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# ANOTHER CHRIST

*Re-envisioning ministry*

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# *Introduction*

## *Spiritual formation for leaders: formed into his likeness?*

In all traditions of ministry and priesthood, the call is to become more like Jesus Christ. Some traditions envision the priest as an *alter Christus*, another Christ. They talk of the priest acting *in persona Christi*. Others are inspired by the *Imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ. Priestly formation or ministerial growth is thought of in terms of an increase in Christlikeness. A classic manual in one tradition was called *Christ: The Ideal of the Priest*.[1]

The Pauline writings employ the language of continuous transformation into Christ: 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your minds' (Rom. 12.2). Paul teaches that Christians' calling and vocation, indeed destiny, is 'to be *conformed* to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8.29). As John Ziesler puts it: 'Bearing his image is being like him, and representing him.'[2] The Greek idea *summorphosis* means 'to be formed or fashioned like, to be shaped like'. Inner lives are to be reshaped according to the pattern of Christ; personal resources and aptitudes to be realigned to the template of Christ.

If this growth in Christlikeness is a goal for all Christians, it is especially so for those in ministry or leadership. Paul puts it: 'My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ be formed [*morphothe*] in you' (Gal. 4.19). John develops this in terms of *homoiosis* or assimilation to God (1 John 3.2). The Catholic tradition speaks of the need for the priest's total identification with Christ, a reconfiguration of the person in accordance with Christ.[3]

## *A crucial question*

'Form us into the likeness of Christ', we pray.[4] But what image of Christ is in view? What image of Christ are Christian leaders,

deacons and priests invited to reproduce in their ministry? The Anglican Ordinal offers only two models of Christ to inspire a lifetime of ministry. For priests it invites a reshaping of candidates' lives on the model of Christ the Good Shepherd: 'They are to set the example of the Good Shepherd always before them as the pattern of their calling.'[5] For deacons Christ the servant is the recommended model: 'In the name of our Lord, we bid you remember the greatness of the trust in which you are now to share: the ministry of Christ himself, who for our sake took the form of a servant' (Declarations). The example of Christ's footwashing of the disciples is mentioned three times in the service of ordination of deacons: 'as he washed the feet of his disciples, so they must wash the feet of others'. No other picture of ministry is offered. This is as good as it gets! Books on servant leadership abound.[6]

But these images of Christ to which we are invited to be conformed have become safe and traditional and predictable. They have become institutional norms: clergy are summoned to be increasingly like Christ servant and shepherd, and maintain the existing Church more or less successfully. They refer to a model of faithful pastoral ministry that seems to allow no scope for innovation or eccentricity. The ordination gives only this vision of ministry: 'Priests are called to be servants and shepherds among the people to whom they are sent.'

But what if clergy were to look for inspiration in their leadership to recent rediscoveries of the person of Christ? William Willimon identifies courage as a key quality to be developed in today's Christian leadership and clergy. In *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* he is critical of how clergy have become a respectable profession accommodated to the spirit of the age: 'We seem to have a high proportion of those who wish to keep house, to conform, and too few who like to play, confront, disrupt, revise, and foolishly envision.'[7] He calls on theological educators to seek to form clergy who can dare to be subversive, unsettling in their prophetic and countercultural witness. He is one rare voice, among others, who suggests that we might be inspired by another Christ. It might turn out to make a difference!

## *Origins of this book*

This book originates from two milieux. One is 30 years of parish ministry, during which I have served as priest in a diversity of settings, for eight years responsible for clergy training and ongoing formation in a large diocese. In the midst of this I could see the need both for models of ministry that inspire and hearten and for a spirituality that energizes, sustains and sometimes upsets and disturbs ministry.

The other setting of this book was working for some time as Course Director at St George's College Jerusalem, to which I am connected as an associate professor. I led groups around the Holy Land, going in search of the historical Jesus and his first-century setting. I encountered both the latest scholarship on the historical person of Jesus and the physical setting of his ministry: the towns, valleys, mountains and terrain, which I have explored in two other books.[8] I was struck by surprising images of Jesus – that were not part of the traditional teaching on Christology. We had studied Jesus as Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Saviour, Judge, King. But now I was discovering startling and refreshing images of Jesus that I had not met before. New researches into the social and cultural background of the first century, anthropological and sociological, have brought significant new insights to the question of the identity and work of Jesus of Nazareth. I was realizing that these academic investigations had extraordinary implications for the practice of ministry. As Hugh Anderson puts it:

> it is incumbent on us in our secular age to try to show Christian believers and unbelievers alike that the Christology question is not simply a matter of esoteric debate . . . within the academy, but relates directly to the practical experience of men and women in their lived world . . . the experiential or existential dimension in New Testament Christology or, if you like, its relationship to and implications for the human situation, is congenial to . . . the necessity of wedding theory and praxis (action).[9]

