



Transformational and Polycentric Leadership of Jesus

Frederich Oscar Lambertus Lontoh
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Moriah Tangerang
Email: oscarlontoh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Contemporary leadership studies often overlook historical paradigms that offer deep insights into the complexity of modern organizations. This qualitative study examines the leadership of Jesus of Nazareth through the integrative lens of Transformational Leadership and Polycentric Systems. Using textual analysis of the canonical Gospel narratives, this study aims to: (1) identify manifestations of transformational leadership characteristics in Jesus' interactions; (2) analyze the structure of his community of followers that reflects polycentric principles such as decentralization and collaboration; and (3) explore the dynamics of interaction that reinforce these two dimensions. The findings reveal that Jesus simultaneously functioned as a powerful center of transformational inspiration and as the architect of a decentralized polycentric network. The transformational dimension evident in the provision of vision, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration effectively prepared and empowered followers to act autonomously. Meanwhile, the polycentric structure manifested through delegation of authority, networked commissioning, and recognition of diversity ensures the movement's continuity and expansion beyond his central leadership. This synthesis produces a dynamic and resilient leadership model. This study concludes that the integration of transformational inspiration and polycentric design in Jesus' leadership was not only a key factor in the success of the early movement, but also offers a relevant theoretical framework for modern leaders who face the challenge of inspiring change while managing complex and distributed organizations. Its implications extend beyond the theological context, making a significant contribution to the fields of leadership studies, organizational management, and the sociology of social movements.

Keywords: Transformational; Leadership; Polycentric; Synthesis; Organisation

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of complex and decentralized modern organizations and societies, the understanding of leadership continues to evolve, seeking models that can inspire profound change while operating in dynamic networks. Contemporary leadership studies borrow heavily from management and sociology theories, but often overlook rich historical paradigms. The leadership of Jesus of Nazareth offers a unique and profound case study that transcends purely theological discourse. His ministry demonstrates a rare synthesis between transformational leadership that inspires and changes individuals, and a polycentric system that distributes authority and initiative to a dispersed community. This study argues that Jesus was not only a central charismatic leader, but also the architect of a polycentric movement a network consisting of many autonomous yet connected centers of influence and mission. Although many studies have been conducted separately on Jesus' transformational leadership or on the concept of polycentric mission in Christianity,

integrative analyses that systematically combine these two theoretical lenses to understand the mechanisms of His leadership are still very limited.

Therefore, this article aims to fill this gap by exploring how transformational and polycentric principles not only coexist but also reinforce each other in Jesus' leadership practices, as well as their relevance to leadership in today's interconnected global context. The research question is, what are the transformational and polycentric dimensions of Jesus' leadership?

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership

Historically, James MacGregor Burns was the first to introduce the concept of transformational leadership in his book "Leadership" while studying political leaders, but this term is now used to study organizations where transformational leaders focus on "changing" others to support each other and the organization as a whole (Burn, 1978). This concept was later developed operationally by Bass (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leadership is defined as leadership that inspires followers to go beyond their personal interests, motivates them to achieve performance beyond initial expectations, and ultimately changes both the organization and the individuals within it. Bass emphasizes that transformational leaders function as agents of change who significantly influence the motivation and competence of others in the group. The effectiveness of this model is explained through four main components, known as the "4 I's" (Bass & Riggio, 2006): Idealized Influence: Leaders become trusted and respected role models, acting based on strong values and ethics. They share risks and prioritize the needs of the group.

Inspirational Motivation: Leaders articulate a clear and compelling vision of the future, generating enthusiasm and instilling team spirit to achieve common goals. Intellectual Stimulation: Leaders challenge outdated assumptions, encourage creativity, and encourage followers to solve problems in innovative ways. They create an environment where questions and exploration of new ideas are welcomed. Individualized Consideration: Leaders act as coaches or mentors who pay attention to the unique needs, aspirations, and development of each follower. They provide personalized support and open two-way communication channels.

Transformational Leadership, as a highly influential leadership theory, has two core definitions from its founding figures. Here is a comparison of the two main thinkers:

Aspect	James MacGregor Burns	Bernard M. Bass
Main Focus	Moral process and empowerment	Psychological influence on followers
Core Definition	"Leaders and followers mutually elevate each other to higher levels of motivation and morality." Transformational leaders inspire followers to recognize higher values for the common good.	Leaders inspire followers to transcend personal interests and achieve performance beyond expectations, through influence that builds trust, respect, and admiration.

Aspect	James MacGregor Burns	Bernard M. Bass
Relationship with Other Styles	Mutually exclusive with <i>Transactional Leadership</i> . Both are separate styles.	Can be combined with <i>Transactional Leadership</i> . Both can be applied simultaneously by a leader.
Emphasis on Results	Changes in the values and goals of followers.	Increased motivation and performance of followers.

Source: Author's analysis of Burn's (1978) and Bass's (2006) theories.

