Jesus and Transformation

Paul N. Anderson

George Fox University, panderso@georgefox.edu

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Transformational leadership differs greatly from transactional leadership. Transactional leadership conditions others to think in terms of penalties and rewards, thus motivating actions and reactions according to the interests of the individual. It is self-oriented, conditioning others along the lines of desired outcomes, but, as the motivating factors are external, adherence to those values and behaviors is tied to their reinforcement. When the systems of reward diminish, so do corollary commitments. In that sense, transactional leadership is situational and reward specific.

Transformational leadership, on the other hand, works to move the insight and motivation of the individual to higher planes of understanding and reasoning. It inculcates values whence behaviors come, but it is not focused on outcomes alone. The motivational aspects of transformational leadership relate not to rewarding the self but to helping the individual ideate and valuate beyond oneself to considerations of others, the needs of the community, and finally the appeal of transcendent truth. Jesus embodied transformational leadership, sometimes even against transactional leadership and in furthering his mission. He often provoked his audiences to higher planes of perception by the use of cognitive dissonance.
Exposition

Envisioning Jesus as a transformational leader of this sort may challenge our understandings of Jesus in ways that feel alien. One conception at stake is that of a Jesus who came to bring a new set of transactions, a supercessionist view of Christianity. Instead of Jewish forms and religious practices, one might envision the Jesus movement as instituting a new religious system by which adherents receive gifts from God if they “do it right” and “believe rightly” from a Christian standpoint. Salvation, one might assume, depends upon using the right language or performing the correct ritual action to receive the divine gift of grace. Or one might construe the New Covenant as a new set of transactions in the age of the Spirit in which performing the right expressions of worship effects the receipt of charismatic gifts of the Spirit. We might even construe a conditional covenant wherein faithfulness to God’s principles brings about prosperity, health, success, and psychological well-being; but all of these perspectives fail to take seriously the transformative aspects of Jesus’ deeds and mission.

Another misconception envisions Jesus as bringing a radically new approach to religious and social life—a radical reformer, introducing new and innovative teachings. This would be partially true, but every instance in which Jesus brought a “new” teaching can be found already explicated in Hebrew Scripture and tradition. In that sense, the innovations of Jesus should be understood as conservative attempts to preserve and elevate the spiritual core of Jewish law rather than doing away with it. When you consider how Jesus taught, as well as what Jesus taught, you see a prophetic invitation backward and forward to the center of God’s commands rather than focusing on their boundary edges. Again, in transactional approaches to divine commands, keeping the law is effected by interpreting general principles in terms of particular stipulations, thereby achieving faithfulness by following prescribed actions. Jesus, however, went back to the core values of the law—the supreme love of God and love of neighbor—seeking to recover the core as the basis for understanding and deed. In these ways, Jesus was an innovator, but one who sought to conserve the heart of the divine covenant rather than effecting a break with it. Likewise, he was a radical, but the radicality of Jesus should not be seen as revolutionism proper; rather, it sought to make the root and center of the ways of God1 primary rather than their boundary edges.

A third conception of Jesus such an investigation might challenge is that of a soft and mild Jesus, seeking to do no harm and helping people
be nicer to others. One can understand how Jesus gets perceived in these ways; he called for the love of enemies as well as the love of God and neighbor. He took pity on the outcasts and healed the sick. He embraced children and exorcised the tormented. He advocated modified compliance with Rome, as long as one’s loyalty to God was firm. He used parables and familiar images to make the Kingdom of God come alive for his audiences, and he calmed people’s fears by inviting them to trust in God’s provision earnestly. In these and other ways, we see Jesus as a comforter of the disturbed, helping people deal more effectively with their givens and situations. And yet, he worked in provocative ways as well. His mission also involved the disturbance of the comfortable, helping people catch glimpses of how to live responsively to God’s workings in the world. The transformative aspects of Jesus’ ministry extended beyond maintaining harmony, and these incisive actions should also be taken seriously in considering how he furthered his mission.

All of these images of Jesus fit, to a degree, but Jesus was also more—and less—than these conceptions might suggest. Jesus as a transformer of individual and societal perceptions not only called for attitude and cognitive change, he also provoked such movement by introducing crises of category in the thought of his audiences. Perceptual and attitudinal change always involves a crisis by which ways of dealing with one’s reality no longer work, leading that person to explore new approaches and paradigms. Indeed, it is acknowledged in most theoretical schools of learning, development, and cognition that moving from one plane of understanding to another is most often precipitated by a crisis wherein one’s tools for problem solving and operation are revealed to be inadequate to the more complex and exception-laden challenges at hand. Effective teachers will also introduce a crisis wherein subjects are forced to explore new, more advanced levels of thinking and operating.\(^2\)

Much of Jesus’ ministry shows evidence of such an interest. We may think that he came to meet people’s needs and help them deal more effectively with the world within and the world without; but that’s not all he came to do. He also came to provoke, to cajole, to create crises by which people would find it impossible to continue living on the same planes of thought, perception, and action to which they had grown accustomed. In particular, Jesus sought to transform perceptions of what God expects of humanity with relation to the Divine Being and with relation to one another. Considering his actions from
the perspective of cognitive dissonance theory helps bring Jesus’ transformative mission into clearer focus.

**Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

When Leon Festinger’s book on cognitive dissonance theory was published nearly a half century ago, it immediately caught the imagination of psychologists and cognitive theorists alike. Rather than assume that humans were motivated primarily by physiological drives or the will to power, Festinger argued that humans possess an innate drive toward congruity and consonance. Where contradictions are perceived between one’s self-conceptions and one’s behaviors, or perhaps between two competing self-perceptions, one is driven to reconcile the discrepancies and move toward a more consonant self-conception. This theory is constructed on several planks in its platform. First, “the reality which impinges upon a person will exert pressures in the direction of bringing the appropriate cognitive elements into correspondence with that reality” (Festinger, 1957, 11). Put otherwise, the drive to establish and maintain cognitive consonance is real, and humans will work to either rectify self-perceptions or to modify their behaviors to reduce dissonance. Dissonance may arise from logical inconsistency, because of cultural mores, because one specific opinion is included in a more general opinion, and because of past experience (Festinger, 1957, 14). Awareness of incongruities and inconsistencies, therefore, causes the subject to seek to rectify the dissonance and move toward greater consonance and authenticity.

