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# SPIRITUAL FORMATION: RETRIEVING PERICHORESIS AS A MODEL FOR SHARED LEADERSHIP IN THE MARKETPLACE

MICHAEL L. DAVIS

## Abstract

Although shared leadership has been identified as a product of the leadership research in the last quarter of the twentieth-century, this article seeks to provide a theological basis for the practice of shared leadership in the marketplace by Christians. Weaving together *perichoresis*, union with Christ, and spiritual formation, I propose that maturing Christians may practice shared leadership as a reflection of the Trinitarian model.

## Introduction

“Like everything else that evolves over time, a new type of leadership is emerging. And many of the old rules just don’t apply anymore.”<sup>1</sup> Comments such as this abound in the leadership literature of the twenty-first century. Change is in the air. Daily researchers publish new leadership articles touting life-changing approaches to the “world’s oldest vocation.”<sup>2</sup> The study of leadership reminds one of the old wedding mantra: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. Shared leadership is one of the new models of leadership finding favor in nearly every sector of today’s society.

Some brides attempt to fulfill tradition by having both something old and something new as part of their wedding day attire. Skillful researchers will find something old about

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Sanaghan and Paulette A. Gabriel, “Why Top-Down Leadership Doesn’t Work Anymore,” The Key Leadership Blog, entry posted August 28, 2012, <http://keyleadership.com/wordpress/why-top-down-leadership-doesnt-work-anymore/> (accessed March 7, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Remy De Gourmont, “Concepts of Leadership,” in *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, ed. Bernard M. Bass, (New York: Free Press, 2008), 3.

shared leadership as well. What appears to be a new concept has roots in time and eternity. For Christian leaders, shared leadership is much more than an approach to leading others. Authentic shared leadership is a reflection of the Christian's sanctification process. Although shared leadership serves as a contemporary model for the marketplace, we may understand it more deeply as an expression of mature spiritual formation rooted in the biblically-based doctrine of *perichoresis*.<sup>3</sup> According to James Torrance, this patristic word describes God as "the God who has his true being as the Father of the Son, and as the Son of the Father in the Spirit. God is love, and has his true being in communion, in the mutual indwelling of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup> Further, the persons of the Godhead occupy the same infinite space because the Father and the Son are both fully God. The Father, Son, and Spirit are "in each other in indissoluble union." The union of the Father, Son, and Spirit does not detract from the uniqueness of either.<sup>5</sup>

The significance of this article is found in its contention that shared leadership is not a new model identified by modern theorists and practitioners, namely Craig Pearce and Jay Conger, but that it finds its genesis prior to the creation of humankind. Shared leadership is rooted in a retrieval<sup>6</sup> of the doctrine of the perichoretic

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<sup>3</sup> The doctrine of *perichoresis*, in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 1998), 366, refers to "the teaching that the life of each of the persons flows through each of the others, so each sustains each of the others and each has direct access to the consciousness of the others."

<sup>4</sup> James Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Our Contemporary Situation," in *The Forgotten Trinity*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (London: BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House, 1989), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Keicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 158.

<sup>6</sup> J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*, (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2011), 4. Billings believes that "a theology of retrieval" involves participating with the saints of past ages through reading of Scripture. The writings and teachings of old may be useful for modern readers to gain a better understanding of current theological issues through the retrieved wisdom of the past. In this paper, the retrieval of the doctrine of *perichoresis* related to union with Christ serves

relationship of the persons of the Trinity and *may be* a result of the believer's union with Christ.

As Christians are positioned *in Christ* and Christ is a member of the Trinity, it stands to reason that Christians find their place in the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity. It is this sharing of the nature and practices found in the Trinitarian relationship of the Godhead that enables maturing disciples to practice intentionally shared leadership.<sup>7</sup> My contention does not discount the work of common grace in the lives of non-believers who may decide to practice shared leadership from a pragmatic stance. However, I suggest that one outcome of maturing spiritual formation is Christ-likeness, particularly in the area of leadership.