Transformational leadership involves comprehensive transformation of several aspects of an organization, such as organizational behavior, culture, personnel, and other stakeholders. In addition, it includes actions taken by leaders to transform themselves (Ghasabeh et al., 2015). Leadership that inspires followers to be fully committed to achieving the common goals of the organization or unit is known as coaching, monitoring, and providing support and challenges. This is part of this leadership style, encouraging followers to think creatively and solve problems (Lin et al., 2022).

From these definitions and interpretations, it becomes clear that transformational leadership involves implementing change in the current circumstances and effectively motivating and inspiring employees to reduce inefficiencies and increase productivity (Noermijati, 2015). This philosophy encourages executives to motivate staff to embrace change and move away from conventional views. It also aims to motivate individuals to initiate new mechanisms through inventive experimentation (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). The concept and practice of transformational leadership has seen substantial growth in interest over the past three decades (Serey et al., 2025).

Transformational leaders give individual consideration to followers, supporting development and achievement through coaching and mentoring (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By practicing "management by walking around" and holding informal meetings, transformational leaders can identify problems, solve problems, and pay attention to the individual needs of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bartolome (1993) argues that a decline in information flow is one of the first warning signs of a problem. Leaders must pay attention to follower behavior and monitor for changes in information flow. Understanding changes in information flow can only be achieved through keen observation and continuous involvement of subordinates. Leaders who regularly communicate with followers are more likely to notice changes in information flow; thus, Transformational Leadership behavior has the potential to address small problems before they become major issues (Bartolome, 1993).

Transformational leadership can be directive or participatory. Requiring higher moral development, transformational leadership is universally recognized as a concept. In addition, contrary to previous expectations, female leaders tend to be more transformational than their male counterparts. Although the six-factor model of transformational/transactional leadership best fits the diversity of the sample according to confirmatory factor analysis, whether fewer factors are necessary remains an open question. Another important research question that has only been partially answered is why transformational leadership is more effective than transactional leadership in various business, military, industrial, hospital, and educational settings (Bass, 1999).

Transformational leadership refers to leaders who strive to create new ideas and perspectives to forge new paths of growth and prosperity for their organizations. By developing commitment, enthusiasm, and loyalty among managers and staff, they mobilize members of the organization to make fundamental changes in the foundation and basis of the organization so that it can be prepared and acquire the necessary capabilities to move in a new direction and achieve higher ideal performance (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016).

Dimensions and Indicators of Transformational Leadership (Bass Model)

Dimensions (The Four I's)	Core Definition	Behavioral Indicators
1. Idealized Influence	Leaders are ethical role models who are admired, trusted, and respected. They put the needs of others above their own and demonstrate steadfast principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act consistently with the values they proclaim. - Sacrifice personal interests for the common good. - Demonstrate strong conviction and determination. - Be a source of pride and inspiration for followers.
2. Inspirational Motivation	Leaders articulate a compelling, meaningful, and optimistic vision of the future. They use symbols and language to inspire the team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate the vision clearly and attractively. - Foster enthusiasm and optimism about the future. - Provide meaningful challenges for the team. - Inspire a spirit of cooperation toward common goals.
3. Intellectual Stimulation	Leaders challenge old assumptions, encourage creativity, and stimulate innovation. They invite followers to look at problems from new perspectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging critical thinking and questioning old methods . - Encouraging creative approaches to problem solving. - Not publicly criticizing mistakes made during the learning process. - Valuing new ideas and solutions from followers.
4. Individualized Consideration	Leaders act as mentors or coaches. They pay attention to the unique needs, abilities, and aspirations of each follower to help them grow.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen attentively to the personal needs of followers. - Assigning challenging tasks as a means of development. - Provide constructive feedback and personal support. - Recognizing the unique contributions of each team member.

Source: Author's analysis of Bass's theory (2006)

Connection with Christian Leadership

In the context of Christianity, these four dimensions are very much in line with the biblical example: Idealized Influence: Jesus is the perfect role model (Philippians 2:5-8). A shepherd whose life is worthy of emulation. Inspirational Motivation: Jesus proclaimed the vision of the "Kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15). A

church leader who conveys the vision of ministry with passion. Intellectual Stimulation: Jesus taught with parables that stimulated thought (Matthew 13). Leaders who encourage the congregation to explore the Bible and discover new applications. Individualized Consideration: Jesus knew and called his disciples personally (John 1:47-48). Leaders who care about the spiritual growth and unique calling of each member of the congregation.

Polycentric Leadership

The concept of "polycentricity" did not originate from a single proponent, but rather emerged independently across various disciplines, each responding to the complexities within their respective fields (Hill, 2023). In the field of law, legal scholar **Lon Fuller** is credited with being the first to use the term *polycentric* in 1978 to describe complex legal disputes or issues involving multiple parties with interrelated interests and positions (), which are difficult to resolve with rigid court decisions that favor only one party (Ainur, 2005).

In relation to leadership styles, sociological studies show that leadership always encourages change and involvement. This creates social cohesion and sets a clear direction. Therefore, it can be concluded that leadership cannot be effective if only one or a few leadership styles are used. Several leadership styles must be represented, as they complement and interact with one another, ensuring the function of leadership. Studies show that leadership is always a polycentric phenomenon that occurs through a network of relationships between these four leadership styles (Gentili, 2021).

