

# ISLAM IMPEACHED

OR

## ‘CHRIST NOT MUHAMMAD’

(NB The following is an extended preamble to a brief millennium declaration entitled ‘Jesus Christ, a Saviour for all Seasons, a Man for all Millennia’ now re-issued with slight amendments in the context of the Islamic threat.)

### INTRODUCTION

Whatever secularists or other religious commentators say about Islam, I am utterly persuaded that radical authentic Christianity alone provides the best basis for scrutinising and assessing it. Since Islam’s barbaric ideology is driven by a corrupt theology, non-theological criteria will never enable us effectively to challenge its claims. However unwelcome some might find the discipline, we must get beyond cultural, historical, social and political criticism. In short, we must go to the heart and ‘get theological’. This includes recognising that Islam’s loveless and immoral creed is to be attributed to three grave defects. *First*, among the Ninety-nine names for Allah, ‘God is love’ is not one of them. *Second*, the claim that ‘Allah is compassionate and merciful’ really teaches that he is fickle in excusing sin rather than forgiving penitents on the basis of a just atonement (as in Christianity). A case in point is the permission Allah gave to Muhammad to renege on his promise to his wife Hafsa not to associate sexually with a Coptic slave after she found him with her (see the Qur’an, *Sura 66: 1-6*). *Third*, unlike the Judeo-Christian Scriptures in which the rigorous demands of Law are met by a generous provision of Grace, the Qur’an is all Law. Concerning the character of the Qur’an itself, it cannot begin to compare with the contents and integrity of the Holy Bible. In view of its Jewish, sub-Christian and pagan sources, what is good in it is not original and what is original is not good.

### CHRIST IN THE BIBLE AND THE QUR’AN

In Islamic countries, Christian missionaries remind Muslims that the Qur’an has a lot to say about Jesus. This fact, so it is argued, is an effective starting point in presenting the Christian Faith to them. However, the same tactic is used by Muslim ‘missionaries’ in the West to demonstrate how close the two religions really are. “We also believe in Jesus,” they say. Thus modern multi-faith gurus argue that ‘Jesus’ or ‘Isa’ provides the basis for reconciliation between the two monotheistic faiths.

While it is true that the Qur’an refers to Christ’s virgin birth, life, teaching, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension and second coming, the ‘Qur’anic Christ’ is very different from the ‘Biblical Christ’. At this point, Muslims argue that both Jews and the early Christians - ‘the People of the Book’ - changed or ‘twisted’ their original documents which, they say, taught the same truth found later in the Qur’an (see *Sura 3: 78-81*). Thus Christians are accused of making invalid claims for Christ’s divinity and trinitarian status not found in their original Scriptures. However, this foundational feature of Muslim anti-Christianity is a completely muddled allegation. *First*, no Muslim scholar has ever produced a single copy of a supposedly genuine original MS of the Christian Scriptures different from the oldest extant MSS of the New Testament (c. 350 AD). To illustrate: if (skilfully wielding a black marker pen) a prankish schoolboy added glasses and a moustache to a print of the ‘Mona Lisa’, claiming it was authentic, sceptics could easily prove it to be otherwise by appealing to the original! *Second*, if the original scriptures had been revealed by God, would He have allowed them to be lost or destroyed? *Third*, even the Qur’anic evidence presupposes that at the time of Muhammad (7th century AD), Jews and Christians still possessed their Bibles - the true

Torah and the true Gospel (see *Sura 7: 156-7*). The latter are really charged not with having corrupted their MSS but with ‘forgetting’, ‘hiding’ and ‘doubting’ them (see *Suras 42: 13-14; 5: 14-16*). The only valid conclusion is that, at worst, Christians of Muhammad’s acquaintance had misrepresented their own copies of the Bible, a view for which evidence certainly exists.