Miroslav Volf describes the leadership style of the Godhead as *polycentric reciprocity* or a relationship "characterized neither by a pyramidal dominance of the one nor by a hierarchical bipolarity between the one and the many."<sup>8</sup> It is this polycentric reciprocity that foreshadows the modern model of shared leadership, which takes into account the changing role of leaders and followers in organizations. The model does not focus on the position power of a leader but instead focuses on the critical functions of leadership as diagnosis and action taking. Any

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as the basis for a biblical approach to shared leadership. Although hierarchical understandings of the Trinity may provide a model for hierarchical leadership the writer contends that the perichoretic, mutual, interpenetrating relationship as exemplified by the Persons of the Godhead serve as sufficient basis for a biblical understanding of shared leadership as a model for marketplace leaders. However, other leadership theorists may devise an alternative model of Trinitarian leadership based on alternative presuppositions of the nature of God.

<sup>7</sup> Although the work of Leonardo Boff suggests that *perichoresis* may be a model for human community, I am not attempting to make that point. However, this article does suggest that maturing spiritual formation, as a result of the believer's union with Christ, positions her/him in a *perichoresis* with the Trinity and this position *in Christ* influences the leadership practices of the believer as they become more like Christ. See Leonard Boff, *Trinity and Society* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 217.

team member can perform the critical leadership functions to assess the current effectiveness of the team and then take appropriate action.<sup>9</sup>

My research of shared leadership in the marketplace by Christian leaders suggests that shared leadership finds real-life expression through:

1. Collaborative climate strategies
2. An understanding of the power of team vision
3. Removal of leadership walls
4. Safe communication
5. Enrichment of the lives of all stakeholders
6. Lived-out values
7. Recognition of the value of people.<sup>10</sup>

This article will review the current literature relevant to shared leadership as an expression of mature discipleship made possible by *perichoresis* and union with Christ. I will develop the argument in three phases reflecting the Trinitarian roots of shared leadership as spiritual formation: *perichoresis* via union with Christ, shared leadership via *perichoresis*, and mature discipleship via shared leadership. Finally, I will draw useful conclusions and applications for spiritual formation.

## Literature Review

Theorists often view shared leadership as a twentieth-century phenomenon. This article is an attempt to articulate my belief that shared leadership is foundationally Christian in nature and character. One may find the roots of this leadership style in an understanding of the Trinitarian idea of *perichoresis* and union with Christ, as well as evidence of maturing spiritual formation. Development of this argument includes a review of literature related to shared leadership, *perichoresis*, and spiritual formation informed by the Christian's union with Christ. Although a wealth of

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<sup>9</sup> Susan E. Kogler Hill, "Team Leadership," in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Peter G. Northouse (Los Angeles: Sage, 2010), 258.

<sup>10</sup> Michael L. Davis, "Intentional Practice of Shared Leadership in the Marketplace by Christian Leaders: A Multi-case Study" (dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 74–78.

material exists related to each of these topics, a review of selected materials will suffice to build the framework for my thesis: the *intentional practice* of shared leadership may be understood as an outgrowth of a mature spiritual formation process.

### *Shared Leadership*

Shared leadership, particularly in the form of leadership teams, is the fastest growing style of leadership today.<sup>11</sup> Craig Pearce and Jay Conger define shared leadership as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both.”<sup>12</sup> Pearce and Conger contend that the study of leadership did not evolve until the industrial revolution and that a fascination with the concept of shared leadership was not present until the 1970s. According to Pearce and Conger, “By the mid-1990s, several scholars began mining this fertile intellectual soil. These scholars, independently and simultaneously, developed models that directly addressed shared leadership. Conditions were finally right for the acceptance of this seemingly radical departure from the traditional view of leadership.”<sup>13</sup>

Amy Edmondson offers an understanding of teaming, a particular type of shared leadership. Edmondson believes, “Success requires a shift from organizing to execute to a new way of working that supports collaboration, innovation, and organizational learning.”<sup>14</sup> Edmondson sees teaming as a reaction to the work of Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, and refers to her concept as a verb and rather than a bounded, static entity.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, twentieth-century

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<sup>11</sup> Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), xi.

<sup>12</sup> Pearce and Conger, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Pearce and Conger, 13.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Edmondson, *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate, and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 1, Location 604–612 .

<sup>15</sup> Edmondson, Location 426–437.

leadership scholars tend to hold an understanding that shared leadership is a modern construct.

