



Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies

## Jesus' Charismatic Leadership

- Konrad Noronha SJ

JNANADEEPA  
PJRSS ISSN 0972-3331  
22/2 July-Dec 2018: 67-80

### Abstract

Jesus' life was one of charismatic leadership. He exhibited charisma akin to the stars of today. Charisma is conferred by followers in society. The difference with Jesus' social recognition, was that for Jesus it was not a personal objective, rather he was doing his Father's will. Also, Jesus had control over non-physical reality evident in his work of healing, dreams and visions, supernatural knowledge, the distinguishing of angelic and demonic forces, prophecy, and interpretation. Jesus mission involved his clashing with the bureaucracy of his time. He created a bond with his followers and his followers today can say that he has dominion over heaven and earth and of things seen and unseen.

### Keywords

Charisma, leadership, followers.

Among the many facets of Jesus' life is his charismatic leadership. Leadership today is talked about in many contexts to explain the power and fascination exerted by the stars of the day, "in the fields of politics (presidents, premiers, and other leaders), religion (church-, sect-, and cult-leaders), sport (team-leaders), or business (simple entrepreneurs

his time, Jewish and Roman. Also, his option for the poor was clear. His ideology was radically different, since it was not restricted to just the following of laws and strictures.

When a bond is created between followers and the charismatic leaders, the followers first identify progressively with the leader; they then commit themselves in a stronger way to the leaders' vision.<sup>7</sup> For the people of Galilee Jesus' extraordinary accomplishments were the material proofs of the beginning of the renewal of Israel. Christ's stewardship over creation and that all creation belongs to him is evident when St. Paul says that through Christ, and for Christ all things were created (1 Corinthians 8:6). "All things" here means "all without exception." This is clear from the obvious sense of the words, but much more from the inclusiveness of the three divisions, "in heaven and on earth," "things seen and things unseen," and thrones, dominations, principalities, powers (p.278)."<sup>8</sup>

## Jesus' character

Jesus Christ is like his heavenly Father, omnipotent and omniscient. His coming into this world was to bring salvation and redemption, to bring the parts of a disordered inner life back into joyful harmony. Everything that anyone does flows from God, but in the special case of Jesus, God's agency became fully one with Jesus humanity. God was acting in Jesus for the salvation of humanity by making humanity one with God.<sup>9</sup> This humanity is seen when after Jesus fed the five thousand, the crowd, "seeing the sign," acclaimed Him the "coming prophet" (Mt 6:14-15). This prompted

---

<sup>7</sup> Piovanelli, Pierluigi. 2005. "Jesus' Charismatic Authority: On the Historical Applicability of a Sociological Model." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2: 395-427.

<sup>8</sup> Cotter, A.C. (1945). The divinity of Jesus Christ in Saint Paul. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 7(3), 259-289.

<sup>9</sup> Placher, William C. 2002. "Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology. (Books: character traits)." *The Christian Century* no. 3: 41.

Jesus to withdraw to the wilderness because, according to the narrator, He knew they sought to make Him king, a human agenda He specifically avoided.<sup>10</sup>

He touches all aspects of a follower's life, as he displayed all human emotions, he surely laughed at the wedding party (Mt 11:19), he had a righteous anger (Mk 10:14), and he wept (Jn 11:35). After Martha and Mary had urged Jesus to save their brother Lazarus (Lk 11:3), the narrator revealed that Jesus loved them (Lk 11:5). Jesus had a deep personal interest in going to Lazarus. In touching a follower, the follower might have to go through life, death and resurrection, just as Jesus too went through these stages. In following Jesus, salvation, often comes through suffering, humiliation, abandonment and despair of the cross. This leads the follower to be open to the one true revelation of God. Whether this crucified Savior was raised from the dead in historical space and time is far less important than the existential healing that encountering the crucified Savior can bring to the emotional present.<sup>11</sup>

Disciples or followers serve as examples in the unfolding plan of God, which has reached its climax and consummation in Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith. It is through the disciples or follows that by way of extension, the body of believers embrace, exalt, and exhibit him as Lord (Heb 1:2; 9:26; 12:2; 13:3). The followers witness, in the past and in the present, are valuable, necessary, and worthy of imitation (Heb 6:12; 13:7), by those in the present. Also, all human manifestations of fidelity pale in comparison to Jesus the martyr and mediator par excellence (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:1, 24). Jesus provides the perfect example of faith-in-practice. He has not only completed the worldly race, but also inherited

---

<sup>10</sup> Thatcher, Tom. 1996. "Jesus, Judas, and Peter: Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 612: 435-448.