### **QUR’ANIC CONFUSION ABOUT CHRIST**

Turning to the Qur’an’s testimony to Christ, absolute Muslim hostility to soundly-documented Christian teaching is very evident. The following selection demonstrates the unbridgeable chasm between the ‘Biblical Jesus’ and the ‘Qur’anic Jesus’:

‘People of the book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about Allah. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than Allah’s apostle and His Word which He conveyed to Mary: a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His apostles and do not say: ‘Three.’ Forbear, and it shall be better for you. Allah is but one God. Allah forbid that He should have a son!’ (*Sura 4: 171*).

‘The Messiah, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle’ (*Sura 5: 75*).

‘Unbelievers are those that say: ‘Allah is the Messiah, the Son of Mary.’ For the Messiah himself said: ‘Children of Israel, serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’ ... Unbelievers are those that say: ‘Allah is one of three.’ There is but one God. If they do not desist from so saying, those of them that disbelieve shall be sternly punished’ (*Sura 5: 72-3*).

‘Then Allah will say: ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: “Worship me and my mother as gods beside Allah?”’ ’ (*Sura 5: 116*).

‘... the Christians say the Messiah is the son of Allah. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. Allah confound them! How perverse they are! They worship ... the Messiah the son of Mary, as gods besides Allah; though they were ordered to serve one God only. There is no god but Him. Exalted be He above those whom they deify beside Him! ... It is He who has sent forth His apostle with guidance and the true faith to make it triumphant over all religions, however much the idolaters may dislike it’ (*Sura 9: 30-3*).

Thus starry-eyed multi-faith ecumenists can only pursue their delusion by betraying historic Christian teaching. That said, further muddle in Muslim polemic requires comment since there is some truth in the Qur’an’s anti-trinitarian denunciations. However, it actually tilts at a man of straw. Whether or not he knew of it, the ‘trinity’ Muhammad scorned was not the orthodox teaching of the Nicene Creed (325 AD) but the bizarre teaching of a ‘Christianised’ pagan sect known as the Mariamists. Treating Mary like a goddess, this cult taught a trinity of ‘God, Mary and Jesus’. Such is not the teaching of Bible-believing Christians. In this respect, we would agree with Muhammad’s stance (see especially *Sura 5: 116* above). That said, judging by the Qur’an’s clear denial of Christ’s deity, there is no reason to believe that Muhammad would have been sympathetic to Nicene orthodoxy.

### **TRINITARIAN TRUTH**

Regarding the person of Christ, Christian orthodoxy rightly affirms the consistency between the virginal conception of Christ and His inclusion within the divine Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. While an impeccable theological and logical case may be made for the doctrine of the Trinity, it fundamentally depends on the truth of the incarnation, a miraculous phenomenon which transcends logic. Since the Qur’an is emphatic in teaching the virgin birth without logic, why can Muslims not accept the orthodox Trinity without logic? And if they affirm the divine nature of the physical conception of Christ, why can they not affirm the

divine as well as human nature of the person thus conceived?

Whatever he learned from the Mariamists, some of Muhammad's own language tends to confirm the truth of the very Christian Scriptures he dismissed (see *Sura 4: 171* quoted above). While the Mariamists did 'transgress the bounds' dictated by 'the Book' where Mary was concerned, they arguably did not transgress where Jesus was concerned. Significantly, some of Muhammad's statements about Jesus are in harmony with the Bible without his realising their true significance. Indeed Jesus was an 'apostle' (*Hebrews 3: 1*). He was also the divine 'Word made flesh' (*John 1: 1, 14*). He is also a 'Spirit from God' (see *Galatians 4: 6*).

However, several of the above Qur'anic expressions are meaningless apart from the truth of Christ's deity. *First*, He was an apostle sent by the Father, sharing the Father's nature: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him' (*Matthew 17: 5*). *Second*, as 'the Word made flesh', Jesus visibly expressed the Father's nature: 'No one has seen God at any time. The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him' (*John 1: 18*). *Third*, having an existence prior to His incarnation, Christ had an eternal spiritual identity in which He shared the Father's nature, a fact reflected in the biblical expression 'only-begotten'. The 'sonship' of Jesus thus relates not to His birth through Mary but to an *eternal* generation in which He thus partook of all the features or attributes of God's eternal being. Mary was merely the vehicle of His human birth at a point in *time*, through whom the *eternal* Son of God derived His *temporal* humanity. Besides viewing Mary as a goddess, the Mariamist heresy arguably implied a physical union between Allah and Mary, against which Muhammad rightly reacted. Over-reacting to such an idea, His horror at the thought of 'Allah having a son' arose from his failure to see the metaphorical form of the legitimate biblical language involved.

