book, we not only will cite biblical passages in support of the deity of Christ but will discuss their interpretation. Along the way, we will interact with a wide range of contemporary biblical scholarship.²⁴ The notes provide a wealth of references to academic literature—commentaries, published doctoral dissertations, periodical articles, and specialized studies—of relevance to the subject matter. Quotations from the Bible will generally be

23. An important reference work on the subject is G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), which we will have occasion to cite several times. An excellent popular-level introduction is Gregory R. Lanier, *Old Made New: A Guide to the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022). Lanier’s book has a chapter devoted to how the New Testament uses the Old Testament to teach the deity of Christ.

24. Informative introductions to the literature on divine Christology include Andrew Chester, “High Christology—Whence, When and Why?” *Early Christianity* 2 (2011): 22–50; Brandon D. Smith, “What Christ Does, God Does: Surveying Recent Scholarship on Christological Monotheism,” *CurBR* 17.2 (2019): 184–208; Michael F. Bird, *Jesus among the gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022), 87–114.

taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), although we also frequently cite other versions (see the Abbreviations list in the front of this book for a list of these versions).

Although biblical scholarship informs every part of the book, its subject matter is not merely the object of academic research. We try to make it clear that relating to Jesus as to God is important for every aspect of the Christian life. We hope it is obvious that understanding Jesus' deity is extremely relevant to how we relate to Jesus. Knowing that he is God incarnate is the only sound foundation for approaching Jesus, for coming to him in prayer, and for trusting in him for salvation. Relating to Jesus as God is also crucial to the message we take to the rest of the world. We must know whom we represent if we are to represent him faithfully. Our Christian walk, witness, and worship must all reflect a sound understanding of the identity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to presenting the New Testament evidence for the deity of Christ and explaining its relevance to the Christian life, we want to equip you to *remember* this information and to be able to present it to others. To that end, we organize the biblical teaching on the deity of Christ into five categories that will be both memorable and easy to explain. We summarize these five categories using an acronym based on the word *HANDS*. This acronym recalls the dramatic experience of Thomas told in John 20:24–29. Despite what the other disciples told him, Thomas doubted that Jesus had risen from the dead. But when he saw the marks left in Jesus' hands by the nails of the crucifixion, Thomas was persuaded of more than the resurrection! Amazingly, he called Jesus his Lord and his God (John 20:28). Just as an examination of the nail prints convinced Thomas he was beholding the hands of deity, a closer look at the Bible reveals that Jesus shares the *HANDS* of God:

H —Honors	(Jesus receives the honors due to God.)
A —Attributes	(Jesus possesses the attributes of God.)
N —Names	(Jesus bears the names of God.)
D —Deeds	(Jesus does the deeds that God does.)
S —Seat	(Jesus occupies the seat of God's throne.)

This acronym, introduced in our earlier book *Putting Jesus in His Place*, is a tested and proven device for remembering and explaining the biblical evidence for the incarnation. Each chapter will go into detail on the biblical teaching relating to one aspect of the five-point outline. If you are so inclined, you might come up with a somewhat different outline that covers the same material in a different way, as New Testament scholar Michael Bird did, inspired by the *HANDS* acronym. Bird uses the acronym *WISDOM* to remember the terms *Worship, Identity, Seat, Deeds, Ontology, and Mission*.²⁵

25. Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 525–30.

The important thing is to be able to remember the broad scope of New Testament teaching on the deity of Christ.

The biblical teaching about Jesus found in his HANDS constitutes a powerful cumulative case for regarding Jesus as our Lord and God. If you do not yet believe in Jesus as the eternal divine Son incarnate, consider the evidence presented here. If you do believe in the deity of Christ, the biblical teaching reviewed here will enrich your understanding of that truth and equip you to share it with others. After you have read this book, we invite you to find additional resources on this subject by visiting our website: <https://www.deityofchrist.com>.

Wherever you are now in your understanding of Jesus, our heartfelt prayer is that your life will be revolutionized by the realization that Jesus Christ is indeed “our great God and Savior” (Titus 2:13).