<sup>11</sup> Noll, Mark. 2011. "A Gentler God: Breaking Free of the Almighty in the Company of the Human Jesus." *The Christian Century* no. 2: 38.

the eternal prize. Jesus is the climax of the faith, because he inaugurated the fulfilment of God's eschatological plan of salvation and carried it out.<sup>12</sup>

## Jesus' vision and mission

Jesus's entrepreneurial and political skills are evident from his speeches and sermons. He applied contemporary filters to the words of Scripture through eyes conditioned by culture and experience. In that way he made it more relevant to the real life of that time. His speeches were political like his mission manifesto in the synagogue which could be considered his inaugural speech. Another metaphor for him is that of an entrepreneur who uses elevator speech when doing business. The punch words for all his teachings, whether it be parables, or straight talk, were very short, yet the message was conveyed to the hearers clearly. Preachers use analogies to catch attention, while not being shackled by them, which is what Jesus often used. Jesus used analogies, parables, metaphors, symbolism, and examples from agriculture and the social conditions of that time. Where Jesus is concerned there was a genuine encounter with the scripture in all that he said. This was evident in his inaugural speech and the other sermons and parables he told. Jesus' inaugural speech can be understood as follows:

An inaugural speech is programmatic as the speaker proposes to accomplish something and inspirational and the speaker then focuses on values that are held and which should be achieved together. Jesus' synagogue reading was both inspirational and programmatic. It was also political: It outlined what God wants for his beloved community. We also see in Jesus the hunger of the entrepreneur and the (com)

---

<sup>12</sup> Still, Todd D. 2007. "'Christos' as 'pistos': the faithfulness of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 4: 746-755.

passion of the social reformer. This is what made Jesus come alive.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus was more than just an entrepreneur or a politician. He was the son of God, and had come to do his Father's will. A lot of what he said and did could be considered entrepreneurial and political, as his teaching and preaching changed a lot of what was the status quo of the time. As a political figure he was considered radical because of his changed views from the regular, yet he always utilized scripture to substantiate what he said, always pointing out not just deficits but also how improvements could be made. As an entrepreneur an organization got set up albeit not at his bidding, but because of his followers, and not in the sense of what an organization is understood as today. Jesus' organization was the reign of God. The entrepreneur streak was seen in that he did something new, he showed compassion and love, and created structures that have stood the tests of time. The newness of what he presented is as valid today as it was then, and will continue as long as there are followers in his reign, the disciples who look up to him as the Son of God.

## Discipleship and the reign of God

Jesus' core message was a very simple and clear one, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel," according to Mark 1:15. The traditions preserved by the synoptics as well as the Gospel of Thomas show that Jesus chose to announce the coming of the kingdom using parables which were easily understood by the people of that time while conveying the deeper message he wanted to convey. His supporters could see the transformational power of his work, as exemplified in "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Isaiah 35:5–6a; 61:1c).

---

13

Neff, David. 2013. "A Tale of Two Analogies." *Christianity Today* 57, no. 4: 66.

When talking about discipleship, he goes on to day, “The one who does not take one’s cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:27) and “The one who does not hate father and mother cannot be my disciple and the one who does not hate son and daughter cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14: 26). Also, we hear “I have come to divide son against father, and daughter against her mother, and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Mt 10: 35) and “Do you think that I have come to hurl peace on earth? I did not come to hurl peace, but a sword!” (Mt 10: 34). Jesus also says to his disciples, “Blessed are you when they insult and persecute you, and say every kind of evil against you because of the Son of man” (Mt 5: 11). Jesus’ life is an indication to his disciples about the cause, the character, and indications about the role of a disciple.<sup>14</sup> Jesus has used words that could be construed as being frightening to followers, for who would want to be insulted, persecuted, killed, and have evil things said about him or her? Yet, that is what is demanded of a follower of Jesus, because disciples live in the kingdom as presented by the leader (Jesus) and discipleship entails following in the steps of the one who reigns in that kingdom.

