

Who is Jesus? Part 1 Overview

Written by Calvin Fox

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Jesus through the Ages is the title of an important book by Jaroslav Pelikan, written in 1985. Professor Pelikan was a world renowned scholar of history and theology and this is one of his most famous works of intellectual history. His thesis is that each age of western world history has depicted Jesus in accordance with its dominant character. Put another way, the dominant image of Jesus in any particular period of history is often the key to understanding the most important themes and concerns of that period. That may also be true of us. We tend to project what we personally value most into our image of Jesus as a way of justifying what we believe is truly important. Who a person thinks Jesus is will often tell us more about that person than it does about Jesus. This is a very illuminating study.

Christians today naively tend to believe their current understanding of who Jesus is and what he is all about is, in fact, Jesus as he always has been- the true, authentic Jesus. They like to declare the Jesus they know and love is the same today as he was yesterday and always will be. Well, that the true Jesus is unchanging is indeed true. That the authentic, unchanging Jesus is the person of that name we happen to believe in is open to question and may well not be true. Everyone should study Professor Pelikan's book and its thesis. I will try to give a brief synopsis of it, as well as my own comments based on it, in this Essay.

In the following chapter titles we have a list of identities given to Jesus by Christians through the Ages. Which one is the true Jesus? Which Jesus is the one you believe him to be? Which Jesus is "your" Jesus, the one you have faith in and follow?

"Jesus" is the Rabbi of the First Century, the Light of the Gentiles in the Second and Third Centuries, the King of Kings in the Fourth Century, the Cosmic Christ in the Third and Fourth Centuries, the Son of Man in the Fifth Century, the True Image in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries, Christ Crucified in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries, the Monk in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries, the mystical Bridegroom of the Soul in the High Middle Ages, the Model Man in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries, the Universal Man in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, the Mirror of the Eternal in the Sixteenth Century, the Prince of Peace during the Crusades, the Teacher of Enlightenment in the Eighteenth Century, the

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Poet of Beauty

in the Nineteenth Century, the

Liberator

in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, the

Teacher of the World

in the Twentieth Century.

To be continued

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