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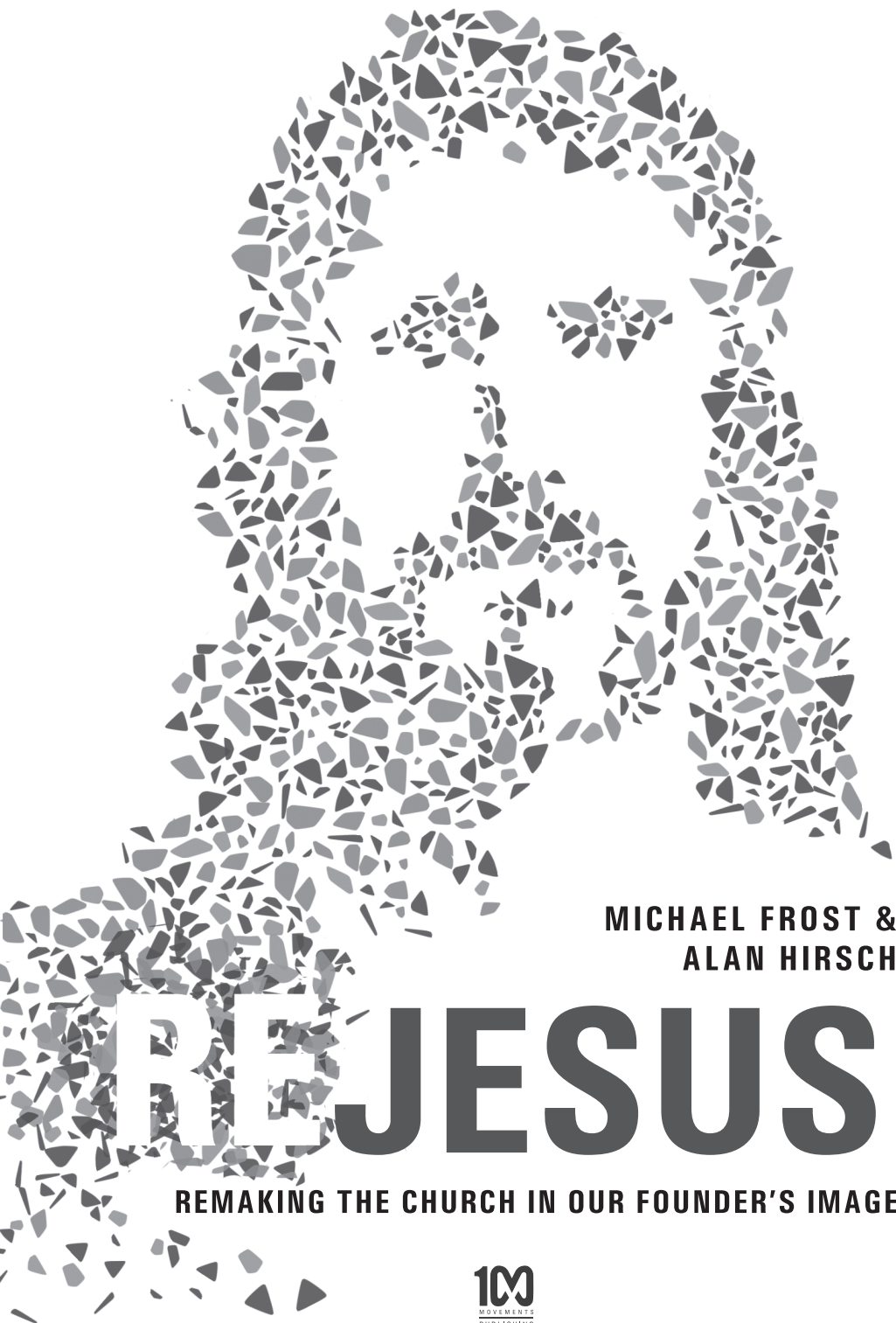
**MICHAEL FROST &
ALAN HIRSCH**