Dimensions and Indicators of Polycentric Leadership

Core Dimensions	Description	Behavioral/Application Indicators
1. Distribution of Authority & Decision Making	Leadership functions are not centralized in one individual, but distributed among several leaders or teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic decision-making is carried out collaboratively within the core team. - Authority and responsibility are delegated to leaders in specific areas (e.g., liturgy, pastoral care, youth).
2. Diversity & Autonomy in Unity	Various leadership "centers" have relative autonomy, but remain connected by a shared vision or core values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each department or service unit has the freedom to design programs according to the context. - There is a decentralized structure but with clear communication and accountability mechanisms.
3. Leadership Based on Charisma & Gifts	A leader's influence and legitimacy stem more from their recognized charisma, expertise, or spiritual gifts than from their formal position.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals with natural charisma and competence can emerge as natural leaders in their field. - A person can become a "leader" for a project or initiative without needing to be "appointed" hierarchically.
4. Collaboration	Relationships between leaders are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication and coordination occur

Core Dimensions	Description	Behavioral/Application Indicators
as a Network	more like collaborative networks than pyramidal hierarchies. Coordination is lateral.	directly between functional leaders. - Top leaders act as <i>facilitators</i> and <i>connectors</i> between networks.
5. Resilience & Adaptive Capacity	The organization does not depend on a single figure. If one leader is unable to perform their duties, leadership functions continue to operate.	- Decisions and information are not "stuck" with one person. - The church/organization can adapt and continue to function during leadership transitions.

Source: Author's analysis of Handley and Ostrom's theories

Fundamental Differences in the Development of the Two Theories

Transformational leadership is a leadership theory deliberately developed by social scientists and psychologists. Polysphericity was originally an analytical framework used to understand complex systems in nature, society, and organizations. This concept was later applied to the study of leadership and Christian mission. In the context of Christianity, the concept of polycentricity was adopted to describe a distributed model of leadership and mission, referring to the thinking of scientists such as Ostrom.

Aspects	Transformational Leadership	Leadership Polycentric
Core Definition	A leadership style/process that inspires and motivates followers to achieve profound change and transcend self-interest.	A leadership structure/model that distributes authority among several leaders or focal points.
Key Focus	Transforming individuals and organizations through vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and personal attention.	Distributing leadership functions and authority to build organizational health and resilience.
Structure	Can be applied in any structure (single or team). Often associated with a charismatic central leader.	Rejects a single structure. Inherently a network or collaborative team with multiple leaders.
Change Mechanism	Top-down through the influence of inspiring and empowering leaders.	Lateral through distribution of responsibility and team empowerment. Change comes from many points.
Biblical ideals	The example of Jesus (transforming the lives of His disciples) and the prophets (, calling for repentance).	The Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12) and diverse gifts (Romans 12, Ephesians 4).

Source: Author's analysis of various theories of Transformational and Polycentric Leadership

Strengths & Weaknesses of Each

Transformational leadership, a concept pioneered by James MacGregor Burns and further developed by Bernard M. Bass, is a leadership style that focuses on change and transformation in both individuals and

organizations. Its main strength lies in its visionary and motivational capacity; a transformational leader is able to generate enthusiasm, move people toward a grand shared vision, and overcome resistance to change through charismatic appeal and inspirational articulation of the future (dutriabayu, 2025).

Furthermore, this model has a strong focus on developing followers through individualized consideration, where leaders actively guide, support, and challenge each member to grow, ultimately creating a cadre of followers who are more competent, committed, and independent. The effectiveness of this model is also particularly evident in crisis or transitional situations, where strong, authoritative leadership that can provide certainty and clear direction is needed to navigate uncertainty (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). However, transformational leadership is not without its fundamental weaknesses. Its success is highly dependent on the charisma, credibility, and presence of a central leader, thus carrying a high risk of creating a cult of personality and making the organization vulnerable if the leader makes mistakes or loses influence. Finally, this model often faces serious succession challenges, as it is very difficult to find a replacement with an equivalent combination of charisma, vision, and ability, leaving the organization vulnerable to decline or identity crisis after the departure of its original leader (Arshad et al., 2023).

In polycentric leadership which is rooted in Elinor Ostrom's governance theory and developed in organizational and missiological studies the emphasis is on distributing authority and leadership functions across multiple interconnected and often autonomous centers or nodes. The main advantage of this model is high organizational resilience; because it does not depend on one person or one decision center, the organization can continue to function and adapt even if one or more leaders step down (Ostrom, 2010b).

In addition, the polycentric model encourages broad empowerment by utilizing the gifts, talents, and diverse perspectives within the community, which in turn encourages more people to take responsibility, take initiative, and experience leadership growth. The decision-making process in this system tends to be healthier and more holistic, as it arises from collaboration and consideration of various perspectives, thereby reducing individual bias and increasing a sense of shared ownership of the decisions made (Ostrom, 2010b).

