



Developing Christ-Like Leaders¹

Ted Ward

Abstract. The article focuses on the values and behavior of Jesus as basic to the education of leaders. The full humanity of Jesus necessitates inclusion of his behavior, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and communication style in pastoral education.

Since childhood, my life has been concerned with *learning as a developmental process*. Starting as a church musician, adding instrumental music teaching in secondary school, preparing for overseas missions, then to college teaching, and winding up deeply committed to educational research and planning, my career has focused on educational development, worldwide. As a Christian, my concern is for leadership education. As I see it, from Sunday school through theological education, the purpose of Christian education is to aid the development of the people of God as leaders—for the church, for the family, for business, industry, and society.

“Teaching them to obey all that I have taught” is the second part of the church’s task (Matthew 28:10). This command to teach must be pursued through theologically grounded concerns for holistic personal development, family development, the development of children, and development of the community, including leadership development.

The task implied in “all things that I have taught” includes far more than words and facts; it includes values and behavior. The study of the behavior of Jesus is neglected, perhaps because Jesus is seen as being divine and thus completely beyond comparison with ordinary humans. A proper understanding of the theology of the incarnation accepts Jesus as fully divine and at the same time, fully human. Thus the full humanity of Jesus suggests that without a deliberate inclusion of the behavior, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and communication style of Jesus pastoral education—indeed any Christian education is incomplete.

Jesus, “The Great Teacher”

The general impressions that even unbelievers hold of Jesus Christ, is that he was a great teacher. Surely he is recognizable as one of the great religious teachers of all time, but that generalization seems not to be taken seriously, even by his followers. If Jesus is to be respected as a great teacher, it would be important to give careful attention to the ways in which he taught as well as to the substance and content of his teaching.

In today’s understanding of educational procedure, it is widely understood that the methods and activities of teaching carry an actual content; how a teacher teaches is part of the information that is taught. People who teach in kindly, gentle, personally involving ways are more likely to teach kindness, gentleness, and personal concern as part of their learning outcomes. In contrast, if a learner is taught a particular subject in a hostile, angry, highly competitive environment, the facts

¹ Ted Ward. Unpublished original document prepared for AETAL, São Paulo, Brazil, 1993. Subsequently published as Developing Christ-like Leaders. *Common Ground Journal*. Vol. 10 (1) (Fall 2012): pp. 9-11.

may be learned but will either be quickly forgotten or ignored, or they will ever after be used or taught to others with the heavy imprint of the negative feelings with which they are associated.

For these and many other reasons, Christians should observe carefully the ways in which Jesus taught. A few specific observations follow:

Jesus invited people to walk with him. Far more than just speaking to groups and individuals, Jesus brought people into a sharing of his life.

Jesus invited people to do something and become something. It is more than a figure of speech when Jesus invites with these words: "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

Jesus walked with his learners into a changed lifestyle. He reminded them that his was a life of simplicity and freedom from earthly encumbrances. The disciples walked with him across the countryside, slept in the outdoors, carrying nothing more than provisions for their immediate needs.

Jesus felt compassion and showed his depth of feeling to his disciples. He cut through formality and social distance to establish an intimate emotional bond with his learners.

Jesus responded with care and respect to the questions that people asked him. Even when he was weary and engaged in more private moments of reflection, those who came to him were never turned away. He responded after listening carefully; the Bible never shows him turning the subject of a conversation away from the original inquiry and purpose of the person who came to him.

Jesus warned against competitive behavior. In the several moments when the subject came up within his group of disciples, Jesus was very demanding on the subject of competitive behavior and the quest for power. In Matthew chapters 20 and 23 there are powerful warnings about the human desire for authority and honor. As in the value system of the Kingdom of God taught in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus consistently took a stand against the personal pride that so easily becomes arrogance and self-importance and against the self-advancement and competitive climbing that hurts others.

Jesus puts his disciples to work in active learning projects. Far more than just cognitive information dumped as deposits into ready brains, Jesus saw teaching and learning in terms of *doing* things. In John's recounting of the events and meaning of the Gospel, among the startling surprises heaped together in the great "chapter of surprises" (John 4), he says that the Pharisees were surprised to observe that Jesus was not engaged, himself, in the baptism that had come to signify his fame; it was the disciples doing the baptizing! Jesus used an apprenticeship approach in which his disciples were put to work learning by experience to do for themselves the things that they had seen Jesus do and the things that they were hearing Jesus say.

Jesus reoriented his disciples in their cultural relationships. A continuous theme throughout the teaching ministry of Jesus was his concern for intercultural reconciliation. One of the greatest barriers that stood in the way of God's redemptive plan was the cultural narrowness and relative isolation of his chosen people, the Jews. This isolation had grown out of the original mandate to keep themselves separate and as a holy people dedicated to the God

above all gods, Jehovah. This part of their responsibility the Jews accepted—off and on. But the other major part of the mandate, to be God’s witness to all nations was thoroughly ignored. Thus Jesus found it necessary to help the Jews discover that God’s love and compassion extended far beyond themselves. The Samaritans were the cultural frontier for Jesus’ disciples. On many occasions, whenever circumstantially possible, and at least twice on deliberately chosen paths, Jesus put his disciples in contact with their despised neighbors, the Samaritans. He persistently showed that he valued the Samaritans. They were important; he even chose to make the hero of one of his teaching stories a **Samaritan**—what a surprise to the legalistic, separatistic Pharisee! When only one of a healed group of lepers returned to thank him, Jesus pointed out to the disciples that once again the evidence shows that Jews are no better than Samaritans. Clearly, Jesus was teaching about cultural differences and the importance of his disciples’ recognizing the cross-cultural scope of ministry in his name. (In Acts 1:8, Luke adds the details of “to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth,” thus underlining that the scope of the Gospel and the mission of the church cannot be limited to one’s own ethnic and cultural group).

Jesus demonstrated the holism of godliness. The Gospels show that Jesus often participated in social events, including at least one wedding and many dinner parties. He saw no conflict between being an ordinary well-balanced human—as a friend, a traveling companion, a dinner guest, a frequent visitor in an ordinary household, and all things spiritual. He wrapped all of life together, and he shared this perspective most explicitly by including his disciples in every event. He did not set himself apart as a mystic or spiritualist whose every word and every breath was separated from tangible, objective, practical realities of life. His life and actions showed that God wants to be a fundamental part of everything about life. To be a true disciple of Jesus is to **walk**—to live every moment of life within the spirituality that is made possible by personal and family relationship to God.

Educational Implications

To properly reflect Jesus, the Great Teacher and the Lord of all of life, education that is called by his name must reflect the lifestyle and relational qualities of the Lord himself. Any competitive and mean-spirited qualities in ordinary education must come under the judgment of the Gospel. All self-serving, survivalistic, personal-achievement motives in education must be subordinated to the community-building service orientations of the value system of the kingdom of God. Intentions for educational outcomes, curriculum structures, and the instructional procedures themselves must all be made consistent with and subservient to the purposes of the church in God’s redemptive plan.

Add to this concern for godly values the issue of qualities needed in leadership for the church, and the criteria for Christian education become radically different from ordinary education. In fact, the criteria for the development of leaders in the church can be seen to be substantially in contrast with much that is characteristic today in pastoral education.

Leaders for the Church

No place in the Bible are the rigorous standards for godly leadership more eloquently stated than in Matthew 23. In the words of Jesus Christ warnings are given against control and prestige-seeking, the key leadership fault of humankind under sin. This section of Scripture shows human appetites to be in sharp perspective with the standards of community that Christ expects for his church.