A second assertion is that “if two elements are dissonant with one another, the magnitude of the dissonance will be a function of the importance of the elements” (Festinger, 1957, 16). This being the case, relatively minor incongruities matter little. They cause little anxiety and do not threaten one’s conception of self. On the other hand, if the importance of the issue is high, either in the thought of the individual or the contextual group, one will experience accordingly great motivation to reconcile the dissonance. This leads to a third assertion, namely, that “the total amount of dissonance . . . will depend on the proportion of the relevant elements that are in question with the one in question” (Festinger, 1957, 17). Thus, the number of issues involved is a factor of the dissonance magnitude in addition to their importance. A fourth inference, factors in “the proportion of relevant elements” involved (Festinger, 1957, 18), leads Festinger to calculate a fifth factor—namely, that “the maximum dissonance that can possibly exist between any two elements is equal to the total resistance to change of the least resistant element” (Festinger, 1957,
The reason is that adjustment in one direction or another will tend to reduce the level of experienced dissonance. Therefore, when the forces of dissonance extend beyond forces of resistance, adjustment will eventually transpire.

A sixth plank in Festinger's platform relates to the motivational aspects that are factors of cognitive dissonance: "The presence of dissonance gives rise to pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance. The strength of the pressures to reduce the dissonance is a function of the magnitude of the dissonance" (Festinger, 1957, 18). Based on this point, it can be assumed that the alleviation of dissonance affects human decision-making. Therefore, dissonance can be reduced by any of three options: the elements among the dissonant relationships may be changed, new cognitive elements and understandings may be added, and the importance of the elements themselves may be reduced. Post-decisional dissonance is also a reality, but it decreases the more that the positive and negative rewards are considered after the fact. On the other hand, favorable attitudinal change can be observed to be higher when the subject must rationalize an action with less extrinsic reward. Another observation is that action causes its own sort of reflective appraisal, sometimes evoking cognitive change in retrospect.

Attitude change happens as a result of dealing with cognitive dissonance in several ways. First, attitude sometimes follows action. Where people take up a new set of actions, changes in attitude often follow as a means of reducing the dissonance between one's new behavior and one's interest. If the behavior continues, attitude will tend to adapt to the new behavior in ways that affirm it. Second, where the extrinsic reward might be low, subjects often tend to compensate and attribute to the action a greater sense of meaning, lest dissonance over meaningless action threaten consonance. Contrary to reward-and-punishment motivation, cognitive dissonance theory shows that people actually come to value a behavior more highly if the ownership is forced to come from within instead of without. A third aspect of attitudinal change involves changing one's opinion about former investments if it is seen that they are inconsistent with other values. By showing the apparent contradictions between values, understandings are forced to function on higher levels as the present set of tools and operations are no longer equal to the challenges at hand. These are some of the ways that cognitive dissonance evokes changes in attitude and perception—themselves aspects of transformative cognition. 4

Applying this theory to Jesus' mission, many of his actions cannot be best understood as intended to meet people's needs or to explain
the way of the Kingdom by means of illustrative object lessons. Many of his actions seem more provocative than comforting. Nor does he simply try to motivate people to do more, or do things better. Many of Jesus' deeds appear to have been aimed at heightening the cognitive dissonance of his audiences, seeking to transform their ways of thinking about things, especially regarding the transcendent character of God and what God expects of humanity. This method of operation can be inferred by considering Jesus' dissonance-producing deeds.

**Jesus' Dissonance-Producing Deeds**

In distinguishing the Jesus of history from the Jesus of the faithful, scholars have devised several criteria for determining historicity. The first criterion is that of dissimilarity. Simply put, aspects of Jesus' ministry least similar to emerging developments in early Christianity are less likely to have been concocted, and by default are more likely to be considered historical. Second, the criterion of multiple attestation infers that an event or saying appearing in more than one Gospel setting, especially if appearing in slightly different ways so as to avert suspicions of derivation in one direction or another, may be considered more authentic. A third criterion is coherence: the view that a presentation cohering with what we think Jesus was like, rather than idiosyncratic ones, stands a greater chance of being authentic. A fourth criterion is that of naturalism versus supernaturalism, which distinguishes the realism of history from the more embellished features of hero stories and theological interests. When all of these criteria are employed, several basic features of Jesus' ministry stand out as most likely to be considered authentic. These include his relation to John the Baptist, his cleansing of the Temple, his dining with sinners, his breaking the Sabbath, and his declaration of the love of God. Considering each of these actions and themes in the light of cognitive dissonance theory heightens particular aspects of Jesus' transformative intentionality.

Before considering these deeds of Jesus, however, something of the religious and social backdrop of first-century Palestine is in order. Jesus' ministry began during the tenth decade of the Roman occupation, and Jewish groups and institutions had to find ways of adjusting to the occupation. Sadducees, managers of the Temple system and its priesthood, found it convenient to exchange compliance with Rome on a variety of issues for Roman support. They emphasized the importance of ritual purity, requiring the exchange of Roman money for Jewish money before purchasing an acceptable animal for the appropriate sacrifice. The Essenes, in turn, rejected the Jerusalem aristocracy
as collaborating with Rome and set up alternative communities in the wilderness and in villages to fulfill their understandings of God’s righteousness. The Qumran community had strict regulations for entering and participating in the community and viewed its membership as the “children of light” versus their adversaries and those whom they called “children of darkness.” The Pharisees advocated faithfulness to God by emphasizing complete observance of the Torah. They were active in every major Jewish community, and they were known for setting up a hedge around the Law, ensuring its observance by stipulating what faithfulness required.