However, polycentric leadership also has a number of weaknesses. The complexity of coordinating multiple leaders and decision centers can slow down and complicate deliberation and execution processes, making it less suitable for situations that require swift action. Without highly effective communication, clear roles, and a strong culture of trust, this system risks internal conflict, overlapping authority, or even unhealthy competition between leadership centers. As a result, in urgent crisis situations that require single command and a firm and unified response, the polycentric model has the potential to experience paralysis or inefficiency (Gentili, 2021; Ostrom, 2010b).

Synthesis in Jesus' Leadership: Overcoming Limitations

Interestingly, studies of the leadership of Jesus of Nazareth as analyzed through the Gospels reveal a sophisticated synthesis that overcomes many of the weaknesses of each model separately. Jesus clearly practiced visionary transformational leadership and focused on the development of His disciples (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Stetzer & Rainer, 2023).

However, at the same time, He deliberately designed a movement that was polycentric. He delegated authority (Matthew 10:1), sent out disciples in pairs and then in larger groups (Luke 10:1), thereby creating many centers of influence and ministry. This action directly reduced the risk of burnout for Him as the central

leader and the risk of a cult of personality, as the focus gradually shifted from His persona alone to the message and mission carried by many people. On the other hand, the strong transformational vision of the "Kingdom of God" and the core values taught by Jesus served as a unifying force and clear moral compass for the entire polycentric network (Stetzer & Rainer, 2023).

This overcomes the potential weaknesses of polycentrism, such as confusion of direction and conflict, because all centers of leadership are aligned by the same vision and principles. Thus, Jesus' leadership offers an integrative model in which charisma and a central (transformational) vision are used not to centralize power, but rather to build capacity and distribute agency to many people (polycentric), creating a movement that is inspiring, resilient, and capable of reproduction (Wright et al., 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative design that focuses on narrative and interpretive analysis. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how Jesus applied the principles of transformational leadership and polycentric leadership in his interactions with his followers and society in general. Data Sources: The Bible: As the primary source, the Bible will be used to identify and analyze examples of Jesus' leadership. Relevant verses will be taken from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Document Analysis by collecting and analyzing relevant documents, such as articles, books, and reports discussing leadership theory and Jesus' situational leadership. This is expected to provide deep insights into how Jesus applied adaptive situational leadership in a biblical context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Dimensions of Transformational Leadership and Its Application to Jesus

Transformational leadership, first developed by Burns and refined by Bass, focuses on a leader's ability to inspire, motivate intellectually, and provide individual consideration to change followers to a higher level of commitment and morality. The application of this theory to the figure of Jesus shows a strong fit (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burn, 1978).

Based on an in-depth analysis of the Gospel narrative, Stetzer & Rainer identified ten specific characteristics that affirm Jesus as the archetype of a transformational leader. These characteristics not only reflect personal charisma, but further form a planned leadership methodology to transform and empower others. His deep investment in his followers became the foundation, where Jesus actively trusted and entrusted the responsibility of ministry to his disciples, an act that shifted them from the position of spectators to active participants (Stetzer & Rainer, 2023).

This was operationally realized through decentralized commissioning, as recorded in Luke 9 and 10, where He sent them out in pairs and independently, thereby training them to be self-reliant and building leadership capacity in many locations at once. His vision of leadership also transcended immediate needs, as evidenced by His long-term orientation seen in His prayer for all future believers (John 17:20), demonstrating an awareness of the Movement's sustainability (Lontoh & Wibowo, 2025). These characteristics are complemented by an authentic concern for community and life balance, as when He wept over Jerusalem and consistently withdrew to pray, modeling integrity and spiritual dependence. Furthermore, His transformative openness to other cultures through interactions with Samaritans and those considered sinners expanded the

scope of His influence and demonstrated the inclusive nature of the kingdom He proclaimed (Stetzer & Rainer, 2023).

Collectively, these ten characteristics demonstrate that Jesus' leadership was designed to create profound change (transformation) in individuals and systems, which is the essence of transformational leadership, while also building the foundation for a polycentric and sustainable network (Wright et al., 2019).

Dimensions of Jesus' Transformational Leadership

Idealized Influence

Jesus deliberately chose to teach His disciples from the position of a δούλος (doulos, servant), explicitly rejecting the conventional title κύριος (kyrios, master) in the context of His teaching (John 13:13-14). The culmination of this teaching was His act of washing the disciples' feet a task culturally reserved for the lowest slaves. In this way, Jesus made Himself the living curriculum. His authority as a teacher was manifested and validated through this radical act of service, thereby subverting the logic of worldly power (Bennema, 2016).

Second, Jesus further elevated his relationship with his disciples from a master-servant dynamic to a φίλος (philos, friend) relationship, stating that everything he had heard from the Father he had made known to them (John 15:15). In this concept of friendship, influence and authority flow from openness, trust, and sharing of life, not from coercion or fear. This is a transformative pedagogical method, in which disciples are invited to enter into the understanding and mission of the Teacher through the bond of Fellowship (Bennema, 2016).