### RECOGNISING THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE

Since God is not a physical being (see *John 4: 24*), the idea of 'begetting' or 'procreation' invokes an analogy of limited significance only. In short, the details of physical procreation have no parallel in the use of the analogy between human and divine 'begetting' since analogy does not mean identity. The significant parallel is that just as human beings reproduce themselves *according to their own kind*, so, *according to His own kind*, 'God the Father' revealed Himself in Jesus 'God the Son'. The Qur'anic prohibition 'do not say: 'Three.' ... Allah is but one God' exhibits confused and ill-informed thinking. Muslims are right to reject the Mariamist trinity of 'Allah, Mary and Jesus' but wrong to reject the authentic Christian Trinity of 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. Yes, as Jews and Christians both believe, God is but one God. However, His identity is not to be limited to the notion of the single personality of a human individual. Reflecting the plurality of the Hebrew *Elohim*, the name 'God' refers to a being of *one* nature expressed in *three* distinct though perfectly co-ordinated personalities. The identity of a single, common *nature* forbids the conclusion that there are three gods, just as a human 'father, son and grandson' forbids the conclusion that three such distinct individuals involve more than one type of humanness. In short, in both cases, they are 'three persons with one nature'. Besides Old Testament anticipations of the doctrine of the Trinity (see *Genesis 1: 26-7; Psalm 2: 7; Isaiah 9: 6*), the fact remains that the Christian Scriptures abound in 'trinitarian' testimony, notwithstanding the absence of the later technical term 'trinity' in the documents themselves (see *Matthew 3: 16-17; 28: 19; John 15: 26; 2 Corinthians 13: 14; Ephesians 1: 3-13; 1 Peter 1: 2; 1 John 5: 7*. NB: While this last text is not found in the some Greek MSS, it is present in the Old Italic versions (Latin translation from Greek, c.150 AD) which predate the oldest extant Greek MSS).

If Muhammad is quoting a verbatim Mariamist statement when he said "Unbelievers are those that say: 'Allah is the Messiah,' " their confusion contributed to his own over-reactionary confusion. While 'God is the Messiah' hardly represents Christian orthodoxy, 'the Messiah is God' certainly does. In Christian terms, the former could be seen to confuse 'Father' and

‘Son’, whereas the latter simply asserts that the divine Messiah possesses the same divine nature as the Father. Such a distinction of persons within the Godhead is evident in the New Testament, e. g. John 14: 8-10; Hebrews 1: 3. An illustration helps elucidate the last mentioned. The Messiah ‘being the brightness of [the Father’s] glory and the express image of His person’ reminds one of an image on a TV screen. While the source of the original visual image is at the point of transmission, the image on the screen is distinct from the transmitted source even though its own visual features are identical with those of the source. Thus Jesus could say, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14: 9).

### **QUR’ANIC CONTRADICTION OVER CHRIST’S CRUCIFIXION**

Next to its denials of Christ’s deity, the Qur’an is self-contradictory over His death. For instance, two statements predict his crucifixion while a third denies it ever happened:

[The Jews] plotted, and Allah plotted. Allah is the supreme Plotter. He said: ‘Jesus, I am about to cause you to die and lift you up to Me. I shall take you away from the unbelievers and exalt your followers above them till the Day of Resurrection’ (*Sura 3: 45-55*).