Some contemporary writers articulate shared leadership from a theological stance. Peter Dickens buttresses the idea that shared leadership finds its roots in the activity of the Trinity as he writes,

The Trinity is an extraordinary model of distributed leadership. The concept of heroic leadership invariably suggests a single leader.... This [shared leadership model] can only happen when the leaders shift from power to service as their plausibility structure. They must fully embrace not only the concept of service, but intentionally lead from a position that is utterly devoid of power.<sup>16</sup>

Jimmy Long also suggests that the Jerusalem Council, described in Acts 15, serves as an early Church historical example of the modern shared leadership paradigm. According to Long, “This shared leadership model seemed to be pervasive in the early days of the church.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Perichoresis*

In recent years, leadership theorists have seen a connection between *perichoresis* and shared leadership. George Cladis has written a popular work on the topic. *Leading the Team-Based Church*, completed in 1999, seeks to “bring vital faith and church organization closer together to serve effectively the Kingdom of God in a postmodern culture.”<sup>18</sup> Cladis is one who has encouraged the Christian leadership community to consider the influence of the Trinity on Christian leadership. According to Cladis, John of Damascus used *perichoresis* in terms of a *circle dance*, emphasizing the circularity of the holy dance performed by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Further, Cladis writes, “A

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<sup>16</sup> Jimmy Long, *The Leadership Jump: Building Partnerships between Existing and Emerging Christian Leaders*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2009), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Long, 98.

<sup>18</sup> George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), x.

perichoretic image of the Trinity is that of the three persons of God in constant movement in a circle that implies intimacy, equality, unity yet distinction, and love.”<sup>19</sup> This description of God is both a “biblical and theological model for building meaningful ministry teams in the church of the twenty-first century.”<sup>20</sup>

Other theologians see *perichoresis* in a different light. Gregory Nazianzen used the term “to refer to the interpenetration of the two natures of Christ, both divine and human.”<sup>21</sup> According to James Womack, *perichoresis* originally “derived from a Stoic term for ‘mixture’ which literally meant ‘a mutual coextension of dissimilar parts entering into one another at all points.’”<sup>22</sup>

### *Christian Formation*

Robert Letham’s work serves as the bridge that connects *perichoresis* and the doctrine of union with Christ. In his book, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology*, Letham refers his readers to John 14:10–11: “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I said to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.” Letham concludes,

This is a reference to what in Trinitarian theology is termed the perichoresis, the mutual indwelling of the three Trinitarian persons. In the words of Gerald Bray, the persons occupy the same infinite divine space. The Father and the Son are both fully God. All that can be said to be God is possessed by both. Yet they are distinct. The Father and the

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<sup>19</sup> Cladis, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Cladis, 4.

<sup>21</sup> James A. Womack, “A Comparison of Perichoresis in the Writings of Gregory of Nazianzus and John of Damascus,” (Master’s thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Womack, 10–11.

Son—and, by extension, the Spirit—are in each other in indissoluble union. This union does not infringe the distinctness of either. Jesus goes on to say that when the Spirit comes, he will indwell his disciples. Moreover, they will then know for themselves that he and the Father are in each other. On top of this, they will also know that Christ is in them presumably by the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Letham presents clear arguments that union with Christ is necessary for Christian formation to take place in the life of the believer. He writes, “Union with Christ is the foundational basis for sanctification and the dynamic force that empowers it.”<sup>24</sup> Letham’s work serves as a foundational source for this article.

Millard Erickson, in *Whose Tampering with the Trinity*, understands Bruce Ware’s concept of the Trinity as an asymmetrical *perichoresis*, based on Jesus’ words in John 14:10–11. Erickson writes, “Here there is asymmetry, in which Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in him. The works Jesus does are not just his own, but the Father is doing his work through Jesus. Ware would strongly agree and probably would see this text as supporting his position, although he does not specifically cite it.”<sup>25</sup>

In *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*, J. Todd Billings describes his theology of retrieval, that is “hearing the voices of the past in such a way that they are allowed to exceed and overcome the chatter of the present.”<sup>26</sup> Billings describes a theology of union with Christ as a contrast to the understanding of modern American society. He writes,

A theology of union with Christ centers Christian identity in Jesus Christ himself, and in the claim of

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 48.

<sup>24</sup> Letham, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Millard Erickson, *Whose Tampering with the Trinity: An Assessment of the Subordination Debate*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 6, Location 1880–1884.