A variety of resistance movements emerged, including those led by what Josephus calls “prophets,” those who were called “zealots,” and those known as Sicarii dagger men. The commonality between these individuals and groups is that they believed in the forcible overthrow of the Romans, in keeping with the Maccabean uprising and the prophetic heroes of old. By contrast, apocalyptists believed God’s intervention would come from the heavens and that God’s enemies would be dealt with from on high. In the meantime, they called for perseverance and faithfulness to God’s ways, as opposed to assimilation.

While there was a great deal of variety between these first-century C.E. movements and a fair amount of interchange between them, they also shared a variety of commonalities. First, they believed in a covenantal relationship between Israel and God, in which the Jewish nation was called to faithfulness in particular ways. The Law was meant to be kept, and religious measures were set to specify the legal, cultic, and societal standards to be achieved. In addition, ritual means of purification were established as means of redeeming the individual from shortcomings or infractions, and systems were quite clear in terms of what was required. A second feature of these systems is that people were regarded as pure or impure depending on the degree to which they were able to adhere to expected standards. The adherents were considered “righteous,” while non-adherents were labeled “sinners.” This led to a third feature, which involved the marginalization of those who did not measure up in particular ways. Avoiding such social alienation also provided an impressive motivation for pursuing religious observance and attaining religious purity. It was in such a setting that the ministry of Jesus should be envisioned.

Ironically, connectedness to the love of God and experiencing the love of others in community were casualties of such systems. Psychologically, even one’s conception of self was forced into the categories of either merited esteem or self-denigration. The Decalogue, however,
was from the beginning a gift of grace. The first four commandments of Moses are intended to restore the vertical relationship between God and humanity; the last six commandments are intended to restore the horizontal relationship between persons. In that sense, Jesus refused to answer the lawyer’s question as to which was the greatest of the commandments. To single out one would have been to neglect the other nine; the question involved a no-win proposition. Rather, Jesus responded by getting to the core of the Law: the love of God and the love of neighbor (Mark 12:28–31). By citing these two summaries of the Law, Jesus shows familiarity beyond the Exodus rendering. He also knew the interpretations following the Decalogue in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, apparently affording a broader understanding than a legalistic appraisal would afford. In addition to expounding the love of God and neighbor directly in his teachings, Jesus also enacted it through his works. Five of the most likely historical features of Jesus’ ministry here deserve consideration, and each of these can be seen to be furthering the mission of Jesus by means of precipitating cognitive dissonance.

The first feature of Jesus’ ministry commanding notice is his association with John the Baptist. One thing common to all four Gospels is the inauguration of Jesus’ ministry in conjunction with the ministry of John the Baptist. Clearly, his public ministry’s beginning is marked by his baptism by John, and Jesus’ notoriety builds upon John’s. The mistake, however, is to build an understanding of Jesus’ mission based on a partial or misguided notion of what John was doing. Two leading misconceptions include the identification of John as a militaristic prophet desiring to overthrow the Romans by means of a resistance movement, and the interpretation of John’s baptism as a new religious requirement superseding one set of religious requirements with another. Neither of these appraisals fit. Even in Josephus’ listing of first-century Galilean prophets, he refers to John as a far more authentic prophet than militaristic leaders such as Theudas, the Samaritan, and the Egyptian. And in Jesus’ commands to put away the sword and to love one’s enemies, he is presented in ways greatly contrastive to contemporary prophetic leaders. On the second point, not only does Jesus’ own ministry diminish the plausibility of such a view, but it fails to understand the main point of John’s baptismal testimony. In the light of cognitive dissonance theory, what John, and therefore Jesus, was doing becomes clearer.

Rather than seeing John as instituting a new ritual to which Jesus submitted, it is better to view John’s immersion of people in the Jordan
Saint John the Baptist and Transformation

Jesus and Transformation

and elsewhere as a declaration of the prolific availability of divine grace and the life of the Spirit. John’s ministry should be viewed as a contrast to confining access to the grace of God to ritual means of purification, either in Jerusalem, Qumran, or other cultic settings. When contrasted to the Jewish ritual purification baths, required to make one “clean” before entering the Temple area or other worship areas, the actions become clearer. At the Essene Gate entrance to Jerusalem, and in Qumran, pools for ritual purification show two sets of stairways—one descending, another ascending. In the Qumran pool, there are four stairways leading out of the water, and in both cases a rail divides the “impure” descenders from the “pure” ascenders. Impurity is transferred by touch, so one would not want to be made impure by touching another who had not yet been purified. Other features also figured in here. For one thing, getting clean was an important practical matter. In a dusty and unsanitary setting, getting cleaned up before entering settings of worship would have been a worthy practice on several levels. For another, running (living) water was required for the purification to be effective. This is also understandable, as the less stagnant the water source, the more effective its cleansing would be. It might also be argued that the Jewish mikva’ot cleansing pools (also found in many homes) were designed to bring the luxury of a “river bath” into the city. Rainwater was stored during some months of the year, and it was used later for cleansing purposes, fulfilling the washing requirements of the Torah and also serving practical purposes. Ritual purity, however, also became one of the benefits of particular sorts of bathings and cleansings, and it functioned to mark insiders and outsiders in cultic ways.