Jesus tells those who attach themselves to him that they will encounter difficulties. The willingness to love Jesus over family would result in ostracization; the mention of the cross indicates that disciples are to expect not just death but death as social outcasts. Discipleship entails grave and agonizing loss. In fact, the activity of disciples is characterized as cross-bearing. The sole reason for the social cost here depicted is the following of Jesus. p.49<sup>15</sup>

The reason for the suffering of disciples is that they are focused on Jesus and God’s reign. This contrasts with the reason for the suffering of those who reject God’s reign

---

<sup>14</sup> Jervis, L Ann. 2002. “All for Jesus: the cause, character and role of discipleship suffering in Q.” *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 1: 41-56.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

because allegiance to Jesus clashes with society's most treasured investments; the stability of a home, being loyal to family above all else, being accepted in community, living peacefully, preserving one's life. Following Jesus might mean forfeiting these things.

There is a clash between the status quo and the reign of God that Jesus brings. The suffering disciples encounter is productive and purposeful. While followers of Jesus will suffer, the character of their suffering is not self-destructive or depressive as the disciple is acutely other-centered. It is based in having given one's life to another. It is rooted in having given one's life away. There is no room for preoccupation with self. Jesus' disciples are in the reign of God and contribute to bringing it to fruition. "Disciples work for that reign which threatens investments and beliefs rooted in self-aggrandizement and self-preservation" (p.53).<sup>16</sup>

### **A follower's relationship with Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ assures us of the continuity between what was, is, and is to come.<sup>17</sup> A person's relationship with Jesus is defined within the boundaries of Jesus's embodiment, enfleshment, and incarnation. Jesus' disciples actively learn from Him, the Teacher *par excellence*. Therefore, a follower of Jesus must look at the relationship he or she has with Jesus in relation to Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Faithfulness is the mark of true discipleship, which requires the disciple to stand by his/her master in thick and thin. Anything short of this is hypocrisy. True discipleship is thus determined by a person's commitment to practicing the values and principles learned from reflecting on Jesus Christ and to reflect Him in the way he or she lives. The service offered to Jesus by His disciples, Jairus, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> McFarlane, Graham. 2006. "Living on the edge - moving towards the centre: the place of Jesus Christ in our quest for personhood." *Evangelical Quarterly* 78, no. 1: 37-50.

is proof of their commitment and love despite the hostile environment in which they operated as they played an appreciable role in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

As followers we understand this from Jesus' interactions with people. His focus was on helping people see in new ways that shed greater light. This was helpful for people who felt desperately deprived of meaning and hope, as many do today. Jesus is best understood through narratives of his life and narratives in relation to our lives and how we live it. (p.475)<sup>19</sup>

Jesus' fulfilled his mission in and through his obedient humanity and that is what is expected of us, as it is in and through the humanity of Jesus Christ that our human personhood is realized. It is within the boundaries of the life, death and resurrection that social and economic constructions which we come to know as the Kingdom of God begin to fashion and shape the personhood of us. The quest is the story of creation and Church, redemption and Kingdom. "It is located in relationship with the Living God, through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ and empowered and realized in communion with the distinctive economic and political criteria of the people of Christ" (p.49).<sup>20</sup> Jesus' relationship with his father, epitomizes the understanding of discipleship. It is a relationship we can only strive for, but it sets before all Christians, faith, fidelity and obedience which are needed for a follower, a disciple, in a deeply spiritual relationship.

---

<sup>18</sup> Alana, Olu Emmanuel. 2000. "The challenge of being Jesus's disciple today." *Afer* 42, 114-119.

<sup>19</sup> Howell, Susan H. 2004. "Students ' Perceptions of Jesus ' Personality as Assessed by Jungian-Type Inventories." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32, no. 1: 50-58.

<sup>20</sup> McFarlane, Graham. 2006. "Living on the edge - moving towards the centre: the place of Jesus Christ in our quest for personhood." *Evangelical Quarterly* 78, no. 1: 37-50.



