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JESUS IS LORD

by
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THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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Christians take their name from Jesus Christ Who declared that He was the centre of God's relationships with the world. The claims He made for Himself were clear and extraordinary. Thus He said "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12), and again, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me" (Jn. 14:6), and again "No man knows the Father save the Son and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Mt. 11:27). Moreover Jesus identified Himself with God. He said: "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30), and "Before Abraham was I am" (Jn. 8:58).

These claims were not made in a spirit of arrogant self importance, but by one who set a pattern of meekness and lowliness and service. They were made because they were true, and they are the key to understanding the world. They point to the most remarkable fact that "God was in

Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor.5:19). God our creator and our judge has revealed Himself as our Saviour; the son of God has taken our nature and become man that He might undergo Himself the curse which our sins bring on us, that being delivered from it, we might become God's adopted sons, and inheritors of His eternal kingdom.

Christians are those who believe what Jesus said about Himself and about His relationship to God and to us. The rest of the New Testament confirms this belief that Jesus is the Son of God and our only Saviour. Thus St. Peter told the Jewish leaders that in the name of Jesus alone is there salvation (Acts 4:12), and St. Paul spoke of Him as the "one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim.2:5). And in Phil.2:5 the apostle testified to Jesus' divinity, saying that though He was in the form of God He thought it not something to be

clung onto, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, becoming man and being obedient to the death of the cross.

Jesus Christ is central in world history because He is central in God's purposes for humanity. In Jesus God has entered into a new relationship with His creation, a relationship never to be gone back on and a relationship which brings salvation. Not everyone recognised this: the religious leaders of the time crucified Jesus and the crowd gave their consent. But Christians take their name from the fact that they acknowledge Jesus as Lord. If we take the name of Christian let us see to it that we make Jesus Christ central in our life, thinking of Him not only as the one who was born years ago, but as Lord now; for, as He told His disciples, all power is given to Him. He is ruling now in this world and has promised to be with us to the end of the age.

Jesus Christ is central in the Christian religion and in the Christian view of the world. We who are Christians must be on our guard lest we by-pass Jesus Christ in our religious activities. "God was in Christ" we read in Scripture, so that it is fantastical to think that we can please God if we by-pass Him in Jesus. Or again, we read, "the Father sent the Son", so that we cannot please the Father if we ignore the Son. Thus our Lord clearly taught "He that honours not the Son honours not the Father" (Jn.5:23). We must honour Christ in all our religious activities. When we remember that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes on him should not perish but have everlasting life" how can we imagine that we please God, if knowing Christ, we by-pass Him in any way at all in our religious exercises or hopes of heaven?

Yet the temptation to by-pass our Lord and Saviour

Jesus Christ is always with us. Perhaps I can illustrate this from the forms of service arranged by the United Grand Masonic Lodge of New South Wales for a service in a leading Christian church last Sunday. A glance through that form of service shows that our Lord Jesus Christ is never mentioned, but prayer is offered to God directly, as though we sinners had a right to come into His presence apart from our only Mediator. But we cannot honour the Father if we who are Christians turn our back on our knowledge of Christ and seek to pray to God apart from Him. "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by me" said Jesus. Words couldn't be clearer, and any attempt to come to the Father apart from Jesus is self deception. It cannot be done.

We have no "light", or knowledge about God, or about the way we ought to live, which does not come from Christ. He is "The light of the world";

there is no second source of light or truth; and we who are Christians must plainly acknowledge this, if we are to honour God or be pleasing to Him, for "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself". Only when we make Christ central do we worship the true God.

There is a second point: If we leave Jesus out of the centre of our religious thoughts it is inevitable that we will lose sight of the fact that we are saved by God's grace. Jesus died for our sins and sinners cannot come into God's presence apart from forgiveness through Christ. But if Jesus is left out of the centre of our thoughts then the cross of Jesus and its redemption must of necessity also be lost sight of, and in its place a religion of works - moral works or religious works - takes its place. Since Christ is not mentioned in the form of service I referred to it is not surprising that there is also no

reference in the prayers to repentance or forgiveness or the cross or the coming of Christ, which are the central themes of the Christian religion.

