

The Making of a Saint

by Christopher Carstens

All of Christian formation—including and especially the RCIA—is designed to remake fallen men and women into an image of Jesus Christ: to become a saint, in other words. For this to happen, parents, pastors, godparents, catechists, and RCIA directors must know first of all who and what Jesus is, he who is the model according to which those on the journey are remade.

What characterizes Jesus? What are those things which identify and mark him? The tradition has come to see three principal ways in which Jesus Christ—the one divine Person in two complete natures—carried out his saving work: his prophetic office, his priestly office, and his kingly office. As *prophet*, Jesus taught of divine things, showing in his very self the “plan of the Mystery,” which is God’s design for men, women, and all creation. As *priest*, Jesus showed perfect love, not only on behalf of God to man, but by reciprocating that love from man to God on Calvary’s cross. As *king*, Jesus was at the service of his own subjects, healing, feeding, and comforting those in his care.

The characteristics of Jesus become ours through the sacraments of initiation. In fact, when our faith speaks of “sacramental character” (especially in the sacrament of Baptism), it is the character of Jesus, in this three-fold office, which is meant.

Christian formation—that is, forming people in the image of Christ—is therefore remaking them (like ourselves!) according to the character of Christ the prophet, the character of Christ the priest, and the character of Christ the king. To one of the *Baltimore Catechism’s* most famous questions, “Why did God make me?”, the response is returned based upon this three-fold ministry: “To know him [a prophet’s work], to love him [the action of the priest], and to serve him [the role of the king] in this life and to be happy with him forever in the next.”

Accordingly, the *Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults* proscribes a formation model based upon these three characteristics of Jesus our model. RCIA has first of all a catechetical or *prophetic* element. Here, the Church (through her pastors and catechists) teaches the truths of the faith to those in formation. But becoming (or being) a Christian is not simply about how much one knows, however necessary knowledge is. For this reason, a second element, the *priestly* dimension, is a part of RCIA’s formation process. Prayer—and lots of it—is found throughout the time of formation, both liturgical prayer—the Rite of Acceptance, Blessings, Rite of Election—and devotional prayer—becoming acquainted with Eucharistic Adoration or the Rosary. Yet, while “two out of three ain’t bad” for some, it’s still not sufficient for one seeking the full stature of Christ. The *kingly* dimension, where candidates become increasingly aware of their obligations to others, both in the Church and outside of it, is an essential dimension.

An RCIA program needs each of these elements—catechetical, liturgical, and pastoral—if it is to do justice to Jesus and those seeking his likeness.