

Trinity 14 Dedication Festival  
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Jeremy Bowen could not be more wrong and Bono could not be more right! Bowen, the presenter of the B B C documentary “Son of God” in 2002, said, “The important thing is not what Jesus was or what he wasn’t — the important thing is what people believe him to have been. A massive world- wide religion, numbering more than two billion people follows his memory — that’s pretty remarkable, 2,000 years on.” On the opposite end of the spectrum, Bono, lead singer of the rock group U2, asked if he believes the claim of Jesus’ divinity is far-fetched, replied with this statement. “No, it’s not far-fetched to me. Look, the secular response to the Christ story always goes like this: he was a great prophet, obviously a very interesting guy, had a lot to say along the lines of other great prophets, be they Elijah, Muhammad, Buddha, or Confucius. But actually Christ doesn’t allow you that. He doesn’t let you off that hook. Christ says: “No. I’m not saying I’m a teacher. Don’t call me teacher. I’m not saying I’m a prophet. I’m saying: ‘I’m the Messiah.’ I’m saying: ‘I am God incarnate.’ ” So what you’re left with is: either Christ was who he said he was — the Messiah — or a complete nutcase.”

Who would have thought I would be saying Jeremy Bowen could not be more wrong and Bono could not be more right! Who Jesus is and what he did is the foundation of Christian faith. When Jesus Christ asks, “Who do you say I am?” (v. 29), he is asking us the most important question we will ever be asked to answer. Answer we will, because Scripture says that one day each of us will stand before him. Of that day, Jesus says, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” — Mark 8:36-38

Let us consider what we know about who Jesus Christ is and, finally, ask ourselves, “Who do I say Jesus is?” Popular Opinion “He asked them, ‘Who do people say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets’ ” (vv. 27b-28). “Vox populi! Vox Dei!” It means “The voice of the people is the voice of God.” It is the foundational philosophy that stands behind every system of democracy that has ever been established. But, is it true? Are the people always right? Indeed, we can ask,

“Are the people ever right?” That is the question.

Consider, for example, these confused determinations by people some consider “experts”: Thomas Watson, president of IBM, said when IBM unveiled its first computer, “I think there is a world market for maybe five computers.” Or, this: “We went to Atari and said, ‘Hey, we’ve got this amazing thing, built with some of your parts, what do you think about funding us? Or, pay our salary and we’ll come work for you.’ And they said, ‘No.’ So, we went to

Hewlett-Packard, and they said, ‘Hey, we don’t need you. You haven’t even finished University yet.’ ” That was Steve Jobs speaking about attempts to get Atari and Hewlett-Packard interested in a computer model later called Apple! Imagine, computer giants like Atari and Hewlett-Packard missed it!

There are many more examples to demonstrate that the voice of the people — even the voice of the leaders among the people — is not guaranteed to be right or reliable. The majority is often wrong. Jesus, himself, says so. “Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” — Matthew 7:13-14

If ever the voice of the people was wrong, it was on Good Friday when mob rule overpowered truth and sent God’s Son, Jesus, to the cross and the people cried, “Crucify him!” (Matthew 27:22).

What are the people’s voices saying that day Jesus asks his question? “Some say John the Baptist” (Mark 8:28). King Herod, who ordered John the Baptist beheaded because he criticized the king’s morality, says to his attendants upon seeing Jesus, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him” (Matthew 14:2). Is the voice of King Herod the voice of God? Hardly!

Mark 8:28 states, “... others say Elijah.” Malachi had prophesied, “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes” (Malachi 4:5). The problem with this conclusion is, of course, that it relegates Jesus to the role of Messiah’s forerunner and not Messiah come to redeem them.

Vox populi is wrong again.

Who Do Other Religions Say Jesus Is? Consider, first, the cults. A cult is a religious group that on the surface sounds Christian but that has a confused Christology. Cults fail to identify who Jesus truly is. A cult's beliefs may sound similar on occasion to historic Christianity but the big difference is really significant. Remember, what we believe about Jesus Christ

is the most important determination we will ever make in this life. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly called the Mormons, incorporates the Lord's name in its title but its beliefs about Jesus are fatally flawed. A basic compendium

of the Mormon gospel is titled *Mormon Doctrine*. It was written by apostle Bruce Redd McConkie, an influential Mormon theologian and member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for many years. According to McConkie, Mormons believe that "Lucifer, the son of the morning, is our elder brother, and the brother of Jesus."<sup>1</sup> *The Journal of Discourses*, a 26-volume Mormon publication presenting public sermons by many early Mormon leaders, includes such statements as this: "Jesus, our elder brother was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our father in Heaven." The same volumes assert, "Jesus was married at Cana of Galilee and had many wives ... he also had many children."<sup>4</sup> From these writings, it is clear that the Mormons fail the test when it comes to answering Jesus Christ's question, "Who do you say I am?" (v. 29).

Ask the Jehovah's Witnesses, "Who do you say Jesus is?" The Jehovah's Witness publication, *New Heavens and New Earth*, declares by way of response, "Michael the Archangel is no other than the only begotten Son of God, now Jesus Christ."

Consider the religion of Islam. Ask the Muslim who Jesus is and the answer we get from official publications is "Jesus was no more than a mortal whom Allah favoured and made an example to the Israelites. They are unbelievers who say God is Messiah, Mary's son" (Sura 43:59, Quran).

