

Liar Lunatic or Lord of All

The argument for Jesus being God as he supposedly claimed

The Christian Church claims it is rational to believe that Jesus Christ though a true man was also truly God. The worship that is due to God is due to Jesus. Most scholars and researchers in the world disagree with Christianity in this thing. Who is right? Was Jesus a liar, a lunatic or Lord of all? They say we have to choose one option out of the three! But are there more options? And who says we need to choose one when we can keep an open mind?

The liar and lunatic or Lord of all argument, the trilemma, is sure to pop up in Christian arguments for the truth of the Christian faith. It presupposes that Jesus claimed to be God - few scholars think he actually did that. The gospels were written years after the alleged events and it was too easy to sneak in a claim to be God. Jesus could have been lied about and never claimed to be God. Even many Bible believers are not convinced that Jesus claimed to be God for the texts that seem to say he did have a more complex interpretation than appears. The Old Testament often talks about holy and not so holy people as if they were divine. Its a poetry device. Jesus could easily have been misunderstood.

Suppose anyway that Jesus did claim to be God. Does it really matter? What if there were several incarnations of God as man or woman and it does not matter which one we adapt to? Nothing in the New Testament teaches the incarnation at all so it follows that should Muhammad be God though he did not know it the Christian has no logical arsenal against that view. The trilemma errs in supposing that only Jesus could be liar or lunatic or Lord of all. There could be other candidates. If Jesus is God and the Virgin Mary is God then it does not matter who you worship for to worship Mary is to worship Jesus when they are the one being.

The trilemma is useless for it is over-simplified. It ignores what kind of God, or liar, or lunatic we are talking about. There are countless subdivisions in each one. Lies and liars come in an infinite variety of shapes and sizes and so do lunatics. And so do understandings of God.

Jesus could have been a liar through having some disorder and not through a defect of character. He could also have been insane. None of these would prove he was not God. So he can be liar and lunatic and Lord of all.

Jesus could have been a big liar or truthful generally while telling one or two strategically timed whoppers.

Not all lunatics come across as raving mad. Some are normal 99% of the time. Nobody can prove that Jesus was sane during the few times he claimed to be God.

Jesus could have been led to think he had divine revelation that he was God. That would mean he could make the claim without being a liar or a lunatic for it is not that different from a priest thinking his loaf is God in human flesh.

Jesus could have believed he was God through religious faith. Jesus believing he was God does not have to mean that mean he experienced what it was like to be God or perceived how he was divine. If he rationalised his mistakes as a sign that he was truly man as well as truly God and thought that his sins were not really sins then he could have been sane as any Christian and still claimed to have been God.

The other problem is that if visions of Satan and other beings featured in Jesus' life as the gospels say, how do you know that some entity was not taking on Jesus' appearance at times and claiming to be God? Did he even know?

The Christian explanation for how Jesus can be a normal man and still God allows for anybody to potentially claim to be God. The claim is not on a par with somebody claiming that they can split the sun in two at whim or who says they are going to turn sand into their breakfast right now. It is not that kind of God claim.

There are many other things Jesus might have been. The trilemma must be seen for what it is - an implicit threat and emotional blackmail. You are accused of slandering God if you don't accept Jesus as God. You are accused of refusing to be saved from sin and Hell by Jesus.

Let us look at how Christians use their beloved and cruel trilemma.

Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Vol 1, chapter 7, claims that since Jesus was not a liar or a lunatic he must be God for he claimed to be God. The chapter is full of the twisted reasoning and lies that author Josh McDowell is known to be good for. Now we are going to meet the favourite conjuring trick in modern conservative Christianity. Mormons use a version of

their own to substantiate the claims of Joseph Smith and so do Muslims in relation to Muhammad. What all these systems use is called the trilemma for it has three main avenues, was he a liar, lunatic or what he claimed to be and they try to debunk the first two options leaving them with the third by a process of elimination. The trilemma does only one thing: leave them more desperate for evidence than when they started for it is a crock. It is attractive for it seems simple and is handy for fooling people who are more influenced by their feelings than their heads.

McDowell begins with the claim that Jesus said he was God. The Church could have come to think that Jesus was God and read this back into the gospels. The gospels could be history seen in the light of later insight or legend-makers. McDowell says that would have been dishonest and the gospels wouldn't do that but when the entire Roman Catholic Church sees no dishonesty in that why shouldn't the early Church have had the same view? People do differ on such things.

McDowell will then say that there is no evidence that the Church read later dogma back into the New Testament. In that case, there is no evidence that it didn't either so we don't know if Jesus claimed to be God or not.

McDowell then proceeds to argue that if Jesus really claimed to be Lord of all and God then we must either accept or reject this claim. That is a lie for we could still be open-minded. And we have to be for there is more to think about than the mere liar and Lord and lunatic trilemma. No matter how much evidence there is for Jesus not being a lunatic or liar we are still entitled not to believe he is God because such a claim needs absolute proof - or perhaps very strong evidence might suffice. A process of elimination is not a great way to approach the man you call your saviour! Would a girl be happy to marry you if you thought she was the best of a bad lot? The lies and hypocrisy of Christianity's defenders do not show real respect for Jesus. Their love for him is superficial.