## The Discipleship of Jesus, Son of the Father

The Writer of the book of Hebrews reasons that God's faithful Son Jesus is worthy of glory (3:3) and this is grounded in the belief of Christ's fidelity and authority as God's Son (2:5-9 and as high priest (3:6b). Jesus is the high priest through whom God can be reached with mercy and acceptance (4:14-16). Jesus' faithfulness as High Priest and Son recur many times in Hebrews, particularly in chap. 11. Jesus is portrayed as the originator or pioneer of salvation who suffers, sanctifies, and stands with believers (2:10-11) (Still, 2007).<sup>21</sup> Heb 5:7, conveys the idea of Jesus' fidelity by referring to the "prayers and supplications" that Jesus offered up to God with loud cries and tears and how the Son's obedient suffering, was integral to his being perfected and enabled him to become the "source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him" (p.748).<sup>22</sup>

The depth of the Jesus' involvement with humanity is associated to the merciful character of the high priesthood of Jesus and the fidelity of Jesus. Disciples are encouraged to be strong (2:10) and acknowledge publicly their commitment to God and to place their trust in God despite societal scorn. Jesus' commitment to, and solidarity with the children, demonstrates that he is a high priest who sympathizes (4:15) with their weaknesses and provides for them a model of fidelity (2:17).<sup>23</sup>

Jesus embodied his Father's (Heb 2:13b). This was commitment on the part of Jesus to attend to the will of God. 10:5 depicts God as preparing a "body" for Jesus, while in 10:10 the communitarian dimension is brought in where

---

21 Still, Todd D. 2007. "'Christos' as 'pistos': the faithfulness of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 4: 746-755.

22 Ibid

23 McCrudden, Kevin B. 2013. "The Eloquent Blood of Jesus: The Neglected Theme of the Fidelity of Jesus in Hebrews 12:24." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 3: 504-520.

the Writer affirms for the community that they are saved “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 2:12-13 accentuates the depth of the personal commitment of Jesus, to lead many to glory (2:10). This is the sign of a great leader, one who leads from the front and who has a desire that his followers make their choice to take the same path.

In Hebrews, Jesus is none other than the pioneer and perfecter of the faith (12:2), for, like God, his character and conduct are constant (10:23) as confessed in, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8). Jesus as dependable, even as God is dependable, is predicated on and supported by the Son’s fidelity to the Father. He was not only “faithful over God’s house as a son” (3:5), but he was also faithful to God who appointed and sent him (3:1-2). The Writer of Hebrews views Jesus as one who trusts in God fully (2:13a) as well as one who faithfully reflects God to humanity and ably represents and intercedes for sinful people before God (1:3). Disciples are challenged to conceive of their heavenly calling and to contemplate their common confession considering Jesus’ faithful endurance and obedience (5:8).<sup>24</sup>

The Epistle to the Hebrews regards faith as foundational (6:1). Faith, is described in 11:1 as a hopeful, committed mind-set regarding the reality of those things not yet seen, and enables people to apprehend God’s generative, creative power (11:3) and to please God (11:6a). Hebrews maintains that trusting in God’s existence and divine benevolence is essential for drawing near to God (11:6b). The Writer of Hebrews iterates their need for confidence and assurance in doing the will of God with a view to receiving that which is promised by God (10:32-36).

---

<sup>24</sup> Still, Todd D. 2007. “‘Christos’ as ‘pistos’: the faithfulness of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 4: 746-755.

p.750-51 <sup>25</sup>

The book of Hebrews gives great insight in what it means to be a disciple, by an understanding of the relationship Jesus had with his Father. The primary qualities of faith, obedience and fidelity come across strongly. This is also expected of all his followers, as followers imitate and stay true to the master.

## Barriers to discipleship

Jesus clearly instructs his disciples about how they fail to be true followers by demonstrating flaws in character formation, through the parable of the sower. The assumption is that the four persons represented by the soils, all hear the truth. The difference lies in how they hear the good news and the kind of heart they should have to follow the life and teachings of Jesus. Through the parable of the soil, we understand at least five major barriers to discipleship that can hinder disciples in their heart formation into Christlikeness. They are:

Dismissive Barrier (resistance to truths that seem impossible to us), Discrepancy Barrier (professed values that are not character deep), Distracted Barrier (a lifestyle slowly drifting off course), Disconnected Barrier (not regularly abiding in Jesus), and Distressed Barrier (an initial moment of troubling emotional stress that is not addressed and becomes debilitating, excessive worry). p.155<sup>26</sup>

Throughout life, we need to be open and aware of what is hindering our being disciples and becoming more like Jesus. Then we can own it, confess it to God, and invite God to help us be more responsive to receive his truth. Jesus

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Issler, Klaus. 2012. "Five Key Barriers to Deep Learning and Character Formation Based Primarily on Jesus' Parable of The Four Soils." *Christian Education Journal* 9, S138.

tells us to put “words of mine ... into practice” (Mt 7:29) and to “learn from me” (Mt 11:29). This is the call of a leader to his disciples. The two questions in Mk: 36-37 are comments on the sayings on discipleship, “What profit is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet be punished with the loss of his life? For what can a man give in exchange for his life?” (Mark 8: 36–37). For followers of Jesus, it is much better to follow him and to lose life now but to gain eternal life in the age to come (Mk 10: 30).