Moreover, there was something paradoxically earthy and transcendent about these new – or ancient and forgotten – images of Jesus. They were intensely human but shot through with divinity. They are the basis of this new book. Jesus emerges as one who is gutsy, provocative, feisty – not 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' but one who is forever breaking out of boxes and titles. C. S. Lewis puts it: 'He's wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.'[10]

This book is a third part of a trilogy and also a sequel – but stands on its own. In *Holy Land? Challenging Questions from the Biblical Landscape* (London: SPCK, 2011) I sought to help the reader grapple with tough questions arising from the terrain of the Holy Land, and in *Beyond the Edge: Spiritual Transitions for Adventurous Souls* (London: SPCK, 2013) I explored how Jesus' call, 'Follow me', leads us into liminal spaces where we are likely to be undone before we are remade and reshaped by Christ. In this third book we see how the first-century setting of Jesus, and his identities within them, suggest a fresh look at ministry today. As a sequel to *Spirituality in Ministerial Formation: The Dynamic of Prayer in Learning* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), this new book builds on the concepts of ministerial and priestly formation explored there; but it can be read on its own.

A key theme in ministerial formation concerns the identity and role of the minister. This can be approached through important functionalist questions: What really is the job of the Christian priest or leader? What is expected of me and what skills will I need? Or the issue of identity can be explored through more significant ontological questions: What am I becoming? What happens when the raw material of my life and my gifting encounters the role of priest? In what sense might this calling be a *sign* to others of the type of kingdom we believe in? This book will resource all kinds of contemporary questioning about the role of priest or leader and bring a fresh angle to the mysterious process of ministerial formation. Existing manuals on Christian leadership seem eminently sensible. They speak of forming strategy, leading teams, handling conflict – all in a biblical way, of course.[11] This book aims to be different – not because of

novelty but because of the unending freshness of New Testament Christology and the experience of clergy in today's risky post-modern world.

## *Aim of this book*

So in this book I want to do two things. First, I want to unearth these images of Jesus that will both unsettle and inspire ministry today – images that emerge from research in the Holy Land about the first century and that resonate strongly with the practice of ministry today. They will turn out, I think, to be authentically ancient and refreshingly contemporary. They speak powerfully about leadership in a way both unnerving and enlivening. I hope they will be a catalyst and stimulus to all involved in ministry, whether as priests, deacons, leaders or lay assistants. Second, as we explore the enigma of Jesus through these images, we discover how they inform not only the practice of Christian leadership today but also a leader's spirituality – whether you want to call it priestly spirituality or the spirituality of leadership.

Prayer exercises at the end of each chapter indicate how we might pray our way with these images today. Most chapters follow a similar pattern. First we examine the model of Jesus, noting the scholarship and examining the evidence. Then we start to see what this suggests to our practice of ministry. A set of penetrating questions is offered, for individual reflection or group use, together with ideas for further reading.

## *Readership and use*

The Archbishop of Canterbury has recently reminded us that one of the priorities for the Church at this time is to 're-imagine ministry'.[12] This book is intended to help us on that process and journey. It is for all concerned with ministry and leadership. It is intended to inspire clergy – especially those looking for a fresh view of the priesthood or diaconate today. It is for those exploring a vocation to ordained ministry. It is also for lay leaders and all

involved in ministry today, in all its many forms. The book is also offered to our brothers and sisters in the free churches and house churches as they evolve patterns of ministry appropriate to the new century. In short – it is hoped that the book will unsettle, disturb, hearten and inspire.

The cover, bearing a representation of the sixth-century icon of 'Christ of Sinai', sums up this book. The two eyes of Christ are quite different – his right eye is clear and penetrating in its gaze, while his left eye is tear-filled and compassionate. As the icon encapsulates the mystery and paradox of Jesus of Nazareth, so this book explores contrasting dimensions of Christ that cast fresh light on our ministry and mission today.

# 1

# *Jesus the builder*

## Creativity and courage in ministry

A raw, sinewy, visceral image presents itself. Jesus, as a young man, dripping in sweat beneath the midday sun, heaving heavy rocks in his strong arms. Jesus, hammer in hand, chipping away at massive pieces of stone, shaping them for use in a great edifice. Jesus, working on a construction site, becoming alert to the exploitation and oppression of workers. This is the Jesus we are rediscovering – Jesus the builder and craftsman.