REJESUS

REMAKING THE CHURCH IN OUR FOUNDER'S IMAGE

FOREWORD BY CHRISTINE CAINE

REJESUS



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ALAN HIRSCH**

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100
MOVEMENTS
PUBLISHING

Published by 100 Movements Publishing

www.100Mpublishing.com

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ISBN 978-1-955142-13-7

eISBN 978-1-955142-14-4

First edition published by Hendrickson Publishers in 2008 © Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch

Interior design: Revo Creative Ltd

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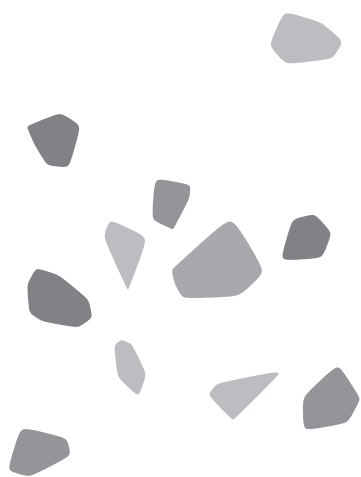
100 Movements Publishing

An imprint of Movement Leaders Collective

Cody, Wyoming

www.movementleaderscollective.com

www.catalysechange.org



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JESUS HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

*Jesus is the center of all, the object of all; whoever does not know him,
knows nothing aright, either of the world or of himself.*

BLAISE PASCAL

*The means to know God is Christ, whom no one may know unless they
follow after him with their life.*

HANS DENCK

On the morning of June 7, 1964, the recently consecrated wing of the Ku Klux Klan known as the White Knights gathered solemnly in the Boykin Methodist Church in the pine woods near Raleigh, Mississippi. Concerned about what they saw as a wave of blacks and communists hitting the streets of Mississippi, the Klan had marshaled their forces to plan a so-called counterattack against the civil rights movement. Armed with rifles, pistols, and shotguns and protected by men riding on horseback through the woods and by two Piper Cubs circling the property overhead, they bowed their heads as their Grand Chaplain ascended to the pulpit to pray. Acknowledging God as their “Heavenly Guide” and “sovereign Lord,” he asked God to “bless us now in this assembly that we may honor Thee in all things.” Finishing his prayer “in the name of Christ, our blessed Savior,” the congregation joined the Grand Chaplain as they said their amens softly under their breaths.¹ Later, Sam Bowers, the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi, took to the pulpit and in overtly religious language declared what amounted to a holy war against the civil rights leadership, detailing a formal protocol for all Klan attacks on the “nigger-communist invasion

of Mississippi.⁷² Within the month, three civil rights workers were murdered execution-style in nearby Neshoba County.

The overtly Christian character of the Ku Klux Klan, its symbolism, and its language, will not be news to anyone—who can forget those burning crosses? But it's the apparently Christ-focused aspect of the Klan philosophy that continues to shock, over half a century later. Praying in the name of Christ at the inauguration of what was effectively a racist death squad still jars, but there can be no denying that the KKK routinely called on Jesus to strengthen them in their quest. We can't help but echo the words of Frederick Douglass, writing over a hundred years before the murderous events of the civil rights struggle, when he distinguished between the teaching of Jesus and the racist Christianity he observed:

Between the Christianity of this land and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of the one is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ; I therefore hate the corrupt, slave-holding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason but the most deceitful one for calling the religion of this land Christianity.³

How did followers of Jesus end up so far from the teaching and example of Jesus? How did Jesus followers like members of the Lutheran Church in Nazi Germany quote Jesus in one breath and incite racial vilification in the next? The same could be asked of the Crusaders or the Conquistadors or even the Rwandan death squads. Or in more recent times, how could men and women—who violently forced their way into the Capitol in 2021 and terrorized those inside by threatening to shoot and hang people—attach the name of Jesus to their chaotic insurrection?

All this only reinforces the grave fears we hold for an increasingly Jesus-less church where Christ's name is invoked at every turn, but where the Incarnated One is nowhere to be found.

