

## Four Positions on Jesus

"Orthodox Christians believe that Christ was a historical character. [However, he was] both supernatural and divine; and that the New Testament narratives, which purport to give a record of his life and teachings, contain nothing but infallible truth." (This is generally known as the "literalist position.")

"Conservative Rationalists, like Renan and the Unitarians, believe that Jesus of Nazareth is a historical character and that these narratives, eliminating the super-natural elements, which they regard as myths, give a fairly authentic account of his life." (This is usually referred to as the "historical myth" position.)

"Many radical Freethinkers believe that Christ is a myth, of which Jesus of Nazareth is the basis, but that these narratives are so legendary and contradictory as to be almost if not wholly, unworthy of credit." In other words, there was most likely a historical Jesus, but virtually all of the stories about him are mythical. (This is known as the "philosophical myth" position.) My added comment would be that in the intervening years between 1909 and now, this position would no longer be considered at all "radical," and the Unitarians referred to in position 2, above, have shifted almost entirely to this third perspective.

"Other ['more radical' is implied here] Freethinkers believe that Jesus Christ is a pure myth—that he never had an [historic] existence, except as a Messianic idea, or an imaginary solar deity." I would add here that a natural concomitant of this position is that the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are entirely fictional—made up stories, no parts of which have any basis in reality whatsoever. (This is the "pure-myth" position.)