In the past the Greek word *tecton*, used to describe Jesus' occupation, has been translated 'carpenter' (Mark 6.3; Matt. 13.55). We have been brought up with images of Jesus working as an apprentice in his father's workshop in Nazareth, perhaps even thinking of the cross as he shapes wood. But scholars now tell us the word can be translated 'builder' or 'worker in stone', 'mason', even 'contractor' or 'engineer'. Recent archaeology has revealed that very close to Nazareth, at the time Jesus was in his teens and twenties, there was a building site of extraordinary scale. In the 1990s and continuing into the new century, excavation teams from Duke University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have made some astonishing discoveries about the city of Sefforis (Zippori), about an hour's walk from Nazareth. It offered unparalleled opportunities for a *tecton*, and it is more than likely that Jesus worked there regularly. Nazareth itself, being a village of only 200 souls, offered very limited opportunities for work, while Sefforis was calling out for craftsmen. What was going on at Sefforis?

The former town had been destroyed in 4 BC in a brutal crushing of a Jewish uprising soon after the death of Herod the Great. The Roman army, led by Varus, burned the city and emptied it.

But Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, had plans for its resurrection. Indeed, Josephus tells us, he wanted it to rise from the ashes as a brand new regional capital, the jewel or ornament of all Galilee. And so it experienced a rebirth precisely at the time Jesus was working as a *tecton* just four miles away in Nazareth. It re-established itself as an opulent Hellenized town for a Greek/Jewish aristocracy. It may indeed be the 'city built on a hill' that 'cannot be hidden' (Matt. 5.14).

In one sense it was an exciting construction site, with different contractors building roads, new villas and great public buildings, such as a synagogue and theatre.[1] Jesus would have applied his versatile skills as an artisan. On the woodworking side he made and installed scaffolding, preparing wooden beams for the ceiling, shaping window frames and doors. In stone, Jesus chiselled at the limestone blocks and released the designs hidden within them. He shaped and reshaped the stones so they would fit together within arches and be able to welcome the keystone or cornerstone of the vault. Such work took a trained eye and strong physical exertion; it required both patience and precision.

## *Lessons from the building site*

What lessons did Jesus learn from the building site? In these formative years he became exposed to cruel inequality and oppressions. He would ask himself at whose expense these constructions were being made. The Galilee region of Jesus' time was a place of increasing poverty, witnessing ever more polarization between rich and poor. An exploitative and grasping urban elite resided in the affluent cities of Tiberias and Sefforis, while in their humble lakeside villages Jewish peasants barely eked out a living.

At Sefforis Jesus learns to listen to his fellow workers and hears of their heartaches and pain and debt. Soon, when the time is ripe, he will travel throughout the region with a radical message about the kingdom of God where all are equal and valued. There is no doubt Jesus became increasingly uncomfortable and disturbed by what he saw – and this clarified and crystallized his very message about the kingdom, about the possibility of a different way of

living, that we will explore in Chapter 3, 'Jesus the rebel'. Such parables as the expendable day workers (Matt. 20.1–15) proclaimed the valuing of every worker. Within God's kingdom there will be a place for all – unlike Sefforis, which spoke so painfully of the apartheid of the 'haves' and 'have nots'.[2]

## *Building metaphors in Jesus' teaching*

In the Hebrew Scriptures the prophet Isaiah had depicted God as a builder in relation to his people: 'For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you' (Isa. 62.5). It is significant that in his teaching ministry, Jesus rarely refers in his parables to wood or trees, as a carpenter might, but made repeated references to building with rock.[3]

His experience at Sefforis gave him a vivid range of metaphors: 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock' (Matt. 7.24). Undoubtedly, his firsthand experience on the construction site of Sefforis gave him insight into building ambitions and human avarice: 'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower' (Matt. 21.33; Mark 11.27). 'Then he [the rich man] said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods"' (Luke 12.18).

From the building site Jesus was able to see lessons that applied to the cost of discipleship:

> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost . . . Otherwise . . . all who see it will begin to ridicule him saying 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' (Luke 14.28–30)

## *The vocation of Jesus*

In more than one sense Jesus recognized in the image of the builder or construction worker a glimpse of his own vocation.

God was calling him to build something new, beautiful and indestructible, his *ecclesia*: 'And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it' (Matt. 16.18). However, it was in Jerusalem that Jesus saw his vocation, more clearly than ever before, in terms of both demolition and rebuilding.

> As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!' Then Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.' (Mark 13.1–2)

The massive structure of the temple, limestone glistening in the bright Jerusalem sunlight, had only recently been completed. Herod the Great had undertaken a massive building project: the construction of a vast platform atop Mount Zion, with retaining walls still to be seen today – the Western or Wailing Wall – made of impressive dressed stones, many weighing over five tons. All were overwhelmed by the beauty of the new temple, and its seeming permanence. However, looking at the temple Jesus realized precisely what God was calling him to. He knew the Scriptures: the call of the Jerusalem prophet Jeremiah, with whom he closely identified:[4] 'I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant' (Jer. 1.10). Jesus knew the words of Ecclesiastes: there is 'a time to break down, and a time to build up' (3.3). And so standing within the temple precincts, Jesus says: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'. There was an outcry: 'The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"' (John 2.19–20).