It is less ridiculous to hold that there is some mistake in the evidence that Jesus might have been God than to hold that Jesus is God. When God comes first we need outstanding proof that any man claiming to be God is God before we can accept him and that is only out of deference to the divine majesty. McDowell would condemn us for not accepting his evidence and makes it plain that he does when he had William R Bright's Foreword saying as much in the book and he will even say that to oppose the evidence is to oppose God who set up the evidence. But the truth is, each person perceives evidence differently and some need more evidence than others and people differ in the kinds of evidence they need. Some people can be convinced by gossip.

The next failure in McDowell's scheme that is that if Jesus was wrong about being God then he was either a liar or a lunatic.

But this should be that he was a liar, a lunatic who was evidently sick or a lunatic who was sane apart from one thing his belief in his deity, a man who was possessed by the smartest demons in Hell who were masters at appearing to be angels of light, a man who thought he was God and was sane or a robot sent by aliens to act like a man-God just for their amusement. There is no end to what Jesus might have been. Maybe he had one of the alien implants that people go on about these days that made him do what he did. It is easier to believe that than to believe that he was God for aliens are possible and it is scientifically possible and we must only bring in the supernatural when we have eliminated the possible which can never be done.

If you think there is a Satan Jesus could even have been blackmailed by Satan. Satan given God's antipathy towards idolatry would have wanted a new false God set up – an up-to-date version of the Golden Calf.

Maybe the Devil manipulated a very good man so that if he really was the most incredible demonstration of true morality that ever lived that this would be known and our failure to be like him would discourage us? Remember, how St Paul said that the Law of God given through Moses increased sin simply by teaching people about what sin was whereas they would sin less without it being more simple-minded. McDowell would certainly agree that the lofty morality taught in many Catholic apparitions is from a demonic source so the demons do good for some secret evil plan so Jesus could have been demon-possessed. All of this shows that McDowell's apologetic is irrational and worthless because of the omissions it makes.

The determinist believes he has no sin so Jesus could have believed he had no sin because he was God. He could have believed he was God though he did make mistakes. There is no doubt that Jesus did make mistakes like when he insulted the High Priest and got a slap for it. Some say that does not refute his divinity because he had to be fully man as well as fully God. Jesus understandably could have seen his actions that would have been considered to be sins by anybody else as mistakes in his case. In that he would have been philosophically correct for evil-doing is a mistake but for some reason he believed other people were not like him and their bad acts were sins. That is no more abnormal than a homosexual thinking he is the only homosexual in the world. Jesus could have believed he was God and been sane. Yes it would have been strange but aren't we all a bit peculiar? It is no more bizarre than believing that the eternal God died for your sins and that the Holy Spirit has assured you that this sacrifice removed your sins. That is saying that the infinite God did something incredible and impossible to believe for you. People believing that Jesus is God on flimsy evidence is just as strange as

Jesus believing himself to be God. Jesus was surer of his own existence than he was that others exist meaning that he showed far more commonsense in believing that he himself was God than they show in believing that he was God. We all have stupid ideas in our heads that stay with us all our lives and Jesus' stupidity produced very different behaviour from many of us. Jesus did not claim that he could do what he liked as a man or knew all God knew. If he claimed to be divine, he saw himself as an ordinary man through whom God did miracles much the same way as any saint would be an instrument. I am trying to say, he would not have claimed to experienced anything as if he were God and thus he is in a totally different category from people who think they can make the universe disappear in five minutes and bring it back if they feel like it or who claim to know all things as human beings.

Richard Dawkins says that Jesus might have claimed to be God and making an honest mistake. This has raised eyebrows for Dawkins considers belief in God to be delusion - self-deception. The implication would be that Jesus was more deluded than the other believers in God for he goes all the way and claims to be God. Self-deception looks like an honest mistake and can pass for it but it is not an honest mistake. If you let yourself be fooled even by yourself that is not a sign of honesty. Some religions believe that God is really a rank or principle rather than a person. For example, God in Mormonism is a man who has divine status but who is not intrinsically God. God is really a rank or a kingship. Jesus then could have been claiming to be a God of that sort and that would allow for making an honest mistake. Though his belief is strange it is no stranger than popular belief in God. The Christian delusion that God and goodness are the same and that good is a person and that person is God is far worse than thinking you are going to sprout wings and fly over the moon or have done so. It is even more detached from reality than thinking you are made of cheese and not flesh. If a normal person can be that odd so could Jesus.