<sup>26</sup> Billings, 2.



the Triune God upon the Christian. Salvation is not self-centered but is a renewal and restoration of the self precisely through orienting the self toward God, toward the church as the body of Christ, and toward the neighbor. Individual believers discover their true identity in communion rather than in a pragmatic, individualistic approach to salvation, and tinkering is replaced by a posture of humble gratitude before God. The God encountered in union with Jesus Christ is at once more majestic and more intimate than the deistic-tending God of the West.<sup>27</sup>

As a transitional step to a preview of literature related to spiritual formation, Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, in *Christian Formation*, present a Christian model for spiritual formation. Jones and Wilder share their conception of formation in Christ as a circle, much like the rings of a tree. In this model, “A dynamic interaction occurs among the believer’s faith in God; the means of growth in faith through love of others, love for God, and suffering; and the shaping of one’s identity in Christ.”<sup>28</sup> Jones and Wilder provide a framework for moving Christian formation beyond a mere theological understanding of union with Christ and its implications for Christian sanctification, toward practical implementation in the work-a-day world.

Dwight J. Zscheile in “The Trinity, Leadership, and Power” provides a final contribution to this discussion of leadership, *perichoresis*, and Christian formation through union with Christ. In this article, Zscheile calls Christian leaders to remembrance of their identity in Christ and in the community of the church. Zscheile, writing from a deeply Trinitarian view, suggests “The renewal of a historical, narrative, and eschatological understanding of God’s self-revelation as three persons invites Christian leaders to help their communities place themselves within

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<sup>27</sup> Billings, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, “Faith Development and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 195.

God's unfolding plot."<sup>29</sup> Zscheile further suggests that "when Christian leaders, in the power of the Spirit, cultivate and guide communities of unity and diversity, mutuality and openness, creativity and concern, passion and participation, they live into the promise of Jesus' prayer" in John 17:21–22.<sup>30</sup>

### *Synthesis of Ideas*

Two additional sources advance the argument of this study of a perichoretic basis for shared leadership as a product of mature spiritual formation. Constantine R. Campbell, in *Paul and Union with Christ*, concludes that the result of union with Christ is positive Christian living. Campbell writes, "It is clear that union with Christ relates to the full variety of believers' actions, characteristics, and status. This is such that *in Christ* language serves as shorthand for indicating that a person is a believer."<sup>31</sup> Clearly, Campbell understands that Christians, because of their location *in Christ*, will become conformed to his image. This is spiritual formation at its finest. Campbell continues his thoughts by offering, "Christian discipleship means identification with the crucified Lord."<sup>32</sup>

A second work that helps synthesize the concepts addressed in this article is *Perichoretic Salvation*. James D. Gifford presents a harmony of several doctrines as he argues that "the soteriological union—the union of the believer and Christ—constitutes a third type of perichoretic relationship; that is, Christ and the believer mutually indwell and participate in one another analogously to the way the persons of the Trinity do."<sup>33</sup> Gifford presents a robust argument to support the current thesis that shared

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<sup>29</sup> Dwight J. Zscheile, "The Trinity, Leadership, and Power," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6(2) (Fall 2007): 62.

<sup>30</sup> Zscheile, 62.

<sup>31</sup> Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 387.

<sup>32</sup> Campbell, 387.

<sup>33</sup> James D. Gifford, *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer's Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 2.

leadership flows from mature Christian formation as modeled by *perichoresis*.

### ***Perichoresis* via Union with Christ**

The process of Christian sanctification is rooted in the believer's union with Christ. Jesus taught his disciples the necessity of being *in Christ* (John 14:20, 15:1–17, 17:20–23). Either as dear children loved by the Father rather than orphans, as branches of the Vine, or as gifts of the Father to the Son, believers find their fulfillment *in Christ*. Amazingly, Jesus articulated a foundational principle of shared leadership—unity. Because Jesus knew what his disciples would face in the coming days, he wanted them to understand the importance of unity. However, his desire for unity moved beyond relationships with each other, and ultimately to unity with the Father.<sup>34</sup>

Andreas J. Kostenberger offers further insight concerning the believer's union with Christ as a unifying principle for Christian living based on Jesus teaching found in John 17:

Believers' unity is neither self-generated nor an end in itself. Believers' "complete" unity results from being taken into the unity of God, and, once unified, believers will be able to bear witness to the true identity of Jesus as the Sent One of God. Unless they are unified, how can they expect to give authentic, credible testimony to the Father, who is united with the Son and the Spirit in revealing himself and his salvation in Christ? Secure in the Father's love, the same love with which he loved his Son, believers will be able to express and proclaim the Father's love to a dark and hostile world.<sup>35</sup>

Gerald Borchert echoes Kostenberger's assessment of the purpose of unity in the body of Christ when he writes, "Oneness is a means to enable the world to realize what

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<sup>34</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Robert Yarborough and Robert H. Stein, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: BakerAcademic, 2004), 497.