But it's not just at Klan meetings and insurrectionist riots that we find

it hard to find Jesus. The church's wealth and privilege are reflected in its ostentatious cathedrals and basilicas. We once visited St. Peter's Basilica together. It was every bit as beautiful as we had imagined. Everyone who sees St. Peter's agrees that it is a truly remarkable feat of human ingenuity, with perfectly designed shafts of natural light highlighting its artistic treasures, built on a scale designed to foster a feeling of spiritual awe. Like all tourists, we wandered, mesmerized, our necks craned upwards to take in the sheer grandeur of the cathedral. Not looking where we were going, we accidentally bumped into each other, and there in the middle of the room that represented the heart of global Christianity for centuries, we reflected on what we were seeing and asked each other if we could find Jesus in this place. Certainly, we agreed, the architecture of the basilica was stunning, and the sculptures, windows, and ceiling were beautiful. But both of us had the same nagging question in our minds: Where is the poor, itinerant rabbi from Nazareth?

It's a well-known trope in the entertainment industry that after Elvis Presley finished a concert, his fans would stomp and scream and chant his name, demanding one more encore, until the PA announcer would be forced to inform them, "Elvis has left the building." Only then, would the fans fall silent and file out of the venue. Though many across the West may be chanting Jesus' name, we feel compelled to declare, "Jesus has left the building."

In saying this, we don't mean to equate either Catholic or evangelical churches with the Ku Klux Klan. We simply mean to identify instances in which a group's depiction of the person of Jesus is incongruous with the Jesus we see depicted in Scripture. Indeed, the discontinuity between Jesus and the religion that bears his name is by no means limited to those churches or denominations. Both Catholic and Protestant groups, right up to our present time and including even the newer Christian church movements, have traded in the radical way of Jesus for the seemingly greater grandeur of such religious expressions.

These examples suggest questions that can be, indeed, should be, asked of all believers, churches, and denominations in any time and place:

- What ongoing role does Jesus the Messiah play in shaping the ethos and self-understanding of the movement that originated in him?

- How is the Christian religion, if we could legitimately call it that, informed and shaped by the Jesus we meet in the Gospels?
- How do we assess the continuity required between the life and example of Jesus and the subsequent religion called Christianity?
- In how many ways do we domesticate the radical Revolutionary in order to sustain our religion and religiosity?
- And perhaps most important of all, how can a rediscovery of Jesus renew our discipleship, the Christian community, and the ongoing mission of the church?

These questions take us to the core of what the church is all about. They take us to the defining center of the movement that takes its cue from Jesus. Rather than call this “reformation,” we will call this task “refounding” the church because it raises the issue of the church’s true Founder or Foundation. And in our opinion, nothing is more important for the church in our day than this question of refounding Christianity. It has a distinct poignancy as we collectively attempt to address Christianity’s endemic and long-trended decline in the West, and no quick-fix church-growth solution can be found that can stop the hemorrhage. There is no doubt that the Western church faces a spiritual, theological, missional, and existential crisis.

We must admit that both of us are somewhat obsessed with mission and what it means to be a missional people. But we both remain convinced that it is Christology that remains even more foundational and therefore the primary issue. We have elsewhere asserted that it is Christology (the exploration of the person, teachings, and impact of Jesus Christ) that determines missiology (our purpose and function in the world), which in turn determines our ecclesiology (the forms and functions of the church).⁴ We have found no reason to revise our opinion on this, but over time we have only become even more convinced of the primacy of this formula. Both of us (together and apart) have written books about a distinctly missional form of discipleship and ecclesiology.⁵ In writing this book, we feel we are now getting to the nub of the matter. We are going back to the Founder and recalibrating the entire enterprise along christological lines.

The core task of this book, therefore, will be to explore the connection

between the way of Jesus and the religion of Christianity. We will attempt to assess the Christian movement in light of the biblical revelation of Jesus and to propose ways in which the church might reconfigure itself, indeed, recalibrate its mission, around the example and teaching of the radical rabbi from Nazareth. Why is what we experience as Christianity discontinuous with the way of Jesus? How consistent is our witness with his life and teachings? And can we move away from his prototypal spirituality without doing irreparable damage to the integrity of the faith? How far is too far?

Jacques Ellul, the French theologian and philosopher, raises a disturbing historical problem for us to solve, a problem that he calls “the subversion of Christianity.”