John adds: 'But he was speaking of the temple of his body' (v. 21). It is probable that we are getting close here to what Jesus really thought about the meaning of his own vocation, his death and his resurrection. The accusation that he made a claim to destroy and rebuild the temple appears, unusually, in all four Gospels and so may well go back to an authentic utterance

of Jesus, albeit symbolic and cryptic. Moreover there is a consensus among scholars that the event we label 'the cleansing of the temple' (the overturning of tables and their crashing to the ground) is best understood as a prophetic action by Jesus bespeaking the very destruction of the temple – no mere clearout, but its very ending.[5] Jesus, it seems, had a stunningly outrageous understanding of his calling and identity. He was to be the new locus of the divine! Since 970 BC the divine had been thought to reside in the temple, represented there, first of all, by the Ark of the Covenant placed in the Holy of Holies. 'See, something greater than Solomon is here' (Matt. 12.42). Jesus is pointing to himself, to his very body, as the place where God is now to be discovered. But this is no painless theophany: there is to be a violent desecration and destruction of the temple of his body, and it is to be laid in ruins, before something new and mysterious is to arise.

## *Killed in a quarry*

It is significant that Jesus is killed in a quarry.[6] The rock of Calvary itself may have been left standing amid the ancient quarry outside the city wall precisely because it was useless – a deep fracture running from its top into the earth indicates that it was unsuitable for use in building – it became a rejected rock. The first Christians, seeking to make sense of the event of Calvary, turned to the Hebrew Scriptures and there found texts that spoke of a rejected rock being used in God's rebuilding purposes for humanity: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone' (Ps. 118.22). This verse is used by different communities in the New Testament and is quoted in Mark, Matthew, Luke in the Holy Week story, by Peter in his sermon in Acts 4 and by the writer of 1 Peter 2.7. Jesus is also understood as 'a stone one strikes against . . . a rock one stumbles over' (Isa. 8.14). But such a stone becomes the keystone in the new work, the new temple that God is building, for a further text from Isaiah inspired the first Christians: 'See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone,

a sure foundation' (28.16). This is quoted in Romans (9.33) and 1 Peter (2.4–6). The rock of Golgotha, standing to this day, is at once a memorial to the crucifixion and a pointer to a new future.

Today the rock of Calvary is part of a complex in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that makes up 'the rock of our salvation'.[7] The empty cave of Christ's tomb, which Constantine had separated from the surrounding rock, is the timeless witness, the testimony to the reality of Christ's victory: 'The venerable and most holy memorial [*martyrion*] of the Saviour's resurrection', as Eusebius called it. In front of the rock of Calvary and the empty tomb, Constantine constructed a spectacular basilica, which became the focus of Christian pilgrimage for centuries. This very building became a testament in stone to the resurrection of Christ – the stone that the builders rejected truly became the cornerstone!

## *Ministerial formation: God's creativity in us*

Ministerial formation attests to God's ever-creative process of shaping our lives, God's awesome creativity. Indeed, the language of formation evokes the accounts of creation: 'the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being' (Gen. 2.7). It recalls the language of the psalms. Psalm 139.13–15 wonders at God's secret moulding of the person in the womb. Psalm 33.15 talks about God forming the inner person: 'he who fashions the hearts of them all'. Jeremiah's image of the potter working on the clay (18.1–6) reminds us that God not only makes us of dust of the earth but wants to shape us. God can do wonderful things with the 'raw material' of a human life yielded to his hands. The song puts it: 'Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me . . . break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.' Formation is a process by which a person gets reshaped. 'Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?' (Isa. 43.18–19).

## *Key New Testament passages*

What does the New Testament suggest should be our priorities in working with God as co-builders and co-workers? Various New Testament writers explore the pastoral and leadership dimensions of the powerful building and formation metaphor, and there are three key passages to be pondered, throwing up some tough questions.

### Develop resources

> According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it . . . Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Cor. 3.10, 16)

Read the whole passage (1 Cor. 3.10–17). Paul calls himself 'a skilled master builder'.

- What skills do you think he displayed in building Christian community?
- What building skills do you seek to develop in your ministry?
- How do you show that you value and appreciate all the materials and resources available in your community?

### Build a temple

> In him [Christ Jesus] the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God. (Eph. 2.21–22)

Read the whole passage (Eph. 2.19–22). We trace the idea of God's temple reaching fulfilment in the body of Jesus and in the body of Christ, the Church.

- How does seeing the people of your congregation in terms of a sanctuary and dwelling place of God affect your ministry to them?

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