The Trinitarian Nature of Leadership

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Abstract

Lesslie Newbigin, Jurgen Moltmann, Stanley Grenz, Howard Snyder and countless others believe that all ministry is founded in the Trinity. Yet our leadership paradigms in the Western church have largely been built on secular, individualist assumptions. How would our paradigms and practices be reformed through the lens of Trinitarian theology? What impact would a *perichoretic* understanding have on leadership models? Christian writers, and even non-Christian writers like Peter Senge can help us critique our assumptions and reform our practices. The outcome of such an exploration has implications for missional spirituality and practice. Some of these implications are examined and new questions are suggested.

Introduction

According to Phyllis Tickle (*The Great Emergence*) every five hundred years or so the church holds a giant rummage sale, and all the great questions are asked anew. The explosion of theological creativity we are seeing today holds promise for a fresh vision of leadership and renewed missional engagement. The Trinitarian recovery is particularly auspicious.

Reading Newbigin clued me to the importance of the Trinity for a biblical and sustainable missionality. Writers like Stephen Seamands[1] draw out the importance of the Trinity for Christian ministry. Others, like Jurgen Moltmann,[2] are looking more at the fundamentals of Trinitarian theology. Still others, like Stanley Grenz, were drawing from Trinitarian thought with application to both anthropology and ecclesiology.[3] Inevitably, one asks: what does all this mean for Christian leadership? We have imported professional models almost uncritically. What help can theological lenses offer? Stephen Seamands

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[1] Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005)

[2] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[3] Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing and Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000).

offers a clue when he comments that, "Moving churches in the West toward a Trinitarian model of church life will involve a major paradigm shift away from our pervasive individualistic ways of thinking."[4]

Leadership Paradigms and Trinitarian Lenses

Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those who are led.

Gary Hamel

Christian leadership models have been largely individualistic, viewing leadership through the "heroic" lens: Superman, Rambo and the Lone Ranger. Even where leadership teams have been fostered, many cannot conceive of a functioning team that has no human head.[5] "First among equals" is just a friendly way of framing the old hierarchical view.

Could it be that our hierarchical practices of leadership partly explain our tendency to Christomonism? As Douglas John Hall phrased it, "The Western tradition especially was always tempted to substitute an undialectical monotheism heavily informed by a Christology emphasizing the divinity principle and downplaying Jesus' true humanity. The result, in the hands of the simplifiers, is what H. Richard Niebuhr rightly named 'a new unitarianism of the second person of the trinity'—or, in the plain and oftrepeated slogan of popular evangelicalism, the simple declaration: "Jesus is God."[6] Individualist paradigms make us prone to special kinds of theological error. Errors in ontology eventually become errors in ecclesiology, and errors in ecclesial practice cause us to neglect Trinitarian foundations.

Leadership books are everywhere, and leadership conversations are ubiquitous. I wondered if others were making the Trinitarian connection. I began with the all-seeing Google, and immediately came up with an article by Mike Gunn in the Acts 29 Network: "The Intricacies of Trinitarian Leadership."[7] A second article, a little more recent (2008), was penned by Milan Homola, "Unitarian Relational

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[4] Op Cit., 39.

[5] In contrast MaryKate Morse new book argues that a community of discernment and direction is possible. MaryKate Morse comes from the Quaker tradition. *Making Room for Leadership* (IVP, 2009). Similarly, leadership coach Margaret Wheatley considers it a limitation of any human system when leadership becomes centralized and decisions flow down while information (hopefully) flows up. See in particular *A Simpler Way* (Berret-Koehler, 1996).

[6] Douglas John Hall, "Confessing Christ in a Post-Christendom Context." Address to the 1999 Covenant Conference of the Presbyterian Network, Atlanta, Georgia. November 6, 1999. 4. David Fitch offered similar complaints in his book *The Great Giveaway* (Baker Books, 2005).

[7] Mike Gunn, "The Intricacies of Trinitarian Leadership." May 4, 2006. Online http://www.acts29network.org/article/the-intricacies-of-trinitarian-leadership/

Leadership: The Myth!"[8] Conditioned by cultural preference, Trinitarian approaches to leadership are not homogeneous.

Instead, they follow a classification that parallels biblical anthropology. Mike Gunn takes an approach which is broadly egalitarian, yet retains role distinction. Milan Homola, on the other hand, boldly forges forward into a *perichoretic* model.