How has it come about that the development of Christianity and the church has given birth to a society, a civilization, a culture that are completely opposite to what we read in the Bible, to what is indisputably the text of the law, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul? I say advisedly “completely opposite.” There is not just contradiction on one point but on all points. On the one hand, Christianity has been accused of a whole list of faults, crimes, and deceptions that are nowhere to be found in the original text and inspiration. On the other hand, revelation has been progressively modeled and reinterpreted according to the practice of Christianity and the church. ... This is not just deviation but radical and essential contradiction, or real subversion.⁶

Although this might seem to be an overstatement, Ellul supports his conclusions with some unnerving scholarship. To our thinking, no one has satisfactorily answered his question. Yet it cannot be avoided if we are to reestablish ourselves as an authentic church in the twenty-first century. Therefore, among other things, we have taken it upon ourselves to further develop his concerns and to continue to raise the question first posed by Ellul.

LET'S INVITE JESUS BACK IN THE BUILDING

We believe the only way we can truly authenticate ourselves as an expression of Christianity is to somehow measure ourselves against the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And it is to him that we must now return if we are going to faithfully negotiate the profound challenges of the

twenty-first century. But surely this is what the church tries to do in every age and context? Surely all expressions of Christianity seek to call Jesus Lord and have a special place reserved for him in their life and theology? We would argue that while confessionally this might be true, the church throughout history struggles to concretely conform its life to the radical life and teachings of Jesus. We readily acknowledge how difficult it is to live a life based fully on Jesus. It is no easy thing, because the way that Jesus sets for us to follow is inherently subversive against all attempts to control, and thus institutionalize, the revelation that he so powerfully ushers in. In other words, it's just plain hard to create a religion out of the way of Jesus.

So our intention is not to judge but rather to recover the absolute centrality of the person of Jesus in defining who we are as well as what we do. As hard as it is to truly follow him, we assert that we must constantly return to Jesus to authenticate as well as legitimize ourselves as his people. We have no other Archimedean point by which to set our coordinates or any other touchstone by which we can assess the abiding validity of our faith and to evaluate our validity as *Christians*. The love of Jesus, and our commitment to live in conformity to him, is in effect an inbuilt spiritual mechanism at the heart of the church's theology and experience that provides an instrument for our ongoing renewal. It seems to us that a constant, and continual, return to Jesus is absolutely essential for any movement that wishes to call itself by his name.

THE CO-OPTION OF JESUS TO IDEOLOGICAL CAUSES

It is challenging to keep a clear vision of the true way of Jesus, particularly when immersed within a culture that is otherwise aligned. Missiologist David Bosch grew up as a proud racist Afrikaner near Kuruman in South Africa. Looking back with shame, he recounts how in 1948, the same year he entered teacher's college, the pro-apartheid National Party swept into power. For Afrikaners like Bosch, "It was to us like a dream come true when the Nationalist Party won that victory. We had no reservations whatsoever."⁷ It was during this very time that young David Bosch was sensing a strong call into the Christian ministry, oblivious to any conflict between his support for apartheid and his belief in the teaching of Jesus.

But Bosch is not the only well-meaning theologian to have been guilty of such dissonance. Early last century, the well-known historian Adolf von Harnack remarked, "There is something touching in the striving of every individual to approach this Jesus Christ from the perspective of his personality and individual interests and to find in Him none other than himself, or to receive at the very least a small part of Him."⁸ By "something touching," Harnack means something sad or pathetic or pitiful. As a historian of dogma, he had seen too many agendas take Jesus captive, quoting him to justify all manner of beliefs and practices. He became convinced that the kernel of the gospel had been overlaid by the husks of metaphysical concepts alien to the teachings of Jesus. The primitive stories of Jesus had been corrupted by official church dogma, claimed Harnack.