<sup>35</sup> Kostenberger, 498–99.

God has been doing.”<sup>36</sup>

The believer’s union with Christ, unity with the body of Christ, and oneness with the Father are reason enough to retrieve the doctrine of *perichoresis* as a model of shared leadership. Although often difficult to understand, some theologians define *perichoresis* simply as “the intensely intimate presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>37</sup> Further, it may be understood as “mutual indwelling or, better, mutual interpenetration and refer to the understanding of both the Trinity and Christology.”<sup>38</sup> However, a deeper understanding is possible.

James Gifford understands *perichoresis* as more than union of the Trinity or the dual natures of Christ. Gifford articulates a third type of *perichoresis* as he writes,

The incarnation of Christ, in which the Christological variety of perichoresis finds its full and orthodox expression, would show that a perichoretic relationship between the divine and human would at least be possible—the union of two natures in the person of Jesus Christ shows that both a divine and a human nature can indwell the same physical person simultaneously. In addition, humanity is created in the image of the triune, perichoretic God. Therefore, creation and the incarnation guarantee the possibility of such a relationship.<sup>39</sup>

Jesus was not interested in uniformity for his growing group of disciples, but rather, unity. Jesus and the Father are distinct from each other, separate persons with different functions. They work together with a common mission, yet

<sup>36</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, in *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Publishing Group, 2002), 208.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Kress, “Unity in Diversity and Diversity in Unity: Toward an Ecumenical Perichoretic Kenotic Trinitarian Ontology,” *Dialogue and Alliance* 4 (1990), 67.

<sup>38</sup> S.M. Smith, “Perichoresis,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. W.A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), 843.

<sup>39</sup> James D. Gifford, Jr., *Perichoretic Salvation: The Believer’s Union with Christ as a Third Type of Perichoresis*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 22.

are separate persons while remaining unified as one. This is the mystery of the triune nature.<sup>40</sup> Such is the nature of shared leadership. Therefore, because believers experience union with Christ as a result of salvation provided by Christ, they also participate in the soteriological *perichoresis* with the triune God, our biblical model of shared leadership. The evidence of Scripture and an understanding of this third type of *perichoresis*, rooted in the believer's union with Christ, support the writer's thesis and results in shared leadership via *perichoresis*. It is now appropriate to examine biblical and theological evidence to support the contention that shared leadership flows from a soteriological *perichoresis*.

### Shared Leadership via *Perichoresis*

This paper proposes that the intentional practice of shared leadership of Christians is rooted in union with Christ, is a product of the perichoretic nature of the Trinity, and is evidence of mature discipleship. In his recent work, Robert Crosby refers to the baptism of Jesus as he describes the perichoretic nature of the Trinity in terms of the Divine Team. Crosby writes, "In this moment, God the Father was honoring God the Son. It was a joyful moment; one not to be missed. Herein we are given a peek inside the ultimate honoring circle, the Divine Team."<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Crosby references John 5:19–23, 14:15–17, and 16:12–14 as he suggests that the Trinity serves as the "Ultimate Honoring Circle."<sup>42</sup> In these passages, Jesus honors the Father, who honors the Son, just as the Holy Spirit honors the Son while Jesus honors the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit plays a prime role in the shared leadership of the Trinity, and serves as an amazing example of self-giving. Jesus teaches his disciples that the Holy Spirit will not seek his own glory, but will shine the spotlight on

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<sup>40</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *John and Acts*, in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* vol.9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), 167.

<sup>41</sup> Robert C. Crosby, *The Teaming Church: Ministry in the Age of Collaboration*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 129.

<sup>42</sup> Crosby, 131.

the works of the Son.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:13–14, ESV).

