
**PARTICIPANTS WITH GOD:
A PERICHORETIC THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP**
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Abstract: In the contemporary North American context, evangelicals are excited by the promise of leadership. The resurgence of the doctrine of the Trinity offers a rich theological environment to speak into this reality by developing a theology of leadership. The doctrine of the Trinity (with the doctrine of *perichoresis*) invites us to view leadership in participative terms. In this view, leadership is not done for God or in light of God but in participation with God. In this article, this perichoretic theology of leadership is developed in conversation with perspectives on spiritual gifts and applied using the pastoral models of the shepherd, the wounded healer, and the wise fool.

Introduction

In North American evangelicalism the hunt is on by pastors to find the right leadership style, principles, or programs that will enable their local churches to burst with growth and discover spiritual health. Evangelical publishers market an array of books that promise just these results, if only the reader would follow the steps and apply the ideas offered.¹ Few would argue the importance of leadership in this or any other era of church history. Today, however, I would suggest that

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¹ See for example: Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); Rowland Forman, Jeff Jones, and Bruce Miller, *The Leadership Baton* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); or Neil Cole, *Organic Leadership: Leading Naturally Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010).

evangelicals, and many others with them, exaggerate the promise of leadership.

This inflated emphasis on leadership can be seen in both the expressed statements and the subtle assumptions of some of the leadership gurus in contemporary evangelicalism. Aubrey Malphurs, for one, states categorically that “leadership is the hope of the church.”² He goes on to articulate a vision of leadership that results not only in well managed churches but leadership as the means for spiritual renewal and kingdom impact.³ More subtly, Will Mancini, in his book *Church Unique*, also places great emphasis on the role of leadership. Despite saying he does not offer the “silver bullet” to church effectiveness, he goes on to write, “The clarity and practical application you realize through this process will take you to new levels of effectiveness and to a lifestyle of visionary leadership.”⁴ I affirm that both Malphurs and Mancini have the best of intentions in helping leaders develop healthy, growing churches. However, I do believe that the promise they offer through leadership is disproportionate to the experience of most pastors.

This article has a general and a specific thesis. Generally, pastors who approach leadership looking for a cure-all for the ailing circumstances of the church would be wise to enter into a critical and reflective theological conversation about leadership. Such a conversation would aid Christian leaders in rooting leadership in theological reflection and assist them in developing a

² Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 12.

³ As it relates to spiritual renewal Malphurs teaches that “it’s the responsibility of the church’s leadership to see that authentic transformation happens” (117). He goes on to articulate that this occurs through the lead pastor’s personal spiritual renewal, which “is catching” and affects his pastoral team and “from the pastoral team, transformation spreads to the people” (117). For me this is a fine example of an exaggerated emphasis on leadership.

⁴ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), xxvi.

theology of leadership. Engaging in this conversation would also help Christian leaders in clarifying some of the hidden assumptions of leadership theory as well as articulating and applying their own theological convictions to their particular setting of leadership.

Specifically, the fruits gleaned from the resurgence of the doctrine of the Trinity provide a healthy context to engage in this theological conversation. Stan Grenz has stated, “Whenever the story of theology in the last hundred years is told, the rediscovery of the doctrine of the Trinity...must be given centre stage, and the rebirth of Trinitarian theology must be presented as one of the most far-reaching theological developments of the century.”⁵ In this article, I intend to bring this “rediscovery” of the Triune God into conversation with pastoral leadership, in order to articulate a theology of leadership that is rooted in and moves in cadence (dances) with life in the Triune God.⁶

This argument will be developed in two ways. First, the Trinitarian concept of *perichoresis* is explored showing how *perichoresis* establishes leadership as a participative movement of grace that originates within the Triune God. Second, a discussion about the nature of spiritual gifts is taken up. This conversation will question, exegetically, the conventional understanding of spiritual gifts. The intention is to show that New Testament teaching about giftedness is not about a definable group of gifts, but more about concrete expressions of grace. This understanding of giftedness is remarkably consistent with a perichoretic theology of leadership. It resonates with an understanding of ministry as the movement of grace originating within the Godhead and moving by the Spirit through particular people as concrete expression of

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 1.

⁶ For an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity and its application to Christian leadership see Dwight J. Zscheile, “The Trinity, Leadership, and Power,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6(2) (2007): 43-63 and Thomas Tumblin, “The Trinity Applied: Creating Space for Changed Lives,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6(2) (2007): 65-73.

grace. Leaders are, in this view, one of these tangible expressions of God's grace. This theology of leadership, then, is rooted in the movement of grace pouring out from the Triune God into the church and world. This movement of grace, therefore, begins within the life of the Triune God. Finally these insights are applied to three pastoral models: the shepherd, the wounded healer, and the wise fool.