Inspirational Motivation

Jesus provided a profound model for motivation by emphasizing spiritual transformation, personal connection, and a holistic approach to learning. These sources reveal that Jesus' motivational methods transcended traditional teachings, focusing on individual transformation through spiritual and moral development (Saharjo, 2021).

His approach is characterized by:

1. Spiritual motivation: Connecting learning with deeper life values (S. Sumiati et al., 2021)
2. Personalized teaching: Not only transferring knowledge, but touching the heart and conscience (Saharjo, 2021)
3. Contextual learning: Using relevant methods that meet the needs of the audience (Sunarko, 2020)

Critically, Jesus viewed motivation as more than just academic achievement it was about holistic personal growth, spiritual understanding, and character development (Budiyana, 2021). Christian leaders who take this approach enable their followers to experience a comprehensive life transformation through education.

Intellectual Stimulation

Jesus demonstrated profound intellectual stimulation as a transformational leader by challenging conventional thinking, encouraging innovation, and fostering critical thinking among his disciples. He stimulated minds through parables, rephrasing tough questions (e.g., "Who is my neighbor?"), and modeling

new, counter-cultural approaches to problem-solving and service, such as washing feet (Demesi et al., 2022). Key aspects of Jesus' intellectual stimulation in leadership include (Zai et al., 2023): Challenging Assumptions: Jesus actively encouraged followers to question traditional, rigid interpretations of law, pushing them toward a deeper understanding of intent and mercy. Encouraging Innovation: Rather than following established, rigid, or safe paths, Jesus introduced new ways of ministry and problem-solving, such as calming the sea or using parables to redefine social norms. Fostering Critical Thinking: By using questions to answer questions, Jesus forced his followers to think critically, analyze situations deeply, and arrive at conclusions rather than simply feeding them information. Problem-Solving and Creativity: He demonstrated a high level of intellectual engagement by interpreting situations in new, transformative ways, encouraging a creative mindset in his followers.

Individualized Consideration

Jesus's individualized consideration includes: Targeted Mentoring: Jesus adjusted his approach to individual disciples, such as addressing Peter's specific need for restoration and leadership, or recognizing Nathanael's character before they met. Empathy and Support: He engaged in two-way dialogue, creating "teachable moments" during their journeys (e.g., in Luke 9:51-56), which addressed the immediate concerns and emotional needs of his followers.

Developing Potential: Jesus recognized the potential in common people, like fishermen, and nurtured their skills to become leaders, demonstrating patience with their mistakes. Personalized Interaction: He provided personalized care for the whole person, attending to both the spiritual and, at times, physical needs of his followers to foster their growth. This approach allowed Jesus to foster a deep, relational, and supportive climate where followers felt understood and valued, which is fundamental to transformational leadership (Dixon, 2021).

Case Study: Peter's Radical Transformation

The transformation of Simon Peter from an impulsive and doubtful fisherman into "Peter" (rock), the chief spokesman and leader of the early church, is the most obvious empirical evidence of the effectiveness of Jesus' transformational leadership. Jesus saw the potential behind his rash nature and actively invested time, teaching, correction, and restoration in him. This process reached its climax after the resurrection, when Jesus restored Peter who had denied Him (John 21). The results of this transformation are clearly seen in the Book of Acts, where Peter appears as bold, filled with the Holy Spirit, and a wise leader (Acts 2-5). Peter became a clear example of how Jesus' leadership not only commanded, but fundamentally changed a person's character and capacity.

Jesus' leadership in the Gospels not only fulfills, but also surpasses all dimensions of contemporary transformational theory. He is the perfect prototype who shows that true transformational leadership is rooted in divine character, service, and sacrificial love. More than just providing a model, Jesus is the means that enables transformation to occur through His work of redemption and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, He Himself is the goal of that transformation becoming like Christ is the hoped-for end result (Colossians 1:28-29). Thus, for Christian leaders, Jesus is the unmatched paradigm, the empowering source of authority, and the ultimate goal of every transformational leadership endeavor. Applying His principles of leadership,

which are based on universal love and exemplary behavior, remains an urgent calling and relevance for the church and society in every age.

Jesus' Polycentric Leadership

While transformational leadership explains how to lead, polycentric leadership explains the structure of leadership. Polysentric theory is rooted in Elinor Ostrom's governance theory and developed in the context of global missiology, responding to the outdated "West-to-the-world" model. Joseph W. Handley, Jr. extensively developed this concept as a model that is "collaborative, communal, and empowering of multiple centers of influence" (Ostrom, 2010a).

The concept of polycentricity, which literally means "many centers," has its roots in various disciplines, including governance, economics, and urban studies. In the context of organization and leadership, polycentricity refers to a system in which several decision-making units, each with autonomous authority, function independently but are interdependent. This system challenges the traditional paradigms of centralization and pyramidal hierarchy by distributing authority, promoting diversity, and encouraging collaborative approaches that enhance resilience and adaptability (Ostrom, 2010b).