Mike Gunn's model is commonly labeled "first among equals," and often degenerates into the practice of hierarchy under stress. He describes the Trinitarian connection he sees:

> "… our clear example of this model was found in the godhead itself, co-equals ministering together for the greater glory of their being (God)… I began to question how this worked in real time. Our elder board was co-equal, and had balanced authority, but who was ultimately responsible for key decisions, and the direction the church or the group would take? ... This church (Any group for that matter) needs someone to guide the direction and vision of that group…
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> "At Harambee, as well as my experience at Mars Hill Church, the elders are co-equal in authority, but they are not co-equal in rank and responsibility. This form of leadership I like to call Trinitarian, because like the godhead, the members are co-equal, and co-eternal, but there is an obvious rank in the midst of it" (1 Corinthians 11).

Mike uses a theological category to describe a human structure without doing much theological reflection. His reference here to 1 Cor.11:3 is problematic. "God is the head of Christ." Mike wants us to read subordination into the eternal being of God rather than as a mystery and function of the Incarnation. At the least, however, Mike recognizes that the inner life of God may clue us to the nature of Christian leadership.

Homola's paper is more interesting, because he is making an attempt at genuine theological reflection in connecting the inner life of God and the creation of humankind to the outworking of life in the Body of Christ. Homola actually believes that the *perichoretic* life of the Trinity should be worked out in human communities. It's a short paper and there is little room for theological work, but it is clear that Homola believes that the *imago Dei* and the inner life of the God should make a difference in the way we live and work together, process decisions together, and at how we structure a shared life. After a short discussion on what it means to be human, Homola connects the inner life of God to human community:

> Without taking away from the oneness or the distinction, "*perichoresis* preserved both the unity of the one God and the individuality of the Trinitarian persons." The significance of

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[8] Milan Homola, "Unitarian Relational Leadership: The Myth!" February, 2008. Online http://consumingjesus.org/wp-content/uploads/milan_homola_-_trinitarian_leadership.pdf

this discussion is to show that the God who bestows his image upon creation is not an isolated individual, but rather exists communally (John 17).

This is an important starting point for a variety of reasons. First, it hints that since the new community is the goal of redemption (its *telos*), leadership itself is somehow conditioned by the nature of the community God intends. Second, to be human is to possess the divine image and thus have worth. The implication is that human value is ontological: regardless of class, color, function or role. One person is not more valuable than another because they can be seen to be "leader" or "follower," or more effective in mission or ministry. Homola quotes Grenz to substantiate this point.

Homola's second point is that "God sustains" life and community. He sustains this first intrinsically in Godself, and then secondly outwardly in creation and redemption. Homola's paper breaks down a bit at this point because he does not work from the distinction between the economic and social Trinity. As a result, some of the reasoning becomes confused. He quotes Richardson, for example, that the key "is not that Jesus is divine, but that Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit." While that is a significant point theologically, it could be counted against a Trinitarian outworking of leadership. Exactly what do we draw from the ontology (being) of God, and what from the incarnation? These are distinct "events" and will have different meaning and application. Recognizing this difference will be more defensible theologically and more powerful in its outworking.

To be fair, Homola has a particular agenda in this paper: to counter the commodification so common in Western ecclesial leadership. His proposal is to acknowledge three aspects of "effective Trinitarian leadership."

The first is collaboration with the true and loving leader: the Spirit. The second is humility in the face of overwhelming forces that push for worldly success. The final is an invitational approach to people that honors their unique value while calling them to their communal responsibility.[9]

This isn't a bad application, but in order to make it and defend it we need to back up and do some theological work.

Perichoresis

In *Decoding the Church*, Howard Snyder says that all ministry is grounded in the Trinitarian mystery. Ministry is rooted in Spirit-empowered community, not in organizational hierarchy. In contrast to Mike Gunn, Snyder argues that the Trinity is the opposite of hierarchy.[10] Snyder raises the ancient concept of *perichoresis* at this point. The concept was birthed by Gregory of Nanzianzus and is sometimes pictured as a dance. Clark Pinnock writes that "the metaphor suggests moving around, making room, relating to one another without losing identity… At the heart of this ontology is the mutuality and reciprocity among

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[9] Homola, 2008, op cit.

[10] Howard Snyder, *Decoding the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 56.

the Persons… a circle of loving relationships."[11] The concept becomes a way of picturing an abundance of love that overflows in self-giving, inviting others into the dance.