The effect of John’s baptizing crowds of people would have jarred the thinking and experience of Jewish populations in several ways. First, it would have made cleansing available to the many instead of constricting it to the few. Trips to religious centers were no longer required to attain purity before God, if that is an association the action would have carried. Second, it would have called people to repentance, away from their compliance with Rome, rather than the sort of compromise evident in the Jewish leadership and their accommodation to Roman ways and expectations. Calling people to repentance would have had ethical and social implications aimed at renewing the religious identity of Israel. A third association would have connected the free-flowing water of the Jordan with the free-flowing work of the Holy Spirit, and this meaning is clearly picked up in the ministry of Jesus. In fact, every time the baptisms of Jesus and John are mentioned...
in the Bible, it is done in a contrastive and intensifying way: John baptized with water, but Jesus baptized with fire and the Holy Spirit. In that sense, water immersion prefigures spiritual filling characteristic of the Jesus movement in Acts.

By inviting the multitudes to repentance, by challenging leaders regarding their complicity with Rome, by tying ethical repentance to purification, and by declaring the prolific availability of the grace of God, John's baptismal ministry created cognitive dissonance for the individual construing the receipt of grace only through ritual means of purification. By baptizing in the wilderness, John was declaring boldly that purification and the "remission of sins" were tied to ethical living and authenticity rather than with the symbolization of such in cultic expressions. Viewing Jesus as continuing the ministry of John in his own ministry, then, clarifies other aspects of his work. While the Fourth Gospel poses an awkward set of statements on Jesus and baptism (Jesus baptized with his disciples near the place where John was baptizing [John 3:22], although it is emphasized in the next chapter [John 4:2] that it was Jesus' disciples that baptized, but he did not), it is likely that Jesus' ministry continued in the trajectory of John's. In that sense, he continued to expand access to God's love and grace by his actions and teachings.

A second feature of Jesus' ministry deserving consideration is his cleansing of the Temple. While the Synoptics present this event as happening at the end of Jesus' ministry (as it well may have), John presents it at the beginning. Especially if the Jerusalem leaders were indeed offended enough to want Jesus put to death upon his next visit to Jerusalem (after the otherwise commendable healing of the paralytic in John 5), this event must have created a huge disturbance. And it does not appear to have been an accident. Wrong is the view that Jesus fell into a fit of rage and lost control over his composure, flailing away at people and animals alike. The text says nothing of violence against humans, or even that animals were beaten—only that Jesus made a whip of cords and drove them all out—people, sheep, and oxen alike (John 2:15). A second misconception is clarified in considering Mark's text. In Mark alone, Jesus arrived the day before and looked around; because it was late, though, he departed and returned the next day (Mark 11:11). This suggests a calculated move rather than a fit of rage. So what were aspects of the calculation, and what did Jesus seek to accomplish in his demonstration the following day?

In terms of cognitive dissonance, he challenged the religious establishment and its practices in the name of God and God's purposes for
Jesus and Transformation

Jesus' ministry in which cognitive dissonance featured prominently is the healing of the infirm on the Sabbath. Jesus' healing of the sick is one of the most noted aspects of his ministry, but one feature about this work often escapes notice—namely, that he performed several of his healings on the Sabbath. This note carries over into all four Gospels, and it is a feature of Jesus' ministry that is unlikely to have been concocted. What also escapes notice is the fact that the religious authorities were often portrayed as having been upset at his healing on the Sabbath. This was because it was a practice deemed as being against the Sabbath regulation not to work on the Sabbath. Unlike other healers and doctors who might have made money as a result of their medical services, Jesus instructed his followers to minister without accepting money from others, nor did he accept remuneration himself.

In Jesus' first healing on the Sabbath in the Synoptics, the man with the withered hand, the healing is performed in the Synagogue. When the Pharisees challenge him about his legal violations of Sabbath laws, Jesus responds by asking whether it is lawful to do good or harm, to save life or to kill, on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4). After he healed the man,
the Pharisees are reported as immediately holding counsel with the Herodians as to how they might destroy Jesus (Mark 3:6). He obviously had threatened their authority in challenging their sensibilities as to what God required. The second set of Sabbath healings in the Synoptics is mentioned only in general. After Jesus preached in the Synagogue at Nazareth, he experienced rejection, as a prophet is “not without honor” except in his hometown. Only Mark mentions the performance of healings, but Luke adds special significance to the ministry. Luke connects Jesus’ inaugural message with the year of Jubilee (Isa. 61), when the debts of all would be forgiven and healing and deliverance would be restored to all; then he “explains” the fact that not all who needed to be were healed—only some—harking back to the days of Elijah. Mark describes the response of the crowd in stark terms: because of their lack of belief, even Jesus could do no miracles (except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them). Luke adds a third and fourth Sabbath healing—the healing of the crippled woman in one of the Synagogues (Luke 13:10–17) and the healing of the man with dropsy on the way to the home of a Pharisaic leader (Luke 14:1–6). In both of these, the wisdom of leading an ox or a donkey to water, or setting an ox (or son) free if it falls into a well, is given as legitimation for breaking Sabbath codes.

The Gospel of John presents both of Jesus’ most detailed healings as having happened on the Sabbath, leading to extended discussions among the Jewish leaders. The healing of the paralytic in John 5 raises questions of Jesus’ authority (John 5:9–18), and when the discussion continues upon his next visit to Jerusalem (John. 7:22f.), the authorities are presented as still being troubled over his healing on the Sabbath. Likewise, the healing of the blind man in John 9 occurs on the Sabbath, and once again, consternation is expressed over it (John 9:14–16). In these passages, Jesus’ authority is questioned, which leads Jesus to further controversy as he claims to be acting on behalf of the one who sent him—God. What becomes apparent when considering the six instances where Jesus performs healings on the Sabbath is that he seems to be doing so as a matter of working deconstructively as well as constructively. He desires wholeness for those he heals, but he also apparently chooses to perform healings on the Sabbath as a means of creating a crisis of dissonance in the thought of bystanders. Rather than seeing Sabbath observance as a matter of meeting legalistic requirements, it is invoked as a facilitator of redemption and wholeness. In healing on the Sabbath, Jesus provoked a cognitive crisis within the thought of those who perceived otherwise. By creating a
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dilemma between two “goods” involved with keeping Sabbath regulations and celebrating the healing of the infirm, Jesus challenged the legalistic clout of the former with the existential authority of the latter. From the resultant dissonance, the central value of the Sabbath demands reconsideration.

