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Mind of Christ  
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## MY UNITARIAN CHRISTOLOGY

My view of Jesus Christ has been influenced strongly by the Enlightenment and the approaches to religion that it created. First and foremost this is reflected in a belief that Reason determines how we interpret scripture and tradition in regards to the nature of Jesus. This is the lens through which we view the world and I do not feel that we need to suspend our use of Reason to understand who Jesus is. This does not mean that I dismiss all accounts of miracles or supernatural occurrences, it is instead that I believe that while scripture is Divinely inspired, it is a human document, written by humans, for humans and as humans we couch great truths in myth. So many of the stories in the New Testament are in my mind more symbolically true than literally true, that is designed to convey a truism about the nature of the human condition, or of humanities relationship with God, rather than a literal fact about an occurrence in Jesus' life. This is in keeping with what Clement of Alexandria says in *Stromateis* 6.15.126. "Finding the deeper meaning is thus the process by which God gradually, by means of parable and

metaphor, leads those to whom God would reveal himself from the sensible to the intelligible world."

As a Unitarian I subscribe to the Unity of God and the Unity of Jesus Christ, thus by extension I reject the doctrine of the Trinity as a teaching that detracts from an understanding of the nature of God and of Jesus Christ. This is not a new view but can be traced to what is termed by historians as the radical reformation, but in American Unitarian thinking I feel was best articulated by William Ellery Channing in his sermon Unitarian Christianity delivered in 1819 when he said

In the first place, we believe in the doctrine of God's UNITY, or that there is one God, and one only. To this truth we give infinite importance, and we feel ourselves bound to take heed, lest any man spoil us of it by vain philosophy. The proposition, that there is one God, seems to us exceedingly plain. We understand by it, that there is one being, one mind, one person, one intelligent agent, and one only, to whom underived and infinite perfection and dominion belong. We conceive, that these words could have conveyed no other meaning to the simple and uncultivated people who were set apart to be the depositaries of this great truth, and who were utterly incapable of understanding those hair-breadth distinctions between being and person, which the sagacity of later ages has discovered. We find no intimation, that this language was to be taken in an unusual sense, or that God's unity was a quite different thing from the oneness of other intelligent beings.

We object to the doctrine of the Trinity, that, whilst acknowledging in words, it subverts in effect, the unity of God.

I view Jesus as a distinct being, who was created by God, as Ralph Waldo

Emerson states in his Divinity School address delivered in 1838

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his world. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, 'I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or, see thee, when thou also think-est as I now think.'

Jesus did not come to Earth to appease an angry God through his death and in this manner pay an honor price for our salvation, take our place in the dock, or act as a ransom payment to the devil. This being said Jesus did act to save us from sin through the example of his life, teaching and most important his character. Human beings are not inherently good or evil but are instead capable of both. Jesus teachings are a means of developing our character in a way so that it becomes like God's character. In this way we begin to seek after the Divine since our nature shines forth as God's nature since our soul, which is the part of God that is hidden within each of us has been awakened by the action of Jesus in our lives. As the famous Philadelphian Unitarian minister and abolitionist William Henry Furness said

"It is not in any formal doctrine, but in the character, in the personal life, in the spirit of Jesus, that the enlightening and saving power of Christianity consists."

William Ellery Channing espouses a similar theme in his sermon *Love to Christ* (part 2)

Jesus is his religion embodied and made visible. The connection between him and his system is peculiar. It differs altogether from that which ancient philosophers bore to their teachings. An ancient sage wrote a book, and the book is of equal value to us whether we know its author or not. But there is no such thing as Christianity without Christ. We cannot know it separately from him. It is not a book which Jesus wrote. It is his conversation, his character, his history, his life, his death, his resurrection. He pervades it throughout. In loving him, we love his religion; and a just interest in this cannot be awakened, but by contemplating it as it shone forth in himself.

So you could say that my Christology is rooted in the Pure Christianity of the early Unitarians which looks to the life and teachings of Jesus as far more important to understanding his salvific nature than his miracles.

Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* resonated with my personal Christology, and with that of many Unitarian Christians. I also tend to look more at the religion of Jesus as opposed to the religion about Jesus. Thurman states

The religion of Jesus makes the love-ethic central. This is no ordinary achievement. It seems clear that Jesus started out with the simple teaching concerning love embodied in the timeless words of Israel "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with thy soul, and with all thy might, and thy neighbor as thyself. Once the neighbor is defined, then ones moral obligation is clear. (89)

Thurman presents Jesus as having the revolutionary insight to push boundaries, our neighbor is not just my friend, or member of my immediate community or even nation. Jesus breaks these boundaries, is all inclusive in his love and commands us to love even our enemies. To Thurman this act of love is freeing, for in letting go of our fear, deception and hatred we find that there is forgiveness in God. I would say that through the practice of love we enter into discipleship, Jesus is calling us to follow him, to live a life that is inspired by the Gospel and infused with his teachings of peace and love. In doing so Jesus reveals God's love to us.

I was also taken by Rowan Williams treatment of the Gospel of Matthew in his book Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles Our Judgment Williams talks about how in Matthew we are called to come to an understanding of who Jesus is, as opposed to Jesus telling us who he is. As we come to this understanding we ourselves are challenged to associate ourselves with Jesus. So in this sense Jesus does not stand in the dock alone

but we stand with him in opposition to the powers of this world. according to

Williams:

If the symbol of the crucified does not make this sort of recognition (and this sort of being recognized) possible, it has become an empty sign. If it becomes simply a pious way of giving meaning to my own suffering; if it becomes a symbol of human pain in the abstract; if it draws attention because it speaks to our fascination with pain, it is no longer in any useful sense the cross of Jesus. (42)

In looking at the crucifixion I also see it as a call to follow Jesus' example to live in opposition to the forces of oppression in the world and stand in solidarity with those marginalized by this oppressive world system.

As part of my belief in the salvific nature of Jesus' life I accept his resurrection from the dead and ascent into heaven as a symbol of our own resurrection and freeing from the second or spiritual death. Jesus achieves this in us by cultivating our conscience so that we may hear the voice of God in our lives, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson "There is no other way for you to arrive at the voice of God but by patient listening to your own conscience." This ability to arrive at the voice of God is only achieved by living a life that more and more resembles the character of God, so that God's voice becomes our conscience. This was the message of Jesus, and the example of his life, and the promise of hope and salvation that he offers to us to-

day. Jesus is a prophetic figure who serves as a bridge between a loving God and humanity who through his life and teachings imparts wisdom to us so that we may draw closer to God.