[Mary] made a sign to [her people], pointing to the child. But they replied: ‘How can we speak with a babe in the cradle?’ ‘Whereupon he spoke and said: ‘I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Gospel and ordained me a prophet. ... He has exhorted me to honour my mother and has purged me of vanity and wickedness. I was blessed on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day of my death; and may peace be upon me on the day when I shall be raised to life’ (*Sura 19: 29-35*).

‘[The People of the Book] denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared: ‘We have put to death the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah.’ They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did. Those that disagreed about him were in doubt concerning his death, for what they knew about it was sheer conjecture; they were not sure that they had slain him. Allah lifted him up to His presence; He is mighty and wise. There is none among the People of the Book but will believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them’ (*Sura 4: 156-9*).

What is worse, Islam has no conception of personal forgiveness based on an atonement where the demands of justice and mercy are equally met. Unlike Christians, Muslims have no saviour in whom their tortured consciences may find forgiveness and peace. Lacking the motive and experience of Christ’s love, Muslims cannot enjoy forgiving and being forgiven.

### **QUR’ANIC MUDDLE OVER MARY**

While Islam rightly protested against the Mariamist worship of Mary as a ‘goddess’ and the consequent counterfeit trinity of ‘Allah, Mary and Jesus’, the Qur’an still employs questionable language about her. While Mary’s virginal conception of Jesus is asserted, the details of the narrative involve a good deal of fantasy. Compared with this, the Lucan narrative possesses a powerful sense of authentic reality (see Luke 1: 26-38). Also, the Qur’an mistakenly confuses Mary with Aaron’s sister Miriam:

‘And you shall recount in the Book the story of Mary: how she left her people and betook herself to a solitary place to the east. We sent Our spirit in the semblance of a full-grown man. And when she saw him she said: ‘May the Merciful defend me from you! If you fear the Lord, leave me and go your way.’ ‘I am the messenger of your Lord,’ he replied, ‘and have come to give you a holy son.’ ‘How shall I bear a child,’ she answered, ‘when I am a virgin, untouched by man?’ ‘Such is the will of your Lord,’ he replied. ‘That is no difficult thing for Him. “He shall be a sign to mankind,” says the Lord, “and a blessing from Ourselves. This is Our decree.” Thereupon she

conceived him, and retired to a far-off place. And when she felt the throes of childbirth she lay down by the trunk of a palm-tree, crying: 'Oh, would that I had died and passed into oblivion!' ... 'Carrying the child, she came to her people, who said to her: 'This is indeed a strange thing! Sister of Aaron, your father was never a whore-monger, nor was your mother a harlot.' She made a sign to them, pointing to the child. But they replied: 'How can we speak with a babe in the cradle?' Whereupon he spoke and said: 'I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Gospel and ordained me a prophet. ... He has exhorted me to honour my mother and has purged me of vanity and wickedness. I was blessed on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day of my death; and may peace be upon me on the day when I shall be raised to life' (*Sura 19: 15-34*).

Despite its anti-Mariamist stance, the Qur'an arguably retains too much of the kind of thinking that produced the excessive Mariamist adulation of Mary in the first place, even casting doubt on the original purity of Christ. On the latter point, the above quotation suggests that Jesus underwent some early process of purification from 'vanity and wickedness'. On the other hand, Mary is described as 'pure' and 'saintly' in a manner alien to the New Testament:

'And remember the angel's words to Mary. He said: 'Allah has chosen you. He has made you pure and exalted you above all women. Mary, be obedient to your Lord; bow down and worship with the worshippers' (*Sura 3: 43*).

'The Messiah, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle: other apostles passed away before him. His mother was a saintly woman' (*Sura 5: 75*).