A fourth sort of dissonance-producing action of Jesus was his dining with “sinners” and tax collectors. This action might not appear to modern readers as particularly shocking, but table fellowship in ancient Judaism had far more significance than just the pleasure of eating together. Within the Jewish practice of the communion offering, sharing food together was understood as a sacramental event reconciling neighbors and family members to each other in the presence of God. Even enemies were reconciled in the sharing of bread together (Ps. 23:5; 41:9). In Jesus’ first event of sharing table fellowship (Mark 2:13-17), Jesus is presented as calling Levi the tax collector (son of Alphaeus), which apparently drew criticism from scribes and Pharisees. They asked Jesus’ disciples why he dined with “tax collectors and sinners.” Upon hearing about their challenge, Jesus responded that it was not the well who needed a physician, but the ill. Jesus “came to call not the righteous, but the sinners” (Luke 5:32b adds “unto repentance”). Both Matthew and Luke contain an extended set of Jesus sayings about John (probably from the Q tradition, Matt. 11:7-19; Luke 7:24–35), including statements about his ministry in the wilderness, his prophetic-messenger ministry (based on Mal. 3:1), the Kingdom’s suffering of violence (by the rejection once more of “Elijah”), and a final statement linking Jesus and John the Baptist. While John’s coming without eating and drinking was interpreted as having a demon, when Jesus came both eating and drinking, he was accused of being a “glutton and a drunkard” and “a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”

In cognitive dissonance theory, their resistance to change is presented as having been at a high level of magnitude.

Beyond these presentations of Jesus’ sharing fellowship with tax collectors and sinners, Luke describes another incident in which these sorts of unacceptable people were drawing near to Jesus, evoking the consternation of the scribes and Pharisees regarding Jesus’ dining with such (Luke 15:1–3). It is at this point that the Lukan Jesus tells the three parables of lostness and redemption involving the lost sheep (Luke 15:4–7), the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10), and the lost son (Luke 15:11–32). In these passages, Luke, in contrast to Mark, emphasizes the redemption of the lost and the sinners and their repentance as a factor in the happy ending. This theme in Luke is then typified by two
other distinctive passages. A parable is first told about a Pharisee and a tax collector who went up to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee thanked God for his righteousness and privilege, whereas the tax collector, not even lifting his eyes to heaven, beat on his breast and called out for mercy as a sinner. In Jesus’ teaching, it is the latter, the humble, who went away justified, not the self-exalted (Luke 18:9–14). A few verses later, the Lukan Jesus’ dining with Zachaeus leads climactically not only to his repentance but also his penance—he gave half his goods to the poor and repaid what he had stolen fourfold (Luke 19:1–10). In these ways, the Lukan Jesus not only receives sinners and tax collectors but leads them full circle unto repentance.18

More striking and dissonance-producing, however, is the Markan Jesus (and probably closer to the historical Jesus), whose dining with “sinners”—even before they repent—makes a powerful statement. It declares the forgiveness and acceptance of God, available in the present, to be received in faith by any who will be open to it. Repentance may follow as a fitting response to the gracious love of God, but it is not presented here as a precondition. That is the shock of it. This dissonance-producing message of unmerited acceptance is explicitly manifested by Jesus’ declaration that people’s sins were forgiven. Back to the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2:1–12, Jesus declares the man’s sins were forgiven. Therefore, not only were the Jewish leaders offended at his healing on the Sabbath, but they were also exercised over his claiming the authority to forgive people’s sins. They found it blasphemous (Mark 2:6–7; Matt. 9:3; Luke 5:21), for only God has the authority to forgive sins.19 Jesus was probably not unaware of such understandings, which is all the more reason why his receipt of “tax collectors and sinners,” even before they repented, and, likewise, his declaration of forgiveness to the infirm should be interpreted as dissonance-producing actions. Extending unmerited favor in the name of God challenges all systems of deservedness—an aspect of conventionality that cannot be transcended except by revelation. This is why Jesus had to come.

A fifth dissonance-producing action of Jesus is his references to God as his loving Father. Among the Gospels, only in Mark 14:36 does Jesus refer to God in the diminutive sense, Abba, and this intimate reference to the Deity has great theological significance. The human–divine relationship revealed by Jesus restores humanity to the intimacy of God’s love, and it invites humanity to approach God in an I–Thou structure of relationship rather than an I–It relationship. While the occasion of Jesus’ prayer was in the Garden of Gethsemane, with only
Peter, James, and John present, the meaning of the reference possessed great capacity to influence people's thinking. One can understand why the Apostle Paul picked it up and used it in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. Believers are given the "Spirit of Adoption" by which we, too, cry out "Abba-Father," enjoined to the Deity by the bonds of love. Joachim Jeremias has even argued that this was the first reference to the Deity in intimate, diminutive terms in the history of world religions, and though an overstated claim, the innovative character of its mention by Jesus still stands.