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
>
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is…[12]

Trinity and Beginnings

Let me begin by making an argument based on the ontology of God, who has always existed as a community of persons. We begin at the beginning: in Genesis 1. We have the advantage of starting with the first revelation of God to humankind and God's very first act: creation. In the first chapter of Genesis we read of the making of a unique creature: humankind. There are two startling aspects of this creation: first, creation is done by *Elohim*, (a plural noun) "Let *us* make man in *our* image…" Second, the creation of this being is in *God's own image and likeness.* It is not difficult to argue that this is a leaderful act. It demonstrates some of the qualities that dominate leadership literature: decision making, collaboration, innovation, and reflection. But who had priority in creation? The plural and eternal Godhead evidently collaborated in creation. There is no hint of subordination of one person to another. Indeed, the first clause in Peter Senge's definition of leadership could be used here: "Leadership is the capacity of the community to bring forth new realities."[13]

Trinity and Endings

But if the beginnings of creation and humankind demonstrate something of the nature of God, so do the endings. Creation and redemption are all of one pattern. Lesslie Newbigin writes, Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very being of God. Therefore there can be no salvation for human beings except in relatedness. No one can be made whole except by being restored to the wholeness of that being-in-relatedness for which God made us and the world and which is the image of that being-in-relatedness which is the being of God himself. A glimpse of this is given to us in the consecration prayer (John 17) where Jesus prays that those who believe may be made part of the very unity of the divine being, united by that which binds the Father and the Son, which is nothing other than the glory of God.[14] Applied to leadership, this is an argument from *telos.* God's purpose in redemption is the creation of a new humanity and a new cosmos: *the summing up of all things in Christ* (Eph. 1:10). Leadership always has purpose, a goal, a mission: a point to which it is moving. There are two sets of applications we can

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[11] Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 31.

[12] T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 15.

[13] Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Crown Books, 1990).

[14] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1995), 70.

make here: to systems and organizations, and to relationships. First let's consider systems and organizations.

In too many organizations relationships get rationalized; purpose becomes planning; and meaning is buried by media and technique. But at root what often happens is the sacrifice of ends in favor of multiplying means.[15] We fail to keep the vision alive in our living relationships and ways of being. We begin in the Spirit but end in the law: structure triumphs over Spirit, the wineskin over the wine.[16] When we lose sight of the end point, we get lost in the present means. In effect, it's a memory problem. We forget who we are when we forget where we are going. We retain procedures, but lose our passion, and the end is bureaucracy. When we lose a kingdom imagination, we also lose a kingdom ethos, our mission subverted by secular demands. Mort Ryerson, chairman of Perot Systems remarked,

> We must realize that our task is to call people together often, so that everyone gains clarity about who we are, who we've just become, who we still want to be. If the organization can stay in a continuous conversation about who it is and who it is becoming, then leaders don't have to undertake the impossible task of trying to hold it all together.[17]

Trinity and Kingdom

In formal terms, the *telos* determines the ethos. The ends we envision form us as a people, form a *culture*. The culture we create is really determined by how we imagine our future, the future that is God's gift to us of his kingdom. All kingdom leadership should be *eschatological*. We lead from the future in order to live in the presence of the coming kingdom. We know a few things about the nature of the kingdom, and the relationship of God's mission to God's reign. First, we know that the kingdom comes to us a gift. It is not something we achieve, but God's work in us and through us, and often, in spite of us. God's kingdom has a church in the world. Second, we know that the church is not identical to the kingdom, but exists as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom.

Third, the kingdom is both present, and yet to come. It is the focus of God's mission in the world, God's purpose to restore all things and "set the world to rights." The kingdom of God is creation healed. Trinitarian leadership takes all these things into account. The end of leadership is God's kingdom, God's shalom. But the kingdoms of this world have their own agendas, their own gospel. Trinitarian leadership, in seeking the ends of the kingdom, will be subversive. Trinitarian leadership seeks to form communities that exist as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's shalom. This work will sometimes occur within traditional forms, and just as often outside them, because God's kingdom is much larger than the church.

So much for *telos*: now let's consider human community and relationships. From a Trinitarian frame, "He is before all things, and in Him all things cohere." Community is both the starting point and our

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[15] See Jacques Ellul, *The False Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972)

[16] See Howard Snyder's little book, *The Problem of Wineskins*.