Indeed, it's not hard to find examples to support his view. Those who want to find in Jesus merely a reformer of Judaism, or the last of the prophets, have managed to do so quite readily. Supporters of violence have characterized him as a revolutionary, while Tolstoy and his disciples saw him as a teacher of nonresistance. To New Age scholars, Jesus is the holy one of an esoteric order. To the enemies of the traditional social order, he was a warrior against the routine. And to racists, Jesus was an Aryan Galilean. In fact, after ten years in prison for his involvement in the deaths of the three civil rights workers, Sam Bowers returned to Mississippi to devote himself to a study of the life of Christ and was never, in forty years of research, convinced that Jesus was anything other than Bowers believed him to be when he ascended that pulpit in 1964.

Harnack believed that the only answer to the problem of losing the kernel of the gospel under the husks of foreign ideas was to emancipate the gospel by returning to its primitive form, freeing it from centuries of superstitious Catholicism. And in this he was right. Setting Jesus free from the ideological co-option of Nazis, Klansmen, Neo-Marxists, or the cloying theological biases of liberal or conservative theology is essential, but even Harnack wasn't able to let Jesus be Jesus. As a leading Protestant liberal, he launched what would famously be called the "quest for the historical Jesus," believing sincerely that if only the real Jesus could be recovered, he would be the inspiration for a renewed Christianity. Today, twentieth-century German liberals like Harnack are often seen as falling into the very

trap in which they accused others of being snared. Besotted by the liberal humanism of their time and unable to escape the rigors of the new science (history), they limited their rediscovery of Jesus to that of a purely human figure. Harnack's quest for an emancipated Jesus led him to one without such concepts as revelation, incarnation, the miraculous, and resurrection, which he considered unscientific. In the much-quoted judgment of the Catholic George Tyrrell, "The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nine centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well."⁹

Surely the challenge for the church today is to be taken captive by the agenda of Jesus rather than seeking to mold him to fit our agendas, no matter how noble they might be. We acknowledge that we can never truly claim to know him completely. We all bring our biases to the task. But we believe it is inherent in the faith to keep trying and to never give up on this holy quest. The challenge before us is to let Jesus be Jesus and to allow ourselves to be caught up in his extraordinary mission for the world.

Whether it is the grand ecclesiastical project of the institutional churches, epitomized by the ostentatious excess of the Vatican, or the tawdry grab for the hearts and minds of the aspirational middle class by prosperity-style Pentecostalism, the Christian movement has been subverted. Like a forgotten nativity scene in a shopping mall dominated by Santa Claus, reindeer, elves, Disney characters, tinsel, baubles, and fake snow, the biblical Jesus is hard to find. When allowed to be as he appears in the pages of Scripture, Jesus will not lead us to hatred, violence, greed, excess, earthly power, or material wealth. Instead, he will call us to a genuinely biblical and existential faith that believes in him, not simply believing in belief, as in many expressions of evangelicalism. It requires an ongoing encounter with Jesus.

GOSPEL-CENTERED OR JESUS-CENTERED?

Recent events, including COVID-19 and the swirling ideological cold war apparent in the American elections, have exposed forces that have been entrenched in our religious beliefs and structures for some time, but we have somehow managed to ignore or avoid. And while these forces have

been particularly evident in North American Christianity, it is clear they are symptomatic of all Western Christianity. The same grumpy, cramped, ideologically co-opted religion can be observed in our native Australia, in the United Kingdom, and across Europe in some form or another.

We believe that one of the main causes of this is the subtle shift from an essentially *christological* focus to that of a *soteriological* one—from a focus on Jesus as Founder and Lord to a focus on the more doctrinally formulated understanding of certain aspects of Jesus’ work on our behalf—the so-called “gospel.” Christology is thus reduced to soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. This is a huge shift indeed and has changed the character and content of the faith so conceived. This “gospel-focus” has increasingly seeped into Protestantism—and more specifically into “evangel”-icalism as the name itself suggests—over the last one hundred and fifty years or so. The theological reckoning we must now have is to resolve the issue of whether Christianity is really meant to be a “gospel-centered” or a “Christ-centered” phenomenon. This book will argue that there can only be one answer to this—that the church is to be calibrated to Jesus and to him alone. This is because what Jesus “establishes and institutes has its meaning only through him, is dependent only on him and is kept vital only by him. If for a single moment we were to look away from him and attempt to consider and understand the Church as an autonomous form, the Church would not have the slightest plausibility.”¹⁰