The Father-Son relationship is nowhere as intertwined in any of the Gospels as it is in the Gospel of John. Here the Son is equal to the Father, while also subordinate to the Father. Jesus and the Father are one, but the Son can do nothing except as instructed by the Father. When Jesus was challenged as to his authority, he claimed to speak solely on the Father's behalf and stated that to see him is to behold the Father who sent him. Needless to say, these claims were provocative, indeed. One can understand why Jewish authorities would have been troubled by anyone making such claims—whether they originated with the historical Jesus or whether they were part of the emerging Christology of Johannine Christianity, reflecting its worship experience and evangelistic outreach to Jewish family and friends. The origin of Jesus' claiming to have been sent by God was probably the Shaliach (sending) motif of Deuteronomy 18:15-22, where the authentic prophet says nothing on his own but only what God has instructed him to say. On that basis, his work must be obeyed as the word of God, and his authenticity is certified by his predictive words having come true. An inauthentic prophet, or one who speaks simply on his own behalf, needs not be heeded, and blasphemy is punishable by death (Lev. 24:10-23). In his references to the intimacy of God's love and his divine commission, Jesus not only taught about the love of God at the heart of the Torah, he personalized it. It may even be said that this is how he taught his followers to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:2; see also Mark 11:25f.), with the same sense of intimacy. We forget, though, how much of a shock such utterances must have been to his audiences; yet, such is the way of transformative leadership. New perspectives emerge as the limitations of former ones are challenged by dissonance.

In various aspects of Jesus' ministry, he employed considerable numbers of dissonant relationships, as well as their magnitudes, in furthering his transformative mission. Therefore, the same sort of analysis can be performed on other aspects of Jesus' ministry in addi-
tion to the five mentioned above. His healing (and touching!) of lepers must have raised eyebrows; his cursing the fig tree (the symbol of Israel’s prosperity) must have shocked his followers; his engaging demoniacs and setting them free from their inward turmoil must have evoked consternation; his welcoming of children, women, and Samaritans into his inner circle would have been counter-conventional; his transforming of the Passover meal and interpretations of familiar Scriptures would have been regarded as creative innovations; and especially his teachings on the way of the Kingdom, reversing the value of the first and the last, would have been striking indeed. In fact, one of the remarkable things about the parables of Jesus is that the first major parable in Mark (the sower, the seeds, and the soils, Mark 4:1–29) implies that the parables are given not as elucidators of the Kingdom but as vehicles of judgment by which insiders are distinguished from outsiders. Luke and Matthew soften this theme, but Mark’s Jesus uses parable to create dissonance so that transformative understanding might take place.

**Transformative Incongruity and Resultant Congruity**

In these and other ways, the transformative ministry of Jesus is thrown into sharp relief by considering aspects of cognitive dissonance at work in the actions and teachings of Jesus. Time and again, Jesus is presented as driving a wedge between conventional understandings of the ways things work, in relation to religious life and otherwise, and, by causing a crisis of category, Jesus prepares the way for new understandings to emerge. Many of these themes may also be interpreted in sociological perspective, but cognitive dissonance theory allows the focus to remain on how such actions would have affected the individual—with relation to the societal setting and otherwise. A particular value of applying cognitive dissonance theory to Gospel narratives is that it not only helps one understand more clearly what the Jesus of history may have been doing but it also allows present-day interpreters to apply it in the settings within which they find themselves. Consider the impact of imposed incongruity and of movement toward transformative congruity in the above examples, with implications for today.

With John’s wilderness baptisms and Jesus’ relation to his ministry, a new day in spirituality was being announced. Rather than constricting purification and spiritual renewal to cultic rites done in proper ways, John’s provocative actions signified the prolific availability of God’s ever-present grace and empowerment. Repentance and remis-
cession of sins were therefore no longer tied to ritual means of purification; instead they were tied to turning from compromise and injustice and receiving the gift of God's grace by faith. The Jesus movement built upon this call for renewal, and baptism came also to signify spiritual immersion in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. In that sense, the baptism of Jesus was held to be one of fire and the Holy Spirit, and John's immersion of believers in the free-flowing waters of the Jordan prefigured the immersion of believers in the free-flowing presence of the Holy Spirit. A considerable mistake for Christian interpreters, however, would be to construe Christian baptism as a supercessionist rite replacing Jewish ones as the divine requirement. The connection of the ministries of Jesus and John points, rather, in the direction that all who respond to God's grace and presence fully in faith receive them fully with power. Perception and experience are thus transformed, as one looks to the substance of which outward forms are but a shadow (Heb. 9–10).

In Jesus' cleansing the Temple and dining with "sinners," he can be understood to have been challenging the purity laws of Judaism by which some were accorded the grace of God and others were not. Two directions of interpretation have been applied to this understanding, and both have valid points to make. First, in extending table fellowship to "sinners and tax collectors," Jesus was declaring (with divine agency) their reconciliation with him and, therefore, to God—even before they repented. This statement of radical inclusivity functioned to draw people into the love of God as enacted by Jesus, and it may even have led to repentance as a response of gratitude to the gift of grace. In this sense, Jesus demonstrates the same unmerited favor he also announces from God. The other way people have interpreted these actions is to see them as drawing in the poor of the land, the am ha-a'retz. Unable to afford the appropriate sacrificial animal, including the exchange of currency at a loss, vast segments of society had become relegated to the status of "sinners" as a result of the Temple system. Jesus' overturning the money-changers' tables and driving out the animals was a way of saying that the reception of God's grace is not conditioned upon the attainment of ritual purity by means of proper cultic practice. Jesus was therefore drawing in the poor of the land and all others who had become alienated by the boundary-marking functions of the Temple system as an institution. In so doing, he was driving a dissonance-producing wedge between human understandings of divine requirements and the perdurant will of God that all should be reunited in human–divine relationship. And in doing so
in the name of God, he was correcting conventional views of God’s requirement for humanity.

By breaking Sabbath codes, Jesus was also seeking to drive a wedge between conventional understandings of God’s requirements and the original intention of the Sabbath from the divine perspective. Jesus, in performing commendable healings, wondrous deeds furthering the very wholeness the Sabbath was intended to facilitate, exposed the dissonance between regulated observance of the Law and the center of its redemptive function. Healings and feedings provided the occasion for such an endeavor, but many were not healed who probably needed to be. In that sense, many of Jesus’ healings were making a point as to the authentic nature of Sabbath observance, and his breaking the letter of the Law in pointing to its center functioned to make these distinctions apparent.