[17] Quoted in Wheatley, Margaret, "Goodbye Command and Control," *Leader to Leader Magazine*, July 1977

final destiny. God creates humankind in his image, the fall brings fragmentation and hostility, redemption restores us to right relationship: with God, God's creation, and human community. The point of all Christian leadership is to facilitate the restorative process, as Paul phrased it, "speaking the truth in love, we grow up in all things into Him who is the Head, even Christ" (Eph 4:15).

Paul describes this maturing function as the characteristic of a working community. He becomes explicit in the following verse: "Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the outworking of each individual part, causes the growth of the body…" (4:16) Each part must do its work in order for the body to achieve God's purpose. And in distinction to what popular leadership models advise, it is the weaker parts that are more necessary (1 Cor. 12). Brian Walsh warns us that, "Boundaries require categories of in and out and that means boundaries necessarily marginalize."[18] Popular conceptions of leadership tend to both devalue and disempower the contributions of ordinary people by making distinctions based on secular measures and systems of value.[19]

Trinity, Community and Mission

Douglas John Hall reminds us that "the ontology of Jerusalem is a relational one: being means being with; existence is co-existence. Reality is not to be glimpsed through the examination of individual entities or abstract universals but in the between-ness of all that is."[20] It could not be otherwise. The image of *perichoresis* is the "dancing together" of the divine Trinity. This dance is a spontaneous, eternal act of love and "othering," and it overflows in mission. Love invites love, toward the end of "uniting all things together in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). Merton writes that, "The world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness."[21]

Some writers, notably Moltmann and Holmes, move beyond affirming the *missio Dei* as the action and purpose of God, to affirming that God is missional in Godself.[22] In this view God does not merely have a mission, but is a missionary God. Working from Augustine as well as Barth, Holmes locates the missional activity of God in the immanent (or social) Trinity and not merely in the economic Trinity. Mission may or may not exist in Godself, but when creation is born so is mission. All leadership must in some sense be "mission-driven," and that mission must partake of the nature of Godself: loving and

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[18] In this light see especially the paper by Brian Walsh, "With and Without Boundaries: Christian Homemaking Amidst Postmodern Homelessness." A paper to the Canadian Theological Society, Toronto, 2002. Online http://crc.sa.utoronto.ca/files/2010/01/with-and-without-boundaries.pdf

[19] It's only a short step from here to a renewal of clericalism, and the professional models we have imported into our practice already take us there. See in particular Eddy Gibbs in *Leadership Next* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005)

[20] Op Cit., 5

[21] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1962), 297.

[22] Stephen R. Holmes, "Trinitarian Missiology: Towards a Theology of God as Missionary." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Vol.8, No.1 (January, 2006), 72-90.

othering, with a high degree of reciprocity and mutuality. Mutuality should include mutual submission, as Eph. 5:21, "be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Love and *othering* both exist in Godself. But perhaps a Trinitarian frame for leadership can take a clue from the great commandment: to love God with all our heart, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as *ourself*. Leadership should begin in *selfing* and then move outward. Seng-Kong Tan writes,

> God creates and missionizes from his overflowing fullness, freedom and love… It is only in our relation to Christ, the God-man that, by Christ we become what we were created to be, viz. truly human. Moreover, we are also recreated to be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4), i.e. to participate in God's divine light, communicable holiness, and relational life through the energies of the Spirit. As holistic self-relation and relation with others proceed from our relation with God, so genuine human missions must arise from true contemplation. Prayer and missions are not in competition. "On the contrary", according to Jean Daniélou, "Mission appears as the self-unfolding of contemplation.[23]

Just as God's purposes unfold in time from Godself, so mature leadership unfolds from self-knowledge. David Benner notes that, "Deep knowing of God and deep knowing of self always develop interactively."[24] Writing with application to leadership Chris Lowney writes,

> Leaders thrive by understanding who they are and what they value, by becoming aware of unhealthy blind spots or weaknesses that can derail them, and by cultivating the habit of continuous self- reflection and learning.
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> Only the person who knows what he or she wants can pursue it energetically and inspire others to do so… Research increasingly suggests that IQ and technical skills are far less crucial to leadership success than is mature self-awareness. In other words, the hard evidence points to the critical soft skills that are encompassed by knowing oneself.[25]

Beyond Leadership

If the nature of Godself is community, it makes sense to draw some distinctions between community and *team.* A team is not the same as a community. A team usually has a clearly identified leader and so it retains an element of command and control. A Trinitarian perspective on leadership must reject hierarchy. Paul's teaching on the interdependent nature of the Body leaves no room for status. The NT teaching on the priesthood of believers aligns with Jesus teaching that, "the greatest among you must be the servant of all." Dee Hock writes,

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[23] Seng-Kong Tan, "A Trinitarian Ontology of Missions," *International Review of Missions* (April, 2004).