While the New Testament speaks of Mary as 'highly favoured' and 'blessed', she is not described as sinlessly 'pure'. On the contrary, in her 'Magnificat', she herself implicitly acknowledges that she is sinful and thus in need of 'God my Saviour' (*Luke 1: 47*). In short, her 'saintliness' depended on the same 'grace of God' enjoyed by all Christian believers, not on some innate perfection, far less on a fallacious process of 'canonisation'. Furthermore, her defects are not hidden in the Gospels. Indeed, Mary's recognition of her own fallibility should be carefully noted. Jesus is the *only* sinless person to have ever walked the earth. When 'about His *heavenly* Father's business', did Mary not momentarily forget that Joseph *wasn't* his father (*Luke 2: 48-9*)? Did 'the Word made flesh' not have gently but firmly to rebuke Mary's presumption at the wedding at Cana (*John 2: 3-4*)? Did she not by her penitent response (v. 5) teach the Church in all ages to bow exclusively to Christ's authority? Did Mary not have to learn that, in the kingdom of God, our privileges are based on spiritual rather than physical relationships (*Mark 3: 31-5*)?

The Qur'an's view of Mary *vis-à-vis* Jesus therefore invites some very valid criticism. Even shorn of Mariamist excess, it still retains support for the very tendency it seeks to combat. Indeed, the Qur'an mirrors the same tendencies evident in the medieval Roman Catholic Church which produced the very kind of idolisation of Mary (culminating in the immaculate conception dogma of 1854) rightly rejected by the Reformed Church and Islam alike. Commenting on Christ's 'rebuke' of His mother at Cana, John Calvin wrote: 'It is certain that this saying of Christ openly warns men not to transfer to Mary what belongs to God, by superstitiously exalting the honour of the maternal name in Mary. Christ therefore addresses His mother like this so as to transmit a perpetual and general lesson to all ages, lest an extravagant honour paid to His mother should obscure His divine glory. How necessary this warning became, in consequence of the gross and abominable superstitions which followed later, is known well enough. For Mary has been made Queen of Heaven, the Hope, the Life and Salvation of the world; and in fact, their insane raving went so far that they just about stripped Christ and adorned her with the spoils. ... As if she had not all the honour that belongs to her without being made a goddess' (*Comment on John 2: 4*).

## ISLAM AND WOMEN

Having discussed the Muslim view of Mary, a brief look at women's rights is in order. Compared with the Bible's beautiful teaching about marriage and motherhood (see *Matthew 19: 1-10; Ephesians 5: 22-33*), the Islamic provision of four wives per man goes hand in hand with cruel subjugation. The Qur'an urges men who 'fear disobedience' from their women to 'admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them' (*Sura 4: 34*). Clearly embarrassed by such violent humiliation, the UK 'Islamic Vision' version of the Qur'an (IPCI, Birmingham) absurdly attempts to 'soften' if not explain it away. Muslim men are allowed to 'chastise' difficult wives 'lightly' but 'with a toothbrush, or some such thing'!

## CHRIST AND MUHAMMAD COMPARED

It is quite extraordinary that anyone should ever place Jesus and Muhammad in the same kind of category. Writers and educators are guilty of gross deception in failing to distinguish the two 'leaders'. Dr Philip Schaff provides an accurate and authoritative assessment of Muhammad in a portrait that is hardly flattering:

'He was a better man in the period of his adversity and persecution at Mecca, than during his prosperity and triumph at Medina. History records many examples of characters rising from poverty and obscurity to greatness, and then decaying under the sunshine of wealth and power. He degenerated, like Solomon, but did not repent, like the preacher of 'vanity of vanities'. He had a melancholic and nervous temperament, liable to fantastic hallucinations and alternations of high excitement and deep depression, bordering at times on despair and suicide. ... Towards his enemies he was cruel and revengeful. ... Sir William Muir concedes his original honesty and zeal as a reformer and warner, but assumes a gradual deterioration to the judicial blindness of a self-deceived heart, and even a kind of Satanic inspiration in the later revelations. ... He did not shrink from perfidy. He believed in the use of the sword as the best missionary, and was utterly unscrupulous as to the means of success. He could take pleasure in cruel and perfidious assassination, could gloat over the massacre of entire tribes, and savagely consign the innocent babe to the fires of hell. ... Muhammad was a slave of sensual passion. Aisha [his favourite wife], who knew him best in his private character and habits, used to say: "The prophet loved three things, women, perfumes and food; he had his heart's desire of the first two, but not of the last." The motives of his excess in polygamy were his sensuality which grew with his years, and his desire for male offspring. His followers excused or justified him [because of] the difficulties of his prophetic office, which were so great that God gave him a compensation in sexual enjoyment, and endowed him with greater capacity than thirty ordinary men. ... He had at least fourteen legal wives, and a number of slave concubines besides. At his death he left nine widows. He claimed special revelations which gave him greater liberty of sexual indulgence than ordinary Muslims (who are restricted to four wives), and exempted him from the prohibition of marrying near relatives. ... He married [Aisha] when she was a girl of nine years [which makes him a paedophile in modern terms]. ... To compare such a man with Jesus is preposterous and even blasphemous. Jesus was the sinless Saviour of sinners; Mohammed was a sinner, and he knew and confessed it. He falls far below Moses or Elijah, or any of the prophets in moral purity' (see *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 143-203).