In essence, the Holy Spirit's "chief purpose is not to make himself prominent but to magnify the person of Jesus. The Spirit interprets and applies the character and teaching of Jesus to the disciples and by so doing makes him central to their thinking. He makes God a reality to people."<sup>43</sup>

Genesis 1:26 serves as the foundational evidence for the *imago Dei* and connects the Trinity to the creation of humankind: "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness."<sup>44</sup> Colin Gunton has written, "To be a person is to be made in the image of God: that is the heart of the matter. If God is a communion of persons inseparably related, then it is in our relatedness to others that our being human consists."<sup>45</sup>

If God is a Trinity, and the *imago Dei* is present in humankind, it seems reasonable to accept the influence of the triune nature of God on the leadership capacity of humans. Because of humankind's fallen nature, the believer's union with Christ and sanctification process is foundational for sharpening the *Trinitarian-ness* of Christian leadership.<sup>46</sup> As Christians become more like Christ who is

<sup>43</sup> Tenney, 158.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2005), 35.

<sup>45</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 116.

<sup>46</sup> Donald Fairbairn suggests God gave Adam and Eve the Holy Spirit (Gen. 2:7) and thus they were connected to the Son and Father, sharing in the fellowship of the Trinity. Although this relationship was lost after the Fall, God gives the Spirit anew through redemption, restoring people to the state "akin to the original sharing in the life of the Trinity that humankind lost through the Fall" [Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to*

one Person of the Trinity, the believer's leadership style will become more like the unique life of the Trinity, the original model of shared leadership. Seamands describes the unique life of the Trinity as glad submission and mutual deference between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. For Seamands "each divine person is always denying himself for the sake of the others and deferring to the others."<sup>47</sup>

The Trinitarian model of shared leadership, the product of the perichoretic relationship of the members of the Godhead, does not necessarily dictate that there is never a "leader among leaders." According to Scripture, even the members of the Trinity have assigned responsibilities and they function within those responsibilities. The doctrine of appropriations "appropriates a particular activity to one of the Three, in order that we might better understand its role in the overall divine plan, and thereby grow closer to God."<sup>48</sup> Seamands reminds his readers "we say that salvation is from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit. Our response to what God has done, whether it involves repentance, prayer, gratitude, obedience or worship, is also Trinitarian in nature; by the Spirit, through the Son, and to the Father."<sup>49</sup>

Anson Seers, Tiffany Keller, and James M. Wilkerson believe that shared leadership "within self-directing work teams cannot be based on formal hierarchy."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, it is their understanding that emergent leaders within teams are as important to the accomplishment of tasks as are those who hold official positions of power. Emergent leaders are those "group members who exert significant

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*Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 62]. Thus, as believers progress through the process of spiritual formation, they become more like Christ. Thus, they should practice the Trinitarian form of leadership.

<sup>47</sup> Seamands, 79.

<sup>48</sup> David Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 117.

<sup>49</sup> Seamands, 120.

<sup>50</sup> Anson Seers, Tiffany Keller, and James M. Wilkerson, "Can Team Members Share Leadership?" in *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, ed. Craig L. Pearce and Jay A. Conger, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 80.

influence over other members of the group although no formal authority has been vested in them.”<sup>51</sup> Current research of shared leadership serves as a reminder to Christian leaders that God has gifted his creation with two books of Truth: general revelation (science) and special revelation (Scripture). Although the social science community has only recently articulated the concept of shared leadership, Christian practitioners of shared leadership can with assurance, find a biblical basis for shared leadership in the example of the pre-creation, perichoretic relationship of the Trinity.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, shared leadership practice may be one by-product of a mature discipleship process.

### **Mature Discipleship via Shared Leadership**

It is not the intention of this article to articulate an understanding that mature discipleship is a result of shared leadership, but that the practice of shared leadership may be a reflection of a robust discipleship process. Of course, sanctification finds its source in our union with Christ, thus Christ is the one who produces mature disciples. This truth is implied in Paul’s description of the maturing Christian. Paul writes,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–25 ESV).

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<sup>51</sup> Seers, Keller, and Wilkerson, 81.

<sup>52</sup> Fairbairn believes that "the fact that God revealed his oneness first and only later his threeness means that our articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity should begin with God's oneness rather than with threeness" (41). This idea may be implied from a close reading of John 1 and Gen 1. Fairbairn seems to suggest that the "three-ness" of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) are only possible because of the "one-ness" of God. Again, this description may be helpful in understanding the working dynamics of shared leadership.