[24] David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 30.

[25] Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003)

> In the deepest sense, distinction between leaders and followers is meaningless. In every moment of life, we are simultaneously leading and following. There is never a time when our knowledge, judgment and wisdom are not more useful and applicable than that of another. There is never a time when the knowledge, judgment and wisdom of another are not more useful and applicable than ours. At any time that "other" may be superior, subordinate or peer.[26]

Where the modern church echoed Reformation doctrine on "the priesthood of believers," cultural forces pushed us *in practice* toward a professional class.[27] The priesthood remained, with a more friendly face, limiting participation to the few rather than equipping and releasing the many. When the reality of Ephesians 4 is expressed in a community environment, it can be very difficult to tell who is leading. Leaders may be invisible, encouraging, empowering, and equipping as they work alongside others sharing similar tasks.

There are two types of ministry environment. In one environment a team or teams are formed to assist leaders to develop and implement their vision (purpose). In the second environment a community is formed around a shared sense of passion (belonging). In the team environment success is understood as empowering the group to reach agreed goals. In the community environment success is understood as empowering individuals to belong and to reach their God-given potential. In the team environment roles tend to be set in concrete and leaders are indispensable. In the community environment leaders may be invisible, and leadership roles and functions are often shared. At different times in the life of the community, depending on need and context and the empowerment of the Spirit, various ones take the lead depending on their competencies, deferring to the voice of the Lord. The key qualities in this context are humility and discernment.[28]

The artificial distinction between leaders and followers is substantiated in another way: our common sharing in the life of Christ. We are a Body, with a single Head. The gospel is all about *participation.* If the *telos* of leadership is Christ, one new humanity, Christ is also its beginning. From beginning to end, leadership, like all functions of the ecclesia, is a participation in the life of God. The biblical narrative suggests a deeply reciprocal understanding of the Trinity and God's relationship with the world. "Mission is … not the saving of disembodied souls *out of* creation but participation with God in the redeeming of whole persons to become fully alive *in* creation."[29] We participate in God's life. Van Gelder and Zscheile write,

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[26] Dee Hock, "The Art of Chaordic Leadership," *Leader to Leader,* No. 15 (Winter 2000).

[27] See Guder et al, *Missional Church.* In "Equipping God's People for Mission" Alan Roxburgh details the recent evolution of the clergy on pp. 196 ff.

[28] See the work of Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging (*Berret-Koehler, 2009) and Mark McIntosh, *Discernment and Truth: The Spirituality and Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Crossroad, 2004).

[29] Ross Hastings, *IVP Online Pulpit*, Nov. 6, 2012. http://onlinepulpit.ivpress.com/

> A participatory understanding opens up a highly reciprocal view of the God-world-church relationships, in which the church shares in the Triune God's own vulnerable engagement with the world... Imitation tends to stress what God *has done.* Participation invites us into what God *is doing* and *will continue to do* as God's promises in Christ are brought to fulfillment.[30]

In a *perichoretic* take on leadership as process Dwight Friesen observed that, "Leadership is about conversation. Leadership has less to do with the clarity of vision, and much more do to with the quality of conversation.

> How one fosters conversation is everything. Bringing self to the table, creating open space, speaking, naming, surrendering the need to be right, etc. Hidden agendas, unstated vision, passive aggressive needs to control, and rigid categories are just a few of the many ills ready to subvert [a learning] conversation.[31]

Postmoderns may admit that hierarchy grants the illusion of structural efficiency, but they recognize that the model is from the corporate and technological world. In the biological world, life loves redundancy. *Why not* have fifty pastors in a community of two hundred adults? Peter Senge's definition calls us to a level of shared leadership that evokes a developmental model—something closer to a family than a corporate structure. As we participate in the life of the Trinity God's work in caring for the world is expressed through us. Paul Stevens notes the importance of coinherence of the Trinity for every member ministry of the whole people of God:

> The Father creates, providentially sustains, and forms a covenantal framework for all existence. The Son incarnates, mediates, transfigures and redeems. The Spirit empowers and fills with God's own presence. But each shares in the other—coinheres, interpenetrates, cooperates—so that it is theologically inappropriate to stereotype the ministry of any one.[32]

Leaders like Senge are building on the concept of team leadership to look for more open models. Some like the metaphor of air traffic controller (ATC). An ATC doesn't fly the airplane, he only establishes safe paths for flight and coordinates their interaction once airborne. The ATC is almost an invisible part of the

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[30] Craig Van Gelder, Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 109-111.