Ultimately, communicating the love of God to humanity was the central concern of Jesus and his mission. In addition to enacting prophetic challenges to conventional interpretations of the divine will, Jesus pointed time and again to the love and grace of God, inviting humanity to respond to it in faith. He also modeled an intimate relationship with God, calling God “Abba” (parallel to the diminutive “daddy” in English). While Matthew and Luke did not pick up on that significant statement in Mark, they did include the prayer Jesus taught his disciples, inviting them to pray to God as the collective Father of all who would seek his favor.

Aspects of attitude change, a feature of cognitive dissonance theory, may also be inferred when considering John’s dialectical material. For one thing, as Jesus’ subjects were often given little extrinsic incentive to embrace his teaching or ways, they may have come to value the changes he was calling for as a means of dealing with the resultant dissonance. For another, Jesus sometimes walked people into a new reality, affecting their behavior, expecting a change in attitude as a result. The Temple cleansing, dining with “sinners,” and teaching his disciples a new pattern of praying exemplify this approach to attitude change. Transformed thinking sometimes emerges as a result of reflecting upon one’s reformed actions. A third approach to attitude change involved reflection upon former understandings and later ones. While Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, he did claim to “fulfill” it by getting at its center rather than its boundary measures. In both the magnitude of importance and in the number of expressions, Jesus sought to transform the thinking of his audiences by introducing crises making it impossible to address the new experience with
their current set of cognitive tools. In dealing with cognitive dissonance, Jesus effectively brought about transformed perspective in the thinking of his audiences, which involved a central aspect in the furtherance of his mission.

**Conclusion**

In these and other ways, the larger set of provocative actions taken by Jesus created dissonance within the thinking of first-century Jewish groups, forcing people to stretch beyond their present means of approaching the human–divine relationship. By creating cognitive dissonance, individuals would have been motivated to explore other ways to pursue a right relationship with God and one another. By using cognitive dissonance, Jesus can be seen to have furthered his mission in conveying the accessibility of God’s presence and love in ways that did not merely present his audiences with an alternative form of transaction, a varied form of conventional religion similar to the Judaism of his day; rather, he demonstrated transformative leadership. In lifting people’s understandings to new ways of seeing things, in pointing people to the center of Hebrew Scripture and tradition, and in enacting God’s inclusive love, Jesus ushered in a new age—an age of divine grace to be received by the human response of faith to the divine initiative, restoring later generations to the original vision of the Jewish faith. By so doing, he employed cognitive dissonance as a means of facilitating transitions in the thinking and actions of his audiences with missional intentionality. He did not simply exchange one mode of transactional operation for another; he demonstrated transformative leadership by raising the vision and perspective of his audiences to new levels they otherwise would not have reached.

**Notes**

1. The origin of the word “radical” is *radix*, which in Latin means “root.” The radicality of Jesus should be conceived as his seeking to restore the root and core of Jewish teachings rather than departing from them, or rather than being satisfied with a legal approach to core values. By aiming at the core rather than one of its stipulations, one is more likely to approximate the center of the value. Likewise, measuring insiders and outsiders according to their placement along erected boundaries creates artificial divides between insiders and outsiders, at times rewarding (depending on how the line is drawn) distance from the center over proximity to it. Worse, however, is the dehumanizing effect of according insider/outside valuations to persons on
the basis of legalistic and arbitrary measures. These are the sorts of issues Jesus came to rectify.

2. See, for instance, the works of James Loder and James Fowler. Loder argues that it is a crisis experience—a shock—that forms the basis for any knowing event, wherein one's mind searches for a stance of interpretation regarding the event. Fowler's six stages of faith development observe, as did Kohlberg's, that one will operate on a particular level of reasoning until it is no longer adequate. Inadequacy is introduced by the crisis of facing a situation wherein one's current modes of analysis and operation are insufficient. Thus, cognitive crisis and the resulting dissonance marks the occasion for developmental transition and cognitive growth (Loder, 1981; Fowler, 1981).

3. In somewhat different terminology, Carl Rogers describes the incongruity between one's perceived and experienced realities as being a leading factor in one's level of inward anxiety. The role of the therapist, then, helps one achieve a greater sense of congruity. In that sense, truth is liberating and restoring of inward well-being (Rogers, 1951).

4. More can be considered regarding discussions of cognitive dissonance theory, including attitude change, in the books by Robert A. Wicklund and Jack W. Brehm (1976), and Jean-Leon Beauvois and Robert-Vincent Joule (1996).

5. A further discussion of criteria for determining historicity, including the strength and weaknesses of the leading criteria, may be seen in Anderson (2000). Engagements with Professors Borg, Powell, and Kinkel may be considered in Anderson (2002a); especially significant is the discussion of how these criteria are used and represented.

6. In addition to being discussed briefly in the QRT essay (Anderson, 2000, 24–29), these aspects of Jesus' ministry are among those most frequently presented in "red" and "pink" type (definitely authentic and probably authentic) by the Jesus Seminar (Funk & the Jesus Seminar, 1998).

7. More of these movements and ways they maintained their group standards of identity and concern can be considered in John Riches's text on the world of Jesus in first-century Judaism (1990, 68–86). According to Riches, "setting priorities for members' behavior and devising ways of reinforcing such behavior, were other, related ways of enabling the group to withstand the erosion of its values and norms" (Riches, 1990, 68).

8. More about these movements can be seen in Richard Horsley’s book, which analyzes Jesus’ ministry with the Roman occupation as the backdrop (Horsley, 2003).