We might be surprised that in our supposedly enlightened society many people hold up Jesus Christ as a great teacher, a leading prophet, an honorable man. When they do, they often believe they accord him honour. Nothing could be further from the truth. Until we see Jesus as Peter did, as "the Christ," all miss the mark.

Henrik Ibsen playwright said he is "the greatest rebel who ever lived." Charles Lamb author, and collator of Shakespeare's works, observed, "If all the illustrious men of history were gathered together and Shakespeare should enter their presence, they would arise to do him honour; but if Jesus Christ should come in, they would all fall down and worship him." It was of all people; Napoleon who wrote of Christ: "I know men, and I tell you, Jesus was more than a man."

Almost 2,000 years ago a man was born contrary to the laws of nature. This person lived in poverty, was reared in obscurity. Never did he travel extensively. Only one or twice did he cross the boundary of Israel. He possessed neither wealth nor influence. His family had little education. In infancy, he startled a monarch. In childhood, he puzzled scholars. In adulthood, he ruled nature walking upon the sea and hushing a storm. He healed the multitudes of blind, lame, mute, possessed, and he did it without medicine and made no charge for his services. He never wrote anything down, and yet the libraries of the world bulge with the volumes written about him. He never wrote a song or painted a picture or molded clay and yet he has furnished the theme for more art than all others combined.

He never practiced medicine and yet he has healed more broken spirits and hearts than modern medicine far and near. He never commanded an army, fired a gun, recruited a soldier, or attempted political office. Yet no officer or king ever had more volunteers who have, under his orders, marched into every valley of human need, to begin orphanages, hospitals, to right wrongs, and institute justice. The names of athletes, prime ministers, artists, Emperors and soldiers have come and gone; but the name of this person grows with time.

What Do Jesus' Followers Say About Who He Is? Ask some people who walked with Jesus day-by-day all through his earthly ministry and whose lives were profoundly affected by the experience and you get the opinion of people who had an opportunity to match his words with his ways. Peter says, "You are the Christ" (v. 29). The word "Christ" by itself means anointed by God. Peter's answer, however, goes deeper than that by emphasizing the article, translated "the." In so doing, Peter is saying that Jesus Christ is anointed as no other. Peter's affirmation is that after having walked with and watched Jesus, he could see in Jesus all the qualities of God's Messiah. The people got it wrong but Peter got it right! Peter knows who Jesus is because he witnessed Christ's teaching and ministry.

Hear also the affirmations of some who witnessed firsthand this one called Jesus: The once cynical Nathaniel, after the briefest of encounters, concludes, “Rabbi, you are the Son of the King of Israel” (John 1:49). The woman at the well recognizes him when he describes in detail her checkered past and promises her living water: “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29). The Roman centurion charged to stand guard at Christ’s cross affirms Jesus’ identity as he watches the Lord die. “When the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’ ” (Mark 15:39). All these and many, many more attest that after walking with, and watching Jesus Christ, they have no doubt that Jesus is truly “the Christ.”

Virgil wrote about the plight of humanity and how something new needed to be done to help humanity out of its predicament. In Greek thought, God was removed, a mere spectator, like someone observing a play in an amphitheatre or a game in a stadium — sometimes interfering in a helpful way, sometimes interfering in ways that were harmful. There have been all kinds of weird notions about Jesus expressed in the writings of humanity. Shakespeare, for example, in *King Lear* gave expression to some of this kind of thinking when he cried out, “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport.”

It is our Christian belief that Jesus of Nazareth fully disclosed God — who he was and what he did and what motivated him. That disclosure reveals God’s love for us. Further, we believe that this loving God desires to have individual fellowship with us. He not only wants to know us, but he wants us to know him. Who does this one who wants to be known by us tell us he is? We ask him his own question, “Who do you say you are, Jesus?” The credibility of two millennia of the Christian gospel stands or falls according to how Jesus responds. What does Jesus say?

Here are a few samples that come to us in Jesus’ words as recorded in John’s gospel:

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. — John 6:35

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. — John 8:12

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. — John 10:9

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. — John 10:11

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. — John 11:25-26

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. — John 14:6

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. — John 15:1

Each time that Jesus says, “I am” in these statements, he invokes the use of *eime*, a powerful holy first-person Greek pronoun that Scripture uses exclusively everywhere else to speak of God.

I direct Christ’s question to you personally: “Who do you say that Jesus is?” Who is he for you? Is he your only Lord and Saviour? Are you trusting him alone for your salvation as he is offered in the gospel? If you are not, will you now take for yourself this Messiah

who challenges each of us to identify him and to identify ourselves with him?

Though nearly 2,000 years from his birth, yet he still lives! Herod could not kill him. Satan could not seduce him. Death could not obliterate him. The grave could not hold him. He stands forth upon the earth as God Incarnate, the King of glory, Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord. Proclaimed by prophets, heralded by angels, worshiped by saints, feared by devils,

he asks as he did Peter “Who do you say that I am?” Amen.

1. Bruce Redd McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966), pp. 163-164.

2. See *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 1, pp. 50-51 and pp. 345-346, as well as *Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 2, pp. 79-82.

3. [http://www.watchtower.org/e/t15/article\\_01.htm](http://www.watchtower.org/e/t15/article_01.htm).