[31] From the blog at http://dwightfriesen.blog.com June, 2005. Note also that German sociologist Niklas Luhmann describes human community as "a network of conversations." From this perspective the best way to nurture community is to facilitate and sustain conversations. Organizational analysts Brown and Isaacs asked effective leaders to describe quality conversations. The characteristics were listed as: a sense of mutual respect; taking time to talk and reflect on what is really important; listened even when there were differences; accepted and not judged by the others in the conversation; exploring questions that mattered;developing a shared meaning that wasn't originally there.

[32] R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 57.

process, but his or her role is essential in enabling the flight. Others, like Isaac Stern, prefer the metaphor of symphony conductor.

> A good conductor does not merely tell everyone what to do; rather he helps everyone to hear what is so. For this he is not primarily a telling but a listening individual: even while the orchestra is performing loudly he is listening inwardly to silent music. He is not so much commanding as he is obedient.

The conductor conducts by being conducted. He first hears, feels, loses himself in the silent music; then when he knows what it is he finds a way to help others hear it too. He knows that music is not made people playing instruments, but rather by music playing people.[33]

Many new communities eschew titles and labels, recognizing that labels separate people in the community from one another. Labeling a person by their function ("pastor") damages the wholeness of the relationship, and limits the recognition that others may be functioning as pastors in their workplace, or in other webs of connection.

At a deeper level there exists the unspoken assumption that leaders have more to give than others, and that those who "follow" need us more than we need them. In reality, the strong offer one gift, and the weak another. Until we die to the idea that we are somehow "ahead of" or "above" the community of faith around us, we will continue to be frustrated in our attempts to have an authentic community that combines real relationships with real discipleship. L'Arche pioneer Jean Vanier writes,

> We do not want two communities—the helpers and the helped; we want one. That is the theory, but in practice there is a tendency for the assistants to make their own community and be satisfied with that. Truly to make community with the poorest and identify with them is harder and demands a death to self.[34]

Narrative views of leadership are currently gaining popularity and hold promise for providing process views of leadership that are mission-driven and organic more than rationalized. Narrative views may be explored under the rubric of Trinitarian theology through God as author of the Big Story, and our vital collaboration as contributors to the story, utilizing the insights of N.T. Wright and others that God has given us four acts in a drama: the church itself authors Act V.[35]

Conclusion

This brings us full circle to the nature of Trinitarian leadership—it is mutual, vulnerable, joyful, and loving, a dance at once mysterious and filled with purpose. Moreover, it is genuinely participatory: we partner

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[33] Chaim Potok. *My First 79 Years: Isaac Stern* (Da Capo Press, 2001)

[34] Jean Vanier. *Community and Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 30.

[35] *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). See also Jeffrey McCurry, "Towards a Poetics of Theological Creativity: Rowan Williams Reads Augustine's 'De Doctrina' After Derrida," *Modern Theology* 23:3 (July 2007)

with God in his ongoing mission in the world. Many questions remain: (1) Is "leadership" a useful paradigm to overlay biblical revelation on the nature of God and of spiritual community? (2) If we conclude that Trinitarian community is the goal, do we exclude a developmental model that may have elements of hierarchy? I believe the extended family offers the best analogy and developmental model for human community, but families pass through stages from early to late and roles and functions shift.

Our church communities tend to set roles and functions in stone. We need to be reminded that our God "is a God of beginnings. There is in him no redundancy or circularity. Thus, if his church wants to be faithful to his revelation, it will be completely mobile, fluid, renascent, bubbling, creative, inventive, adventurous, and imaginative."[36]

VENI, Sancte Spiritus,

reple tuorum corda fidelium,

et tui amoris in eis ignem accende.

COME, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Thy faithful

and kindle in them the fire of Thy love.

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[36] Jacques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986)