Christians reflect a growing sanctification through the practice of shared leadership. By embracing the Trinity's example of leadership, Christians can do no less than reflect the personality of God to humankind. Selfishness, greed, and thirst for power are results of humanity's fall and are often expressed through Great Man, scientific management, and bureaucratic, hierarchical leadership paradigms. According to George Cladis, perichoretic leadership is committed to developing teams that are covenanting, visionary, culture-creating, collaborative, trusting, empowering, and learning. Cladis suggests that the covenant community is the heart of Trinitarian leadership and the essence of this community is love.<sup>53</sup>

Based on the Trinitarian model of shared leadership, Robert Crosby suggests that Christians must ask themselves "How should we conduct ourselves as Christians, as church leaders, and as collaborative teams in ministry?" Crosby sees the retrieval of the doctrine of *perichoresis* as necessary for Christian leadership. He writes, "The Trinity is the premier model, or the master image, of what Christian fellowship, community, and teamwork are to look like for the purposes of edification, evangelization, and ultimately, the glorification of God on earth."<sup>54</sup> Is it not the Christian's sole purpose to glorify God?

How is a Trinitarian model of shared leadership expressed in the real world? Interstate Battery System (IBS) has long embraced shared leadership and intentionally seeks to express its business philosophy through the intentional practice of shared leadership. From the office of the CEO to the lowest strata of team members, shared leadership is the foundation of the ecosystem of IBS. According to the corporate training manual shared leadership involves four basic practices:

1. All employees (team members) are part of the ecosystem through interdependent relationships and all team members contribute to the creation of value.

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<sup>53</sup> Cladis, 10.

<sup>54</sup> Crosby, 137.

2. Team members aim to meet the needs of all stakeholders as an end in itself and believe that this approach leads to more value creation. (Traditionally, businesses relied heavily on trade-off or zero sum thinking—the idea that if somebody wins someone has to lose.)
3. All stakeholders win as decisions are made by all for all.
4. Team members align personal purposes with corporate purposes and those of other team members.<sup>55</sup>

Apparently, Jesus expects his disciples to model *perichoresis* through love of people (John 14:21). Just as believers love the Son, the Father loves believers. Christians reflect the love of God through their love for others. According to Borchert, “the commands of the expectations of Jesus for his disciples are fully integrated into the way those disciples live.”<sup>56</sup> Additionally, “participation in divine life means primarily sharing in the life of the Trinity, sharing in the relationship that has characterized the Father, Son, and Spirit from all eternity past.”<sup>57</sup> Jesus’ followers appear to have the capacity to reflect God’s love because of relatedness to one another through union with Christ. This deep relationship with other believers allows Christians to love one another just as the Son loves his children.

The members of the Divine Circle Dance model for disciples the value of community. God is the source of community based on the perichoretic relationship he enjoys within the Trinity. Believers can model shared leadership, both in the church and in the marketplace. They must also model community. Jesus taught his followers that love for one another serves as strong evidence of discipleship (John 13:35). Catherine Mowry LaCugna sees the practice of community as an outgrowth of growing discipleship. She

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<sup>55</sup> Interstate Battery System, “Team Member Training Manual,” (Dallas, TX: 2014), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Borchert, 128.

<sup>57</sup> Fairbairn, 12.

writes,

The goal of Christian community, constituted by the Spirit in union with Jesus Christ, is to provide a place in which everyone is accepted as an ineffable, unique, and unrepeatable image of God, irrespective of how the dignity of a person might otherwise be determined: level of intelligence, political correctness, physical beauty, monetary value.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, shared leadership leads to an environment that promotes love and community and in the event conflict does arise, provides for resolution through relationship.

Crosby offers several values of shared leadership through Christian living based on the Trinitarian model. First, disciples reflect the Trinity's practice of self-giving.<sup>59</sup> Jesus articulated this principle in Mark 8:35: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." Dallas Willard believes the "advantage of believing in the Trinity is that we then live as if the Trinity is real: as if the cosmos environing us actually is, beyond all else, a self-sufficing community of unspeakably magnificent personal beings of boundless love, knowledge, and power."<sup>60</sup> Growing Christians practicing shared leadership will reflect this reality in the church and the marketplace.

A second value of practicing a Trinitarian model of shared leadership is that disciples and churches become the image of God in society. According to Crosby, "Our observations of the relationships that exist among the members of the Trinity provide powerful insight into how God wants us to relate to one another in community. Living in the image of God is no isolated discipline; it is a sacrament of community."<sup>61</sup> John Champion amplifies Crosby's thoughts through the following analogy: "If He

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<sup>58</sup> Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 299.

<sup>59</sup> Crosby, 137.

<sup>60</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 318.