## CONCLUSION

In the light of subsequent history, it is any wonder that Islam has its own distinctively dark, oppressive, cruel and bloody track record? The teaching and example of its 'leader' could hardly inspire anything different, even allowing for some otherwise commendable literary features possessed by the Qur'an. If the lives of certain professing Christians sadly match the life-style of Muhammad, it is not because they learned it from our Lord Jesus Christ. Their own decadence arises from the same source as Muhammad's - the unenlightened, unsanctified

and sinful human heart. When the divine and holy nature, saving work and transforming influence of the Saviour of the world makes its impact on our lives, personal, domestic and national life is ten elevated in a way that no other religion or ideology can match, especially Islam. May we all thoughtfully and prayerfully study and absorb the contents of the New Testament to demonstrate this verdict. The following presentation of Jesus Christ is offered as a synopsis of the truth everyone desperately needs either to discover for the first time or to recover before it is too late. Our comfort in this life and our salvation in the next depends upon it. May God have mercy upon us all. Amen!

# **J E S U S   C H R I S T**

## **Saviour for all Seasons, Man for all Millennia**

### ***THE LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH***

He was not simply a religious leader long ago. Since He is the self-revelation of God, He existed before Bethlehem. When He was born on earth He had already existed from all eternity. In fact, through Him everything was created. Indeed, everything still depends on Him. The Bible teaches that He is the second person in the Godhead. To employ the simplest of analogies, God the Father is the ‘architect’ of creation; God the Son - Jesus Christ - is the ‘site manager’; God the Holy Spirit supplies the ‘work force’. The Lord Jesus is the main theme of the Bible. This single observation unlocks its true meaning and makes total sense of what might otherwise remain mysterious. The Old Testament prophets foretold His coming. Angels proclaimed His birth. Apostles declared His glory and mercy to a lost world.

### ***THE UNIQUE SON OF GOD***

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God in a very special sense. While Christians are described as children of God, they are children by grace and adoption. Christ is the Son by nature. As children reveal something of their parents, Christ reveals the nature and character of God the Father in a unique way. He is the ‘true offspring’ of the eternal God. Thus He is ‘God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not created, being of one nature with the Father, by whom all things were made’ (*The Nicene Creed*). The divine nature is therefore truly expressed in the personality of Jesus Christ. In Him we see God the Father from whom His divine nature was directly derived. Of course, this ‘family’ picture language has limits: the virgin Mary was not Christ’s mother in the sense that God the Father was His Father. She was merely the vehicle of Christ’s human nature. Whereas the Nicene Creed rightly teaches that He ‘was incarnate *by* the Holy Spirit *of* the virgin Mary’, recent ‘ecumenically correct’ amendments propose to change this to ‘incarnate *of* the Holy Spirit *and* the Virgin Mary’. This upgrades the role of Mary to an equality with the Holy Spirit implying a form of ‘cohabitation’. Such ideas distort the New Testament teaching. While Mary is justly called ‘Blessed’, Christ through the Holy Spirit actually created His mother in order that she might miraculously convey Him to mankind as ‘God-made-man’. Her role, while necessary for the incarnation, was essentially one of subordination. Thus our attention is to be fixed on Him not her. His uniquely tender and soul-soothing compassion exclusively merits the focus of our faith.

