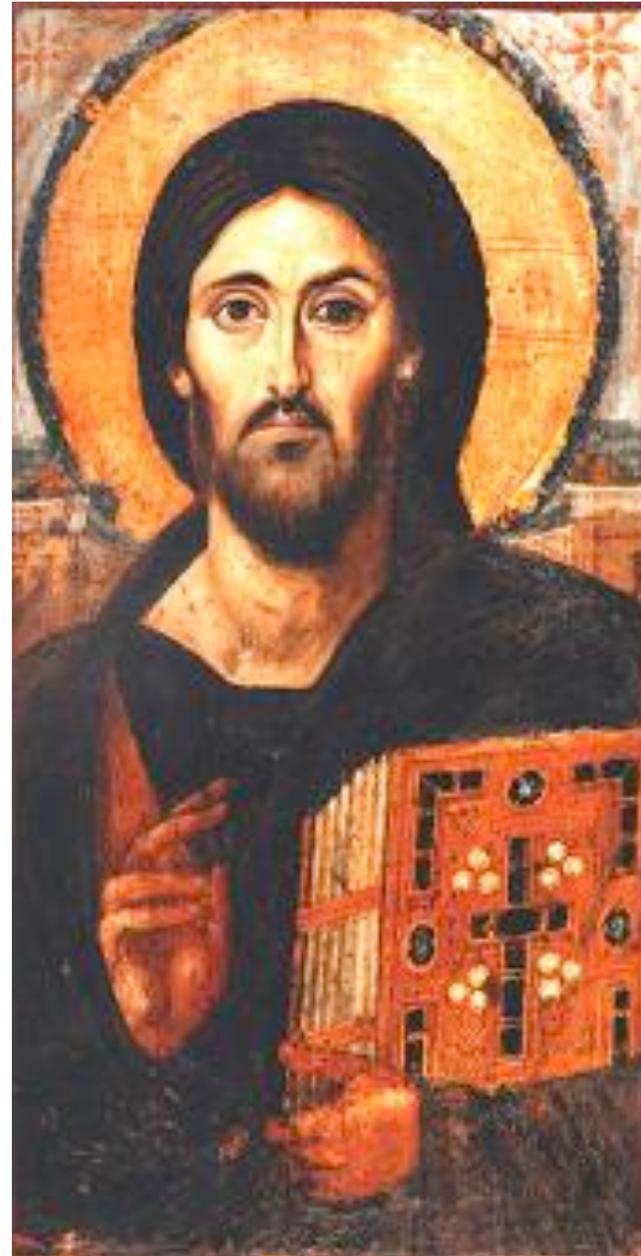


Things to Consider

1. Perhaps you are thinking, 'this seems like theoretical, ivory tower stuff, so what has it got to do with me? Do I really need to know all this?' Actually, the answer is a very definite 'Yes'! No, you don't need to pass any exams, but you do need to know and understand the broad brushstrokes.
2. At the beginning of creation we were made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1.26) but through sin we no longer have that likeness. Deep down most of us know the truth of this and we recognise in our heart the dark areas in our life even though we prefer to keep them hidden. This is the 'sin' in our lives and is not so much to do with particular sins, but rather a state of sin. We all find it easier to do the wrong thing than the right thing. Put simply, we are alienated from God.
3. Jesus Christ came to save us from this; to restore us; to begin that process of renewal in God's image and likeness and in this way we will be 'partakers of the divine nature' (1 Peter 1.4).
4. None of this happens by accident or by chance. It can only be done with our full cooperation. But, and it's a big but, we do not do this ourselves – God in Jesus Christ does it for us. We are transformed from base metal into pure gold! This is the end for which we are made, this is what life is actually all about! And for this we need a Saviour and a Judge!
5. Think of God in Jesus as being like a divine violin tuner. He has an instrument in his hands which has the potential to produce the most exquisite and ethereal sounds. To get that perfect pitch requires that the tuner tightens the strings to achieve exactly the right tension.
6. This is Jesus judging us (dealing with that dark dross in our life we call sin) and saving us (helping us to become all that we might be).
7. The first thing we have to do is to recognise that we are alienated from God and then, in response, repent. This word means to think again, to turn away from that sin in our life. Ask God to help you. Say to Him you are sorry for all that is wrong in your life. With His help, firmly intend to change and do better. (But remember you will fail many times!) Then, give thanks for this gift from God, for it is gift!

