

Christ: Man of Mystery or Man of God?

'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:15-17) Paul's readers, the Colossians, were having their faith tested by other, 'so-called', Christians telling them that they had not understood God or the gospel properly. Those responsible, called Gnostics, were very likely Jewish or pagan mystics. They claimed to be followers of Christ, but said that the teachings of Jesus Christ had been mis-understood and that there was 'secret knowledge' about him which only they could reveal to those who followed their teachings rather than the gospel proclaimed by Jesus' disciples. These were sects, run by people aware that there was something out there but weren't sure themselves what it was.

Some of them were out and out crooks, while others were well-meaning.

There is nothing new here. If you want to see what this looks like today, then check out the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, better known as the Mormons. Both have perfectly pleasant people in them, but the view of the collective regarding Christ and their own place in the world and the world to come is quite different to mainstream theological thinking. Each have a controlling body that is, controlling to every degree of life and lifestyle. In the case of the Mormons, there is a pyramid of leadership ranks, that a member can buy into to discover the secret things about the faith that is not already known to them.

So, at Colossae, these Gnostics had been upsetting the church and Paul sets out to tell the Colossians about God, and how God sees them, beginning with Jesus:

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Those who lived 2000 odd years ago in Judea saw Jesus in the flesh. What they saw was God in a tangible human form. They could touch him, be touched by him, hear his voice, talk to him. There in front of them was the visible image of the invisible God. He was in the flesh because he was born of a woman, but he was God because he was born of the Holy Spirit. Thus, fully human and fully divine.

Having lived among us in the form of a human being, when he was crucified, that should have been the end of him. But this is where the death and resurrection of Jesus becomes so important to us. Even if the physical body could be killed, the Spirit in him could not be killed. His heavenly Father raised him from the dead, clothed with a body such that when he appeared to his disciples, they knew who he was and could touch, talk and listen to him as before.

Death, which till then was the end of life, in effect was told: 'Death shall not have him, because I, God, claim back what is mine. Death does not have the power to hold me

who made all things and gave them life that they may have life and have it in abundance.'

When Jesus rose and ascended to his Father, his life did not end and even if we no longer see him in physical material form, we can still know him in his spiritual form. In this, we stand as intercessors in prayer and praise and thanksgiving between the earthly and the heavenly.

The promise Jesus made was that death would no longer be an end to life, but the gateway, a transforming point, to the beginning of new life to those who follow Christ. Christ will claim us as his own, because: 'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.'

He acts as king, because he is king. As God he is sovereign over all, there is nothing he does not know or is not interested in, about us. There is nothing he cannot do if he chooses to do it, and that includes saving souls from death. God chooses to do this for us because he loves us; he chooses to take us to himself because he desires it; we are all, after all, made in his image.

Though we are created in the image of God, that does not make us God. Christ is the image of God; he is the original, therefore he is God.

If you were given the choice between owning the original of a great and valuable painting and a copy of it, which would you choose? The original, of course. The copy could never be as good as the original. So why, when we can have a relationship with the original God who can give us life in all its fullness, are many tempted to chase after other things of mystery and intrigue, that ultimately do not satisfy?

This was Paul's warning the Colossians: 'Put your trust in the original and best; The Lord will not let you down, nor lose his value. Instead, he will raise you to where he is, to share in his glory.' Those thoughts still echo truly today.