To be clear, the “gospel” is a theological doctrine, a theological *idea* derived from an aspect of the saving work of Christ on our behalf. It comprises the aspect of the church’s core proclamation. But as church history attests, it is a disputed doctrine, as many have tried to define what exactly the gospel *is*. This is clearly problematic because the central person of Jesus is replaced with an important but now reduced doctrine. We have little doubt that this shift contributes to an overtly ideological religion, which is a defining characteristic of cultural Christianity. Jesus is not the same as the gospel. Jesus is our Savior, but he is also our Lord. Jesus is *the gospel with a face*.

The implications of this substitution are serious indeed. We can say that even after decades of consistent formulation and practice, the proof is clear for all to see: evangelicalism’s “evangel” *patently* does not produce Christlikeness. “Our gospel” is unable to reliably produce people who look,

act, feel, and think like Jesus. There is something fundamentally wrong with this. Ought we not to expect that the church corresponds in an observable manner to the way of its Founder? We have to assess our reductionist gospel along with its inordinate focus on soteriology. American New Testament scholar Scot McKnight calls this a “soterion gospel”; others have referred to it as “easy believism.”¹¹ Bonhoeffer rather more bluntly called such expressions a “Christless Christianity.” And as a result, there is now an inescapable need for a major recalibration at the very core of our theology. The church has lost its true bearings, and it is time to reJesus.

Bonhoeffer exposed the roots of Christless Christianity when he talked about cheap grace—a soterion formulation of “the gospel” with all the promise of salvation and none of the distresses of lordship; in essence, non-discipleship. We will explore the issue of discipleship more fully later on, but here we simply want to underscore that the so called “gospel-centered” Christianity (namely *evangelicalism*) cannot produce disciples because it is perfectly designed *not to do so*. Altar calls and standard formulations of the gospel merely ask for “belief” or intellectual assent in order to be “saved.” There is no mention of any ongoing obligation to live under a sovereign King, or for the need to conform one’s life in a lifelong process of becoming more like him.

This process of being indexed (conformed) to Jesus lies at the heart of discipleship. We can and must become like Jesus because he represents the archetypal model of human holiness—he is another way of being human. But we cannot become like “the gospel” because “the gospel” is a (highly contested) theological doctrine. Remember, *Jesus is the gospel with a face*. The lifelong task of discipleship takes the process of conforming oneself to this person very seriously indeed.

DIRECT IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR DISCIPLESHIP

Any attempt to reJesus the church must recover a real sense of the radical and revolutionary nature of what it means to follow Jesus in the contemporary Western context. To be free in Jesus must somehow mean that the idols of our time come under some serious questioning. For instance, to be free in Jesus surely will mean liberation from the shackles of a predominant

and omnipresent middle-class consumerism that weighs heavily on us. To be free in Jesus means allowing Jesus to be Jesus, and in doing so, allowing Jesus to challenge our religiosity or our self-righteousness or our greed or worse.

RADICAL CHALLENGES FOR OUR CHURCHES

Following Jesus will also have implications for a religion constrained by degenerating institutional forms and expressions. And so we will explore the implications that loving and following Jesus have for the missional church. And given that we are mainly concerned with how Jesus shapes our mission and our experience of church, we believe that if we don't deal with Christology, we won't ever understand how to be missionally effective or hold a balanced view of ecclesiology. How many so-called new movements has the Protestant church seen in recent memory? Whether it is Pentecostalism, church growth theory, the third-wave charismatic movement, the parachurch movement, rapid church multiplication, emerging church, microchurch, or the passion movement, so many of them have been presented as new ways of doing church. From our perspective, this is putting the cart before the horse. Let's get our Christology right and then dare to place all our deeply-held desires for how to do church at its service. Not vice versa.