I may take another illustration from the Roman Catholic devotions to the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary takes Christ's place at the centre of religious devotion, and once again the natural consequence is to be seen: The cross is lost sight of so that salvation through works takes the place of salvation through forgiveness.

I have in my hand a pamphlet entitled "Mary's scapular and Fatima" published by the Australian Catholic Truth Society which I bought in a church this year. Thus it is an example of what is still being taught to Roman Catholics in a leading Melbourne suburb. I should explain that the scapular represents the garments worn by the monks of the monastery of Our Lady of

~~Mount Carmel.~~ The scapular used to be a small piece of woollen cloth worn round the neck but this century the pope has given permission for the wearing of a metal medal as its equivalent. It is worn in honour of the Virgin Mary. It is taught that the wearing of this scapular ensures eternal salvation. Consequently, the wearer's attention is effectively directed away from Christ who should be the centre of his hopes. For example, the opening page of the pamphlet states that the Virgin Mary declared in a vision "Whosoever dies wearing this scapular will not suffer eternal fire" and as recently as 1950 Pope Pius XII commended the wearing of the scapular as follows: "Not for a light or passing matter are we here concerned but with the obtaining of eternal life itself which is the substance of that promise of the most blessed Virgin which has been handed down to us". And again, "How many souls there are" Pope Pius XII stated, "who in circumstances

humanly speaking desperate, have owed their final conversion and their eternal salvation to the scapular with which they were clothed?" I need hardly say that Jesus Christ and His saving death is effectively obscured by this teaching; and for those who believe it their hopes of heaven are focussed on their own actions, in this case on the wearing of a medal.

Trust in the scapular is reinforced by numerous stories of miracles which the wearing of the scapular has brought about. Thus the opening page of the pamphlet tells of how the scapular saved a young girl from dancing with a demon, and on page 13 we read: "During the Franco Prussian war five soldiers were preparing to go to the front. Their pastor invited a Carmelite priest to speak to the men on the scapular. On hearing of the wonderful privilege of the scapular the men hastened to be enrolled. One of them, however, ridiculed the idea and

refused to have anything to do with it. In due course the men went off to fight and of the five who left, four returned safely home. The soldier who was killed was the one who refused to be enrolled in the scapular". And on page 15 of the pamphlet we are told that when the graves of St. Alphonsus and St. John Bosco were opened many years after their deaths the sacred vestments in which they were buried were found to be decayed, but the brown scapular which each was wearing was perfectly intact. The pamphlet goes on "Suffice it now to repeat the words of Claude de la Colombiere S.J. "No devotion has been confirmed by more numerous authentic miracles than the scapular".

The wearing of the scapular is said to bring a second most valuable benefit. Not only does it ensure that those who wear it will not die in mortal sin (and thus they will avoid hell), but in addition they will only spend a minimum of time in Purgatory. On page

17 we read that the Virgin Mary told Pope John XXII that "for all who die wearing the scapular I their mother will descend to them by grace on the Saturday which follows their death and I will deliver all those I find in Purgatory and lead them to the mountain of eternal life". And this teaching that the wearing of the scapular brings deliverance from purgatory on the first Saturday after death was confirmed by Pope Pius XII as recently as 1950.

In view of these extraordinary benefits that the wearing of the scapular is said to bring it is not surprising that many of our Roman Catholic brethren wear their medals with such assiduity. But it is impossible that His death should be the centre of our hope and if His atoning death is not the centre of our hope for heaven then our own good works whether our moral life or our religious works become the centre. For it is either Christ or ourselves on

whom our salvation depends;
there is no third alternative.
We who are Christians must be
on our guard lest the Lord
Jesus Christ becomes dim in
our thoughts or in our hope.
For He is Lord of all and we
must make Him the centre of
all our religious worship.
For God was in Christ, and if
we by-pass Christ we by-pass
God Himself, and for all our
zeal are found to be worshipping
a god of our own imagination.

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