

I have started a thread on my current interest, the relationship of the imperial cult (the Roman worship of the emperors) to the rise of Christology (the understandings of Christ). Both Caesars (especially deceased ones, but in some parts of the empire, also the living one) and Christ (by most of his followers, now that he too was deceased) were thought of and called "Savior," "Lord," "Son of God," and even "God."

Most people would know that was true of Christ. But why was it true of the Roman emperor? Why would you worship your political leader? Does this mean we're going to have to call either Hillary or Donald "Lord" or "God"? It seems unlikely. So why did ancient people in the Roman Empire do it?

That's what I want to explore over a few posts. To get there, I need to provide a refresher course (or, for those who don't know this, simply a course!) on how ancient people imagined the divine realm in relation to the human realm. I have taken this description from my book [How Jesus Became God](#):

When ancient people imagined the emperor - or any other individual - as a god, that did not mean that the emperor was Zeus or one of the other gods of Mount Olympus. He was a divine being on a much lower level.

Or instead of a continuum, possibly it is helpful to understand the ancient conception of the divine realm as a kind of pyramid of power, grandeur, and deity.

The Divine Pyramid

Some ancient people - for example, some of those more philosophically inclined - thought that at the very pinnacle of the divine realm there was one ultimate deity, a God who was over all things, who was infinitely, or virtually infinitely, powerful and who was sometimes thought to be the source of all things. This God - whether Zeus, or Jupiter, or an Unknown God - stood at the apex of what we might imagine as the divine pyramid.

Below this God...

The Rest of this Post is for Members Only. So JOIN! It costs less than a Starbucks a month [a *month*] and will perk you up at least as well. And every dime goes to charity!

You need to be logged in to see this part of the content. Please [Login](#) to access.



[Fear of Dying etc.: Weekly Readers Mailbag, September 18, 2016](#)
[The Rise of the Roman Empire](#)