In the study of contemporary Christian missiology and leadership, this concept has been significantly developed by Joseph W. Handley, Jr. through his doctoral research and book, *Polycentric Mission Leadership*. Handley defines polycentric mission leadership as "collaborative and communal leadership that empowers multiple centers of influence and diverse leaders to meet today's challenges." This model emerged as a response to dissatisfaction with the "top-down" leadership model centered on a single figure (leader-centric), which often marginalizes the voices and perspectives of those on the periphery (Handley, 2022).

This model is characterized by six key attributes:

Polycentric Characteristics	Brief Description	Reflection on Jesus' Leadership
Charismatic	Spiritual, character-driven, led by God.	Rooted in His relationship with the Father and His spiritual authority.
Collaborative	Working as a team, equal partners, synergy between institutions.	Calling disciples to participate in His work, not just as executors.
Communal	Prioritizing collective strength and <i>a sense of community</i> .	Building a community of students who live together and serve one another.
Relational	Building deep relational capital and trust.	Prioritizing personal relationships (e.g., with Peter, Mary, Martha).
Entrepreneurial	Granting freedom and autonomy to lead within the system.	Granting authority and space for students to act (Matthew 10:1).
Diverse	Valuing and utilizing diversity in voices, cultures, and backgrounds.	His diverse circle of followers (fishermen, tax collectors, women).

Source: Author's analysis of Handley and Ostrom's theory

The theological basis of this model is the Trinity where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit operate in a polycentric unity without hierarchy and the concept of the "Body of Christ" which has many members with different functions (Romans 12:4-5). The mission phrase is now "from all people to all places," describing the polycentric reality of the 21st century.

Jesus' Polysentric Leadership in the Gospels

Polycentric leadership is defined as collaborative and communal leadership that empowers multiple centers of influence and diverse leaders to address complex challenges. By exploring the Trinitarian foundation, the practice of commissioning, acceptance of charisma, and His rejection of worldly models of power, this study argues that Jesus inherently practiced and institutionalized a model of distributed and multiplicative leadership (Braithwaite & Handley, 2022).

Jesus' transformational vision is inherently polycentric because it aims to multiply leadership. Instead of centering all ministry on Himself, Jesus proactively distributes authority and responsibility:

Empowerment for Mission: Jesus sent His disciples out two by two, giving them authority to heal and proclaim the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10:1, 5-8). This is a clear act of delegating authority (Wilson, 2022). **Forming a Collaborative Team:** Jesus formed a group of Twelve Apostles, who, despite having a figure like Peter, functioned as a collective that learned together and was then sent out (Hill, 2023).

Preparation for His Physical Absence: Jesus' entire ministry, especially in the days leading up to His ascension, was directed toward preparing His disciples to become independent leaders. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) were given to the community of disciples, not just to one individual. In Luke 24, He "opened their minds" to understand the Scriptures and declared them to be "witnesses of these things," establishing them as centers for the spread of the new gospel (Hill, 2023).

Correcting Hierarchical Mentality: When the disciples argued about who was the greatest, Jesus emphatically affirmed the model of servant leadership: "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:43). This principle deconstructs the pyramid of power and supports a distributed model of service (Hill, 2023; Wilson, 2022).

The Pillar of Jesus' Polycentric Leadership in the Gospel Narrative

The application of this framework to the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels reveals a striking consistency. Jesus not only taught principles of community and empowerment but also operationally built a polycentric movement. This can be seen through four main pillars.

Trinitarian Theological Foundation:

The Paradigm of Equal Relationships. The nature of Jesus' polycentric leadership is rooted in the reality of the Trinity. The pattern of relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three Persons who are equal, different in role, yet one in essence, purpose, and love becomes the highest paradigm for relationships in the community of His followers. Jesus explicitly prayed that this Trinitarian model of unity would be reproduced among His disciples: "*that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You...*" (, Braithwaite & Handley, 2022) John 17:21. This forms the foundation for a community where

authority and influence are shared, not centered on one individual, reflecting "symmetrical and polycentric reciprocity" in divine life.

Distribution of Authority and Delegation:

Building Multiplicity of Agents. Contrary to the worldly messianic model that gathers passive followers around a king, Jesus proactively and repeatedly *distributed authority and sent out* His disciples. The sending out of the twelve disciples (Matthew 10:1-15) and the seventy disciples (Luke 10:1-20) was a deliberate leadership strategy. By giving them the power to proclaim the Kingdom of God, heal, and cast out demons, Jesus transformed his followers from spectators into active co-workers (Brubaker, 2013). This action created "many scattered points of service," actualizing the mission not from a single center (Jerusalem or Himself alone), but from many centers moving simultaneously. This practice became the precursor to the understanding of mission "*from everyone to everywhere*," which is at the heart of contemporary polycentric missiology (Handley Jr, 2025).

Recognition and Utilization of Charismatic Diversity (APEST).