We read in Patricia Cornwell's Portrait of a Killer that the psychopath has an abnormal desire to be admired (page 273). Each psychopath is unique. He might strictly avoid certain antisocial actions such as stealing or fighting and be a rapist (page 27). There could be any combination of good and bad behaviour. Jesus could have been the epitome of morality with the psychopathic disorder emerging in the form of him claiming to be God or the Son of God or the Saviour. The moral image would have been necessary to evoke trust in him so that he could indulge his behavioural disorder. The psychopath is one thing that Jesus could have been that Christians never draw attention to for they know they cannot disprove it.

Jesus telling a lie does not necessarily mean he was the biggest scoundrel ever. The trilemma lies that he would have been. Notice how that lie does not really respect Jesus. The trilemma is about manipulation and shows that Christians do not love Jesus but what they want to believe about him.

To refute the liar hypothesis the believers have to argue that Jesus was sinless. In fact they can only assume that he never lied that is all. They cannot prove it for Jesus might have lied only when there was no likelihood of getting caught out. Some people do. And there are decades of his life which we know nothing about. We know (assuming you can call what the gospels say knowledge) only of the public face of Jesus. It is saner to assume that Jesus lied than that he was God. To say you are sure Jesus never lied in his life is a lie itself. If Jesus wants you to tell that lie then what does that say about him? It is arrogant to say the least!

The pride of men being able to judge that Jesus' morality was perfect is astounding and especially when they never even lived with him! If Jesus knew what he was talking about he would have written The Gospel According to Atheism. Strange that the man who came to make us all humble before God should depend on people not having the humility to recognise that their moral perception is flawed due to so few teaching proper morality. It is scandalous to hold that when Jesus was so supposedly noble at his trial for example that it is an evidence for his immaculate holiness for the gopellers never tell us how they knew what happened at the trial and they all indicate that they were not present. None of the apostles were there.

There is the possibility that Jesus was blackmailed by the Zealots or some group to do what he did. The Zealots could have been looking for Jesus to create a messianic movement around himself that looked forward to the coming of Jesus himself or somebody else as a militant messiah. Perhaps they wanted the people's religious fervour increased to give them the confidence to attack the Romans. Perhaps Jesus was part of a grooming process but was killed before his movement could be led by him into terrorism or violence.

Perhaps Jesus thought if he claimed to be a Messiah of peace it would correct the Jewish yearning for a violent Messiah and when revised it would lead to peace.

The notion that Jesus had to be good to claim to be God and get people to believe in it is a shameless lie for he was claiming to be a God who wrote the Bible and who lied about justice and said it was just to stone gay men and adulterers and heretics to death! A good man dissociates with that kind of scripture and religion - period. He has no excuse for giving any support tacit or otherwise. And not when the religion itself says you must avoid any dubious movement and keep out for it could give you the apple that makes the whole batch rot and warns that human nature is easily ruined - a little evil soon leads to a lot.

Jesus went about preaching and praying and did the occasional so-called miracle. It is lazy to cure people by snapping your fingers - the person who cannot do that but who gives all to care for the sick is a far better person. His example is nothing compared to the "miracle" of ordinary people who give up all they have to go and suffer for the poor at great personal cost. It is an insult to honour him as God. There are pagan humanitarians who deserve supreme honour and why is it given to a faith-head?

Nothing at all can be done to refute the possibilities about Jesus that the trilemma pretends are not there. You don't sentence a murderer to life in jail unless you have eliminated the possibility that he was forced by someone or was driven by abnormal compulsions and if he is surrounded by evidence of the supernatural you know that it is possible demons are blackmailing him so you can't jail him. In the same way, you cannot find Jesus guilty of being God and even less so when that is the most stupendous claim possible.

It is not that we should be asking if Jesus was a liar or a lunatic or God. We should be asking if the gospel records are lies, legend, lunacy, divine or influenced by mischievous spirits. And we should remember that if Jesus had unexplained powers that does not mean he is infallible or right about everything or has power over your soul. The powers could have fooled him into thinking he was God. And some theologians think that Jesus though God could still have erred if he was fully human. All that needs to be sorted out so the trilemma is simplistic. Sort that stuff out and then we might work out that Jesus really claimed to be God and meant it and then work out if we agree with him. Christians do not have the honesty to admit the errors in the dilemma and they do not tell the whole truth about it. They know it would be hard work doing things the right way so they use the trilemma to manipulate people and bypass the work that needs to be done.

The collapse of the apologetic can prove only one thing. And that is that Jesus was a fraud if he claimed to be God. There was no point in Jesus making this claim unless the apologetic would work. The trilemma is an over-simplification and it is certainly true that if he was God Jesus would have wanted it to be easily verified with something like it. He claimed that evidence was necessary to back up his claim when he said that he did miracles and good works and rose from the dead to show the truth of what he was saying about who he claimed to be.

The trilemma utterly fails. It cannot be convincing when all it can get us to do is MAYBE assume that Jesus was God. If you are going to assume it is a waste of time to even think about the direction the evidence points in. It is immoral to be happy with a mere assumption that Jesus is God and it fails to recognise that you need serious evidential and ethical reasons for assuming. It is too serious. The trilemma leaves you wondering if Jesus really wants to be adored as God!