Also in Peters confession at the first announcement of his passion (Lk 8:27–33), Jesus elaborates on the requirements for those who follow him. Jesus calls upon the disciples and the people in 8:34–9:1, to take up their cross, that is, to be willing to suffer, to renounce themselves, and to follow him. Discipleship for those who want to follow Jesus could lead to the loss of their own lives because of Jesus or because of the gospel he proclaims, but this will result in gaining life as is said “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it” (Lk 8:35, NRSV).

## Conclusion

Disciples always imitate their leaders, whether it be in words or in action. Charismatic leaders do not just influence their followers but also enable them to be true to themselves. A true follower embraces the teachings of the leader, and makes choices accordingly. Jesus was a charismatic who had an almost inexplicable aura: fascinating to followers, provocative to opponents.<sup>27</sup> There is a radical nature and dramatic consequences of the call to follow a Jesus which is to be prophetic, messianic, and eschatological.

---

<sup>27</sup> Piovaneli, Pierluigi. 2005. “Jesus’ Charismatic Writeryty: On the Historical Applicability of a Sociological Model.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2: 395-427.

Jesus exuded self-confidence in what he said and did and in his ability to carry out whatever he said and did. His mission often involved his clashing with the bureaucracy of his time but his options were clear. He created a bond with his followers as they then committed themselves to him and became the proof the continuity of his work and mission. Truly his followers today can say that he has dominion over heaven and earth and of things seen and unseen.

### Bibliography

- Alana, Olu Emmanuel. 2000. "The challenge of being Jesus's disciple today." *Afer* 42, 114-119.
- Cotter, A C. (1943). The divinity of Christ in apologetics. *Theological Studies*, 4(3), 369-384.
- Cotter, A C. (1945). The divinity of Jesus Christ in Saint Paul. *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 7(3), 259-289.
- Howell, Susan H. 2004. "Students 'Perceptions of Jesus' Personality as Assessed by Jungian-Type Inventories." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 32, no. 1: 50-58.
- Issler, Klaus. 2012. "Five Key Barriers to Deep Learning and Character Formation Based Primarily on Jesus' Parable of The Four Soils." *Christian Education Journal* 9, S138.
- Jervis, L Ann. 2002. "All for Jesus: the cause, character and role of discipleship suffering in Q." *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 1: 41-56.
- Kelsey, M.T. (1970). God, education and the unconscious. *Religious Education*, 65(3), 227-234.
- McCrudden, Kevin B. 2013. "The Eloquent Blood of Jesus: The Neglected Theme of the Fidelity of Jesus in Hebrews 12:24." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 3: 504-520.
- McFarlane, Graham. 2006. "Living on the edge - moving towards the center: the place of Jesus Christ in our quest for personhood." *Evangelical Quarterly* 78, no. 1: 37-50.
- Neff, David. 2013. "A Tale of Two Analogies." *Christianity Today*

57, no. 4: 66.

Noll, Mark. 2011. "A Gentler God: Breaking Free of the Almighty in the Company of the Human Jesus." *The Christian Century* no. 2: 38.

Piovanelli, Pierluigi. 2005. "Jesus' Charismatic Writerity: On the Historical Applicability of a Sociological Model." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2: 395-427.

Placher, William C. 2002. "Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology. (Books: character traits)." *The Christian Century* no. 3: 41.

Still, Todd D. 2007. "'Christos' as 'pistos': The Faithfulness of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69, no. 4: 746-755.

Thatcher, Tom. 1996. "Jesus, Judas, and Peter: Character by Contrast in the Fourth Gospel." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153, no. 612: 435-448.

Article Received: 02 March 2018

Article Accepted: 02 Sept 2018

No of Words: 4451