Are we fundamentally aligned with Jesus' purposes and will for his community on earth? It's a good question, and one we must ask at this critical time in history. When we direct that question to our Founder, we find the answer somewhat disturbing. The only means we have of proposing a viable answer is to compare the "religion" of Jesus with the religion of Christianity to see if these coincide. If we are to take him as the prototypal Christian, and if, apart from the uniquely messianic aspects of his work, we are to take his words and actions as exemplary and authoritative for all his followers everywhere, then we are left no choice but to make this dangerous comparison. In fact, it's dangerous because we believe such a comparison will reveal the church to be on the wrong side of Jesus' type of barbarian spirituality and religion, precisely because his form of spirituality can hardly be considered civil. It must be called subversive by all that is called civilized. It is what Ellul

called “antireligion.” Jesus undermines any status quo that is not built on the all-encompassing demands of the kingdom, and this must call into question much of our religious codes, institutions, and behavior.

SOME SUGGESTED REFORMULATIONS OF OUR SPIRITUALITY

Because this is a book about Jesus, it is also therefore a book exploring the nature of Christian spirituality and worship in our context. If Jesus is our center point, our guide, and the mediator between humanity and God, then we cannot bypass the implications that this will have for our spirituality. It is true that Jesus is like God, but the greater truth, one closer to the revelation of God that Jesus ushers in, is that God is like Christ. As A. Michael Ramsey, the former Anglican archbishop, noted, “God is Christlike and in him is no un-Christlikeness at all.”¹² Or in the words of Jesus, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. ... I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:9–10). This has huge implications for us, especially for our understanding of God, but it does not exhaust the extent of the revelation we find in Jesus, because not only does Jesus redefine our concept of God, but he also shows us the perfect expression of humanity as God intended it. In other words, he models for us what a true human being should be like. Therefore, focusing our discipleship on Jesus forces us to take seriously the implications of following him, of becoming like him. It sets the agenda for our spirituality. It acknowledges that Jesus as our model, our teacher, and our guide is normative for the Christian life. He is the standard by which we measure ourselves, the quality of our discipleship, and therefore our spirituality.

If the heart of Christian spirituality is to increasingly become like our Founder, then an authentic comprehension of Jesus becomes critical. A true Christian expression models itself on Jesus, and it is God’s unambiguous aim to make us more like his Son. In fact, this is our eternal destiny: “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29). This task of conforming ourselves to Jesus actually lies at the very *core* of the church’s purpose in the world. Reflecting on the Christ Hymn of Colossians 1:15–20, C. S. Lewis says with characteristic clarity:

It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects—education, building, missions, holding services. ... [But] the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose.¹³

In *The Forgotten Ways*, Alan calls this the “conspiracy of little Jesuses,” and we believe it is fundamental to God’s plan and purposes for his world.

If this worries us, if we think this would somehow upset the delicately balanced ecology of our spirituality, then we can perhaps reframe the issue by posing it as a question: If Jesus is perfected humanity—the human image of God—how bad can we become if we become more like him? Would the world not be a better place if there were more little Jesuses around? It strikes us therefore as a matter of fundamental importance to our humanity, our spirituality, and our witness that we regularly get a truer perspective on the focal point and the defining center of our faith.

Finally, in doing this, we hope that we can in some way restore Christology to the church at large, to make it applicable to the whole people of God. For far too long Christology has been dominated by academic and professional Christians, who seem far more concerned with an examination of how the divine and human are related in Jesus’ person than they are in the details of his life or the content of his teaching and vision. Over the years, the study of Christology has become a complex and abstract concept, which has increasingly excluded the everyday disciple of Jesus. When the study of the remarkable life and teachings of Jesus becomes the sole province of theologians and religious professionals, when it is divorced from our daily concerns and from the missional context of the church, it will tend to degrade the vitality of our Christianity. This is our concern, because the living link between Jesus and his people must never be dissolved or placed beyond the reach of the average Christian. To do this is to sever the church from its true source of life (John 7:38). Surely any loss of a direct, grassroots comprehension of Jesus must be a major cause in the degeneration of Christianity in any time and any place?