Although the APEST terminology (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher) comes from Ephesians 4:11, its basic principle namely, diversity of gifts within one body is clearly reflected in the way Jesus chose and formed His leadership team. He called individuals with very different backgrounds, personalities, and tendencies: Peter, who was spontaneous and enthusiastic; John, who was contemplative and relational; Matthew, who was systematic and meticulous; and Thomas, who was critical. Jesus did not try to make them all the same, but rather empowered their uniqueness in unity of mission. This is in line with one of Handley's six characteristics of polycentric leaders, namely Diversity, which values diverse leadership gifts and the ability to work across cultures. This diversity forms a diverse and complementary team that is far more resilient than a homogeneous group (Dash, 2021; Demesi et al., 2022).

Explicit Rejection of the Hierarchical Model of Worldly Leadership. Jesus repeatedly and emphatically corrected the hierarchical and competitive mentality among His disciples. When a dispute arose about who was the greatest, Jesus reversed the logic of worldly power: "*It shall not be so among you. Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave*," Matthew 20:26-27 (Handley Jr., 2025; Serey et al., 2025). The foot washing event (John 13:1-20) is a dramatic demonstration of this principle, where the Leader takes on the most menial role to model leadership as service. This rejection dismantles the pyramidal structure and opens space for a circular model of leadership, where greatness is measured by the contribution of service, not by positions of authority.

Six Characteristics of Polycentric Leadership Exemplified by Jesus

Based on Joseph Handley's research, polycentric leadership manifests six characteristics that are clearly seen in the life of Jesus (Handley, 2022):

Characteristic	Description	Manifestation in Jesus' Leadership
Charismatic	Rooted in character, reliability, and faithful presence, not merely personal charm.	Jesus' authority stems from His deep relationship with the Father (John 5:19) and His perfect integrity, which radiates power and draws crowds.
Communal	Always leading within and through community.	Jesus lived in an intimate community with the twelve disciples, teaching and shaping them in the context of their journey and life together.
Collaborative	Working together in a team-centered paradigm, where no one is above anyone else.	Jesus involved his disciples in miracles (feeding 5,000 people), sent them out two by two, and listened to their input (though he did not always follow it, as in the case of James and John's mother's request).
Relational	Valuing the depth of relationships that go beyond mere working partnerships.	Jesus knew each disciple personally (John 1:47-48), restored Peter after his denial (John 21), and showed different levels of attention to Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and Zacchaeus.
Entrepreneurial	Giving freedom and trust to act independently in the local context.	By sending His disciples out, Jesus gave them the freedom to learn, take initiative, and even face failure (see Mark 9:18) as part of the formation process.
Diverse	Accepting and utilizing the diversity of leaders and leadership styles.	The diverse composition of the disciples in terms of profession, temperament, and social background shows the value that Jesus placed on diversity in His team.

Source: Author's analysis of Handley's theory

The Gospel narrative shows that Jesus Christ was not merely an individual transformational leader, but rather the architect and driving force behind a polycentric leadership system. By basing His model on the Trinity relationship, radically distributing authority, valuing diverse charisms, and consistently rejecting worldly power hierarchies, Jesus built a movement that was resilient, adaptive, and multiplicative.

This movement does not depend on the physical presence of a single leader, but is designed to develop through many interconnected centers of influence a church as a living "network." This understanding provides a solid theological foundation for a polycentric leadership model that is increasingly relevant in today's global church, which is called to witness and serve in a complex, polarized, and interconnected world. Carrying on the legacy of Jesus' leadership means continuing the commitment to build collaborative communities, empower every member of His body, and send many people to be agents of change wherever they are.

Synthesis of Transformational Leadership (building a transformative vision) with Polycentric Leadership (sharing authority within the team) in the modern church.

From the above analysis, it becomes clear that Jesus practiced a transformational leadership that was polycentric in nature. His transformational spirit consisting of an inspiring vision, an ideal example, a thought-provoking approach, and personal attention was the catalyst that transformed fishermen, tax collectors, and other ordinary people into future leaders (Stetzer & Rainer, 2023). The polycentric body He built that is, a community of empowered, commissioned, and prepared disciples is the means that ensures that transformation and mission will endure, grow, and remain resilient in the face of challenges.

Therefore, in answering the research question, Bass's aspects of transformational leadership (4 I's) are consistently manifested in the teaching methods, modeling, and individual coaching applied by Jesus. This manifestation is not an end in itself, but rather a means to realize a polycentric model, namely by raising up, training, and sending out many disciples as new leaders. For the contemporary church, the integration of the two offers a way out of the dichotomy between centralized visionary leaders and flat, directionless committee structures. A healthy church needs a transformational "soul" to obtain a vision, passion, and moral values that bring about change, as well as a polycentric "body" to distribute the implementation of that vision widely, thereby creating a dynamic, resilient, and biblical community.

Application in the Church Context

A church with this model may have a "Shepherding Team" consisting of several people with different gifts (teaching, pastoral, administration, mission). They lead collectively. In addition, there are autonomous leaders who are given full trust to develop areas such as youth ministry, music, or small communities, where they have the freedom to be creative as long as it is in line with the church's vision (Stetzer & Rainer, 2023). This idea is rooted in the biblical teaching of the Church as the "Body of Christ" (Romans 12:4-5), where many members with different gifts work together in unity (Wilson, 2022).