### ***BORN TO DIE FOR OUR SINS***

Christ came to save us. He brought resources we do not possess. Through violating God’s holy law we are guilty, hell-deserving sinners. Spiritually corrupted and impotent, we are helpless to repay the debt we owe to God. Not willing that we should perish, God the Father sent Christ as man to pay in our name and nature all that we owe. Sin deserves death and damnation. It is an offence to the holiness and purity of our Creator. On the cross, Christ suffered the wrath of God in our place. As the God-man, His agonizing death satisfied the

righteous demands of God the Father. Those who repent and trust in Christ are justified - acquitted, pardoned and accepted as children of God. They are also renewed in their natures by the Holy Spirit's indwelling and sanctifying power. Having conquered sin by His death, Christ conquered death by His resurrection. Believers in Christ are saved eternally from sin, death and condemnation.

### ***THE ONLY SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD***

As the Father's love-gift to an undeserving world, no one else can do what only Christ has done. All other religious leaders were only human. They too were sinners. They are also dead. It is multi-faith madness to suggest otherwise. Christ lives to seek and save the lost. We all need Him. The Church proclaims Him to the whole world. He who wept over Jerusalem still looks with love and mercy on a ruined world. He alone has the infinite capacity and almighty grace to save us. All other religions are people reaching up to God. In Christ, God is reaching down to us. Christ has no substitutes. He requires no assistance. While the Church honours Mary, the ancient Prophets and the Apostles, Christ alone is the mediator through whom we pray and worship. Others cannot help us. Christ is all we need. He calls all people in every age and nation to come to Him. In Jesus, a restless world finds rest, a guilty world finds pardon, a dying world finds life and a ruined world finds redemption.

### ***THE CHURCH'S LIVING HEAD***

After His glorious resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven. As Head of the redeemed community, He pours out the Holy Spirit upon us. He personally saves, guides, directs, keeps, strengthens and perfects His Church. In His physical absence from the world, the Holy Spirit acts invisibly on His behalf. Christ has not delegated His headship to any other person whether King, Queen, Pope or Archbishop. Christ the King and Saviour, having established the Church through the ministry of the Apostles, now governs and guides us through Ministers of the Word and Elders. [As expressed in Reformed churchmanship], these are the New Testament 'bishops' or 'overseers' appointed by Christ our Head and chief Shepherd. In every age, the perpetuation of true faith is guaranteed not by some mechanical apostolic, sacramental and episcopal succession but by the ministry of faithful preachers of the Gospel. Their mandate is to teach only the inspired, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God, the Bible. However sound and eloquent they might be, the words of men are to be constantly tested by the Scriptures. By the ministry of word and sacrament, the Lord Jesus makes His holy, loving and gracious presence known in our hearts. The water of baptism is but a symbol of the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. The water itself does not convey the grace of God. Since Christ's glorious body remains in heaven, the bread and wine of the Holy Supper are symbols of that spiritual nourishment guaranteed by Christ's spiritual presence in the hearts of His people.

### ***THE COMING JUDGE OF ALL***

The world has not seen the last of Jesus Christ. He will return to judge the world. Precisely when is known only to the Father. As the humbled Son, Christ came first in weakness to save. He returns with power and glory to judge. Those who reject Him will be damned eternally in hell. Those who acknowledge, trust, love and serve Him will be happy forever in heaven. They are God's chosen children in whom He delights. Let us be sure to listen to Christ's gracious call while time permits. May we acknowledge Him, trust only in Him, supremely love and serve Him all our days. Thus we shall rejoice throughout the remainder of our earthly life and pilgrimage until we come at last to that everlasting rest to which Jesus calls us in the Gospel. Amen!

*Reader*, are you trusting in Jesus Christ?

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