B6/13/MBH



'Two
Faces of
Christ'

Moses is minding sheep that belong to his father-in-law, Jethro, and he spies atop a hill a burning bush which is not being consumed. Going to investigate, God then reveals Himself to Moses. Cunningly, he asks God for His name (for then it was believed that if you knew someone's name you had power over them). But it turns out that God is even more cunning and simply replies, 'I Am who I Am' which can also be translated as 'I will be who I will be'. Thus 'I Am' is the Divine name. (Exodus 3.1-15)

Tradition has it that this theophany, this revelation of God, took place at Mt. Sinai on the Sinai Peninsula, which is now part of modern Egypt. It is also the traditional site where later, God again revealed Himself to Moses, giving him the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 19.1-20.21)

For the past 1,600 years a monastery has stood nestled at the foot of Mt. Sinai to witness and honour these events. For the past 1,000 years it has had the name *St Catherine's Monastery* and within its walls and among its treasures is the icon you see on the front of this brochure.

This very famous icon is named *The Pantocrator of Sinai*, and the word 'Pantocrator' means 'ruler of all'. The icon is believed to date back to the first half of the 6th Century and is the oldest known panel icon to depict Christ.

Spend a few minutes looking at it. Notice in His left hand Christ holds the Book of the Gospels and with His right hand He blesses. His large open eyes look into yours, seemingly penetrating your being. Hold a piece of paper over each side in turn. You will become aware that the face of Christ is different on either side.

With the right side, where Christ blesses, we see the face as relaxed. This is Jesus as Saviour, the Lover of all. (Recall the brochure which explores the idea of God as the Divine Lover.) On the left side, where Christ holds the Gospels, there are shadows and the face is slightly taut. This is Christ as the righteous Judge.

In a real sense Christ has many faces – with such examples as being shepherd, vine, life-giver and teacher – but if it could be summed up, in these two, *Saviour* and *Judge*, would be a good choice. And the important point to note is that they are both there in the character of Jesus Christ and each is held in tension with the other. You can't just have one. Hence the two have been combined in this icon.

Being what we are, we humans sometimes want to emphasise one title above the other and when we do so, we badly misrepresent Him.

Yes, He is our Saviour, but He is also our Judge. This is something we are inclined to overlook today when many simply want to feel warm about Jesus and for it to be reciprocated by Him. As I have said in other brochures, we can reduce Him to a 'fairy godmother' figure, an undemanding God, a nice uncle who makes us feel good about ourselves. But God is a Living Fire and we take Him for granted at our peril. We can be like children playing with electricity without realising it.

Yes, He is our Judge, but also our Saviour, the One who saves us from our sins. Don't forget equally that not only is He Judge, but He loves us to a degree we can't begin to imagine. He is the Divine Lover, the shepherd searching for His lost sheep, the compassionate and forgiving God, a God with a sense of divine humour, the One who spends time with outcasts. He is passionate about each of us and that includes you – even if you choose to think otherwise.

Learn from Moses and don't try to control God. You can't anyway! With our emphasis today on individualism, we like to think we are masters of our own destiny. We are not and never will be! Let God be God in your life with His many faces and particularly these two. Yes, let Him be your Saviour, but don't forget He is also your Judge. Yes, remember He is your Judge, but let Him also be your Saviour. Keep the tension between the two and remember that He is a merciful and forgiving Judge and Saviour.

How to bring these two faces together? God's judgement is seen in His passionate love for us. Its deep aim, its deep purpose, is not punishment, but to draw us to that point where we have become all that He wants us to be. Here we see His work as our Saviour, His saving of us. His love wants to purify us of all sin so that we might be in Him and He in us in an act of union.

It is like the lancing of a boil; painful in the doing, but with the aim of cleansing and healing. Isn't it also like the truly loving parents who discipline, encourage and love their child because they see all the potential, all that the child might become? And of course the child can see none of this, only that yet again mother and father are making life difficult.

It might sound strange, but give thanks to God for His judging of us; it is all about our salvation and His great love for you and me.