<sup>61</sup> Crosby, 138.

were but One Person, He would be shut up within Himself to live a lifeless life, devoid of personal interest, intercourse and content. In one way a self-existent life is a contradiction in terms. Life must be correspondent: it must be reciprocity.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, the value of shared leadership is being *imago Dei* in the world.

A third value of shared leadership articulated by Crosby is that community serves as the context in which God has chosen to reveal Himself.<sup>63</sup> Without the context of community, God cannot be who he claims to be. Trinity assumes community. Disciples grow in sanctification through the context of community, as a result of union with Christ. Within this context, believers learn to practice shared leadership as a reflection of the *perichoresis* of the Trinity. Shared leadership or teaming not only is the best method for getting the work of the church and world accomplished, according to Crosby, “it does something deeper in the heart of the Christ follower. It becomes a prime opportunity to glorify God and to come closer to reflecting the image of God amidst our experiences of community and collaboration.”<sup>64</sup>

### Some Conclusions

This article has proposed that shared leadership serves as evidence of maturing discipleship. Because believers are in union with Christ, the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity serves as a biblical model of shared leadership. Additionally, the Trinitarian roots of shared leadership suggest that the construct is not a new model, but one that has existed since the beginning of time. The world’s oldest vocation, leadership, is best practiced through the oldest model: shared leadership.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, at least three conclusions or suggestions may be drawn from this study of shared leadership.

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<sup>62</sup> John B. Champion, *Personality and Trinity*, (London: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1935), 103.

<sup>63</sup> Crosby, 139.

<sup>64</sup> Crosby, 139.

<sup>65</sup> De Gourmont, 3.

First, since shared leadership is foundationally Trinitarian and traces its roots to pre-creation times, it seems logical to assume that God desires for his children to practice shared leadership. Additionally, since Christians are expected to live as *imago Dei* in the world, they should not only practice shared leadership in the context of the church, but also in the marketplace. As disciples are going into the world, one means of testifying of Christ's love is to practice perichoretic or shared leadership.

Second, since God expects his followers to practice shared leadership both in the church and in the world, the church should ensure that Christians understand the principles of shared leadership and equip believers to become practitioners.<sup>66</sup> Few churches understand the value of equipping believers for shared leadership ministry as part of their discipleship process. However, if the sanctification process is to move Christians closer to the likeness of Christ, then it is imperative that Christian educators and churches develop leadership training that is perichoretic in nature. Christian formation is “driven by personal allegiance to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—coupled with assent to specific truths about God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ as revealed in Holy Scripture.”<sup>67</sup>

Finally, Christian disciples may make a dynamic impact on the secular marketplace by articulating and practicing the Trinitarian model of shared leadership in their vocational

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<sup>66</sup> According to Pearce and Conger (2003), the basic principles of shared leadership include: interactive influence among group members, mutual leadership, achievement of group goals, peer involvement in leadership process, periodic up or down influence, and leadership as an activity that can be shared among group members. These characteristics seem to reflect the life of the Trinity. Walter Kasper describes a “symmetrical representational model,” which depicts this Trinitarian life as a circular movement [Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Crossroads, 1984), 216]. Additionally, the concept of the Father as the greater among equals is maintained by Augustine’s writings as he insists that the Spirit who proceeds from both the Father and the Son does so principally from the Father [Augustine, *On the Trinity* 15.17, 26].

<sup>67</sup> Jones and Wilder, 194.

life. By strategically identifying the source of leadership style to co-workers, employees, superiors, and clients, Christians will be able to glorify God in their work.

Paul's admonitions to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1b), and to "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2) elevate the work of Christians beyond the scope of wealth and success. Paul identifies the reason believers can comply with his commands: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). Christians can make their work about Christ because they are in unity with Christ and God through *perichoresis*. The Apostle Paul reminds Christians that they are to "put off the old self with its practices" and to "put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:9–10). No doubt, Christian leaders need to renew their knowledge of leadership practice as they grow in likeness of Christ through spiritual formation.

It is not unreasonable to believe that God has given Christians a perfect model for leadership through the example of the Trinity's perichoretic relationship and the believer's union with Christ. The spiritual formation of maturing Christians can lead to the practice of shared leadership as they become more like Christ. The *old rules* do still apply, at least for Christian disciples seeking to grow in their spiritual formation.

*Michael L. Davis, Ed.D., is associate pastor at First Baptist Church in Bremen, Georgia, an adjunct professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and a church consultant.*