Empowered Network Leadership Team

Strategy: Form a "Core Ministry Team" or "Visionary Council" consisting of people with different gifts (e.g., Shepherds, Teachers, Mission Leaders, Administrators). This team is collectively responsible for the strategic direction of the church (Stetzer & Rainer, 2023; Wilson, 2022).

Combination of Two Models: The primary leader (such as the senior pastor) acts as a transformational facilitator who ensures the team remains focused on the transformational vision. Meanwhile, each team member is given clear authority (polycentric) to lead and make decisions in their area of expertise. Biblical Relevance: This principle is similar to how Moses formed a council of elders to share the burden of leadership.

Small Group Discipleship with Multiple Leaders

Strategy: Develop small discipleship groups that are not led by a single figure, but by several mentors (with diverse backgrounds, ages, and spiritual gifts). Each mentor shares their perspective, while group participants are also encouraged to serve one another (Burn, 1978; Hill, 2023).

Combination of Two Models: These groups share a transformational vision: to grow in Christlikeness. However, their leadership structure is polycentric, where teaching, nurturing, and intellectual challenges come from several "centers" at once.

Biblical Relevance: This model reflects how Paul trained and sent Timothy, Titus, and many other colleagues as local leaders within a network.

Summary of Modern Application and Biblical Examples

Combined Concept	Modern Application	Biblical Example (as a reference)
Shared Vision	The core team collectively formulates and articulates the vision from various perspectives.	Jesus taught and sent out the twelve disciples to continue His work (Matthew 10:1-8).
Distributed Authority	Each leader in the team is given space and full authority in their field (e.g., community service, worship).	Moses delegated authority to the judges (Exodus 18:13-26). Paul recognized the authority of the elders in each church (Acts 14:23).
Systematic Leadership Development	The process of identifying, training, and assigning responsibility to prospective leaders from various backgrounds was carried out actively.	Jesus spent years shaping His disciples. Paul deliberately took Silas and Timothy with him on his missionary journeys.
Collaborative Decision Making	Major decisions are made through deliberation within the core team, taking into account input from various sides.	The apostles and elders in Jerusalem held a meeting to make important decisions together (Acts 15).

Source: developed by the author based on

Combining these two models requires a paradigm shift from a single leadership model (called "pastor-centric" and can conflict with the nature of the church as a fellowship) to a more collaborative model. Research shows this is effective, but its implementation in Indonesia needs to pay attention to adaptive strategies to overcome cultural and structural barriers.

Significance and Contribution of the Study

This study is expected to make a dual contribution. *First*, in the field of leadership and organizational studies, this research offers an integrative historical model that shows how the strong inspiration of a central leader can be effectively combined with empowerment and decentralization, a model that is highly relevant to non-profit organizations, social movements, and modern corporations operating in global networks.

Second, in the realm of theology and missiology, this research provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the internal dynamics of the early Jesus community and the success of spreading His teachings, while refreshing the understanding of Christian leadership by critically engaging with contemporary social theory. Thus, this article not only bridges the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, but also invites practical reflection for leaders in various fields to emulate a model of leadership that both inspires change and empowers communities.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the leadership of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be adequately understood through a single modern leadership theory framework. An integrative analysis through the lens of Transformational Leadership and Polycentric Systems reveals an adaptable and deliberate synthesis. Jesus simultaneously functioned as a powerful center of transformational inspiration with a clear vision, inspiring motivation, and deep attention to the individual development of his disciples and as the architect of a polycentric design that strategically distributed authority, mission, and responsibility within a decentralized network of followers.

This synthesis is not accidental, but rather a mutually reinforcing leadership mechanism. The transformational dimension (charisma, vision, teaching) creates a "unifying force" and a solid foundation of values for the entire movement. Meanwhile, the polycentric practices (delegation, commissioning, appreciation of diversity) function as a "multiplier" that transforms that central inspiration into widespread and independent action. Thus, Jesus proactively overcomes the main weaknesses of each model: His central charisma is used not to create dependence, but to build capacity and independence, thereby reducing the risk of leader burnout and succession crises. On the other hand, the transformational vision and core values prevent the polycentric network from fracturing and losing direction, overcoming potential weaknesses such as conflict and slowness.

This study expands the application of transformational and polycentric leadership theory by providing a historical-integrative model. This model offers a new paradigm for contemporary organizations whether in the business, social, or religious spheres that are struggling to design leadership that both inspires profound change and builds organizational resilience through distributed design. This research also contributes to theological and missiological studies by demonstrating that the success of the spread and sustainability of the early Christian movement was rooted in Jesus' genius leadership design, which combined clarity of vision with structural flexibility.

For further research, this study paves the way for comparative studies of other integrative leadership models throughout history, as well as empirical research to test the application of the "transformational-polycentric" synthesis in the context of modern organizations today. Thus, Jesus' leadership remains a source of relevant and transformative insight, not only as a religious figure, but also as a superior and timeless leadership paradigm.

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