9. On these matters John Riches's presentation of Jesus and his attempts to transform Judaism (1980) is impressive. He draws in the works of religious anthropologist Mary Douglas and distinguishes between literal meanings of myths and their symbolic functions as inculcators of values. In considering factors involved in religion and change, Riches shows how Jesus employed
language in surprising and unexpected ways to transform people's understandings of God's ways and expectations for humanity (Riches, 1980, 20-43). Riches and Millar take these ideas further in showing how the conjoining of unlikely associations affects perceptual change within the cognitive process (Riches & Millar, 1985).

10. Professor Sanders' discussion of whether the "sinners" to which Jesus reached out redemptively involved genuinely sinful people, or whether they were simply regarded as sinful, over-identifies the poor of the land as the specific group referred to in the Gospels (Sanders, 1985, 174-211). Indeed, it probably did include the poor, and while it probably did include genuinely treacherous persons such as tax collectors and others, the pejorative label of "sinner" also would have included any who did not live up to the letter of the Law and any who had not achieved ritual purity through prescribed means.

11. Riches's chapter (1980, 112-144) on Jesus and purity laws outlines effectively a variety of ways Jesus challenged such laws, pointing instead to the love of God that transcended them all (145-167).

12. The first four of the Ten Commandments addressed the human-divine relationship in Exodus 20:1-11: monotheism, forbidding of graven images, forbidding of taking God's name in vain, and Sabbath observance. These Jesus summarized by quoting the Shema: affirming the oneness of God and the priority of loving God with all one's heart, strength and might (Deut. 6:4f.). The last six Commandments in Exodus 20:12-17 involve honoring parents and the forbidding of murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and covetousness. These Jesus summarized in citing Leviticus 19:18—commanding persons to love one's neighbor as oneself.

13. See the fuller comparison-contrast between Jesus and first-century prophets in "Jesus and Peace" (Anderson, 1994). Jesus appears to have distanced himself from such nationalistic movements, reflected in the Messianic Secret in Mark, and even in his fleeing the crowd's popularistic designs on his future in John 6:14f. Especially in his teachings around the command to love one's enemies (Matt. 5:38-48), Jesus provides his followers creative and transformative means of dealing with the Roman presence beyond the fight/flight dichotomies. Walter Wink's outlining of Jesus' "third way" in this instance marks a turning point in biblical interpretation.

14. Note the four presentations of the Temple cleansing in Matthew 21:12f.; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45f.; John 2:13-17. In the following passages in all four Gospels, discussions of Jesus' authority follow (Matt. 21:23-7; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8; John 2:18-22), and in the Synoptics Jesus volleyes back their question regarding his authority to an inquiry regarding the ministry of John the Baptist—was his ministry from heaven, or from men? Because of their fear of challenging John's prophetic (and popular) authority, which was clearly tied to that of Jesus, they refused to give an answer. In John, Jesus promises a sign, but it will be the sign of the resurrection—rais-
ing up “this temple” after three days, evoking yet another misunderstanding from the unbelieving crowd.

15. The healing on the Sabbath in Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, and Luke 6:6-11 follows the confrontation of Jesus and his disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath in Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, and Luke 6:1-5. The explanation after the Pharisees’ confrontation over the plucking of grain argued back to David’s example in feeding his soldiers during the days of Abithar. Then Jesus makes the point that the Sabbath was made for humanity; humanity was not made for the Sabbath.

16. The passages here include Matthew 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6, and Luke 4:16-30. Luke’s rendering has two extended additions to this passage in which Jesus is presented as declaring his liberating mission: first (Luke 4:16-22), he has come to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Isa. 61:1-2). Second (Luke 4:25-30), Luke describes times during the ministry of Elijah when not all people were healed, only some, and this caused some to want to kill him in Nazareth.

17. Also found in the Matthean tradition is the cliché-ridden association of tax collectors and harlots, who will receive entry into the Kingdom before the dilatory son who did not carry through with his promise to labor in the father’s vineyard (Matt. 21:28-32).

18. The adulterous woman passage in John 8:1-11 is not found in the earliest manuscripts of John, but some early manuscripts locate it within Luke. Whether or not the Lukan tradition was its first textual “home,” the narrative does show a characteristically Lukan ending. While Jesus does not condemn the woman (and he also challenges others who also bore guilt not to cast the “first stone”), he also calls her to repentance: “Go and sin no more.” Here, the conventionality and accountability aspects of Jesus’ ministry to “sinners” are emphasized by later Gospel traditions, perhaps as a balance to his dissonance-producing unmerited acceptance. In that sense, cognitive dissonance can be seen to be operative not only among the Jewish audiences of Jesus during his historical ministry, but it was also apparently operative within the emerging traditions of the church. The Lukan traditions added accountability to such a “dangerous” gift of grace.

19. Luke adds the content that the woman’s anointing of Jesus was a factor of her gratitude for his ministering to her, despite her sinfulness (Luke 7:36-50). Having located the event in the home of a Pharisee (rather than the home of Simon the leper, or even the home of Mary and Martha, both described as being in Bethany), Luke presents Jesus as again declaring forgiveness. This is also reported as having offended those present, and the event takes a turn toward redemption and the disconcerting (to some) forgiveness of sins. It should be said that Luke also probably had access to the Johannine rendering (John 12:1-8), which is why he moved the anointing to the feet of Jesus rather than his head, as in Mark and Matthew. It might also
be conjectured that his familiarity with the Johannine oral tradition (explaining such an unlikely move) might have involved the hearing of the name "Mary," associating the sister of Lazarus with another Mary of possibly more questionable repute. This might account for Luke's conjectural additions and his connecting the event with Pharisaic objection to Jesus' unfettered forgivingness. See Anderson (2002b).

20. See Anderson (1999) for a full treatment of the Father's sending of the Son in John, including implications for understanding Jesus' sense of his own mission rooted in Deuteronomy 18.

References