Therefore, we propose a rediscovery of Christology that includes a preoccupation with the example and teaching of Jesus for the purposes of emulation by his followers. Some will say that such emulation is arduous to achieve in general but impossible when it comes to the specifics of his redeeming death and resurrection, the miracles, and his judgment of the unrighteous. Surely, they argue, we cannot die for the sins of others. And this is why we need a far richer Christology than we've been offered in the past. Our christological understanding needs to focus on the study and examination of the entire phenomenon of Jesus, including his person and work and teachings, for the purpose of determining how the various elements of his life and activity can be emulated by sinful human beings. For example, we can't die for others, as Jesus did, but we can offer ourselves sacrificially in service of others. Paul compares husbands loving their wives with Jesus dying for our sins. A working Christology would help us understand Jesus better and provide the tools for appropriating his example into our lives.

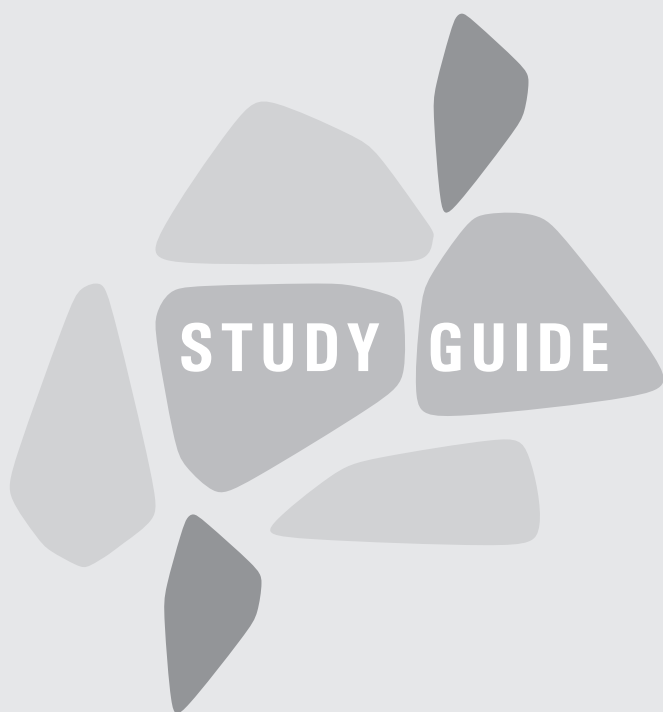
So this is not primarily a book about renewal for its own sake, nor is it a book about Christology as a strictly theological discipline. Rather, it is an attempt to reinstate the central role of Jesus in the ongoing spiritual life of the faith and in the life and mission of God's people. More specifically, it is an attempt to recalibrate the mission of the church around the person and work of the Founder, Jesus. This book then is a work of missional Christology, if there is such a thing. It is an attempt to revision and revitalize our vision of Jesus as Master of history and Lord of the church, against which, we are reminded, the gates of hell will not prevail (Matt 16:18).

In short, it is about nothing less than reJesusing the church.

“

*The challenge before us is to
let Jesus be Jesus and to allow
ourselves to be caught up in his
extraordinary mission for the
world.*

”



BEGIN WITH JESUS

Read Jesus' seven woes on the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in Matthew 23:13–32. Sit in silence for a few minutes, reflecting on Jesus' complaints against the religious leaders.

REFLECT ON THE BOOK

1. In what specific ways would you say the church today has departed from the teaching and example of the Jesus we see in the Gospels?
2. Can you identify any ways the church domesticates the radical teaching of Jesus in order to sustain our religious institutions?
3. In what ways does your church or organization assess the degree to which its identity and practice is shaped by the teaching and example of Jesus?
4. How regularly do you as a whole church study the Gospels?
5. Does the “gospel” that’s preached in your church merely ask for “belief” in order to be “saved,” or are Christians challenged and invited to conform their lives to Christ and embrace a lifelong process of becoming more like him? And if there are such opportunities in your church, what are they, and how effective are they?

PRAY TO JESUS

[A prayer by John Henry Newman]

Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go;

Flood my soul with your spirit and life;

Penetrate and possess my whole being so completely

That all my life may be only a radiance of yours;

Shine through me and be so in me

That everyone with whom I come into contact

May feel your presence within me.

Let them look up and see no longer me—but only Jesus.

Amen.