The Need for a Theology of Leadership

Pastoral theologian Stephen Pattison calls for churches and pastors to develop theologies of leadership. For him leadership (although he prefers the term *management*) is inevitable.⁷ All organizations, the Church included, require skillful leadership. Yet Pattison is cautious in his appraisal saying, "Management is idolized by some as a creative universal panacea for any organizational or social problem. Others resent its perceived narrowness and instrumental approach."⁸ He even lauds the Church for being a pioneer in organizational management but, vitally, he notes, "none of which means that management is totally unproblematic, has wholly beneficial effects, or is merely a set of techniques that have no religious or theological implications."⁹ A theology of leadership is necessary to expose, correct, and inform leadership in the church and is particularly relevant for the evangelical church today.

Pattison articulates some of the assumptions inherent in management theory. These include:

⁷ Stephen Pattison, "Management and Pastoral Theology," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, eds. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). Pattison states, "'Leadership' seems to be a more acceptable term in the church, having resonance with NT writings. I am not sure whether this usage does not create as much confusion as it solves since leadership both inside and outside the church is an ambivalent concept capable of many interpretations and (mis-)understandings" (287). While I appreciate Pattison's concerns I will use the term *leadership* in this article.

⁸ Pattison, 286.

⁹ Pattison, 288.

(1) Human beings can control the world and colonize the future effectively so long as they have the right techniques; (2) Individuals should be subservient to organizational goals and to their superiors; (3) Relationships are fundamentally hierarchical and require clear lines of upward accountability and downward responsibility.¹⁰

Pattison's goal is not just to question leadership but to emphasize "that there is a real need for Christians to be critical of management words and practices ... with a view to using them judiciously and with full awareness of their implications."¹¹ So while leadership in the church is inevitable, it must be done in critical conversation with theology.

I believe that the exaggerated emphasis on leadership represented in the writings of Malphurs, Mancini, and many other evangelicals is there, in part, because of a lack of theological reflection on leadership and the assumptions and theories it brings with it. The first of Pattison's assumptions is very apparent. I believe this is most acute for Malphurs. His vision of leadership can be summed up by the first of Pattison's concerns with management theory, "Human beings can control the world and colonize the future effectively so long as they have the right techniques." This is seen both in Malphurs' assertion that leadership is "the hope of the church" as well as in the nineteen appendixes he includes in his book. The appendixes provide the "right techniques" to discover everything from a leader's Spiritual Gifts to discerning his or her "ideal ministry circumstances."¹² The help and promise leaders like Malphurs and Mancini offer evangelicals can only be improved with a more robust theology of leadership.¹³

¹⁰ Pattison, 289.

¹¹ Pattison, 290.

¹² Malphurs, 173ff. Of the nineteen inventories, audits, and indicators, Spiritual Gifts is found in Appendix F and "ideal ministry circumstances" found in Q.

¹³ Malphurs does speak of a leader's "theology of ministry." He says, "The leader's theology of ministry is what the leader believes that the Bible teaches

Participative Leadership: *Perichoresis* in Patristic and Contemporary Thought

The ancient doctrine of *perichoresis* is a fruitful place to begin to develop a theology of leadership because it reshapes our understanding of Christian leadership and, in particular, pastoral leadership in participative terms. To begin, the ancient development of this doctrine is explored, followed by a survey of its contemporary renaissance, and finally the focus turns to its application to church leadership. Pastoral theology is engaged throughout to inform this move toward a perichoretic theology of leadership.

The doctrine of *perichoresis* offers a participative understanding of leadership, a perspective on leadership that begins within the Triune God. In this view the genesis of leadership does not come through proper education, securing positions of power, or even discerning implanted Spiritual Gifts. The genesis of leadership is within the Triune God. We do not lead *for* God, or *in light* of God, but as participants *with* God. Graham Buxton writes, “To have a vision for ministry is to be envisioned by God for *his* ministry.”¹⁴ We do not lead churches, but we are participants in Christ’s leading of the church by the Father’s will and the Holy Spirit’s enablement. The doctrine of *perichoresis* is essential to establishing this participative understanding because it roots this practice of leadership in the richest theological context possible, the Triune God. As we move toward embracing this theological perspective, it is vital to understand the development of the doctrine of *perichoresis*.

Perichoresis - *An Ancient Word*

The word *perichoresis* has a rich theological history. It has proved to be a flexible term, first used in the patristic

about ministry” (*Being Leaders*, 135). See also Malphurs’ biblical-theological explanation in his “quest for leadership truths” (18).

¹⁴ Graham Buxton, *Dancing in the Dark: The Privilege of Participating in the Ministry of Christ* (London: Paternoster, 2001), 252, emphasis Buxton.

era in the area of Christology before it found its theological home, integral to the doctrine of the Trinity. The noun *perichoresis* came into patristic use through Maximus the Confessor.¹⁵ He used it to define how the two natures, human and divine, function in Christ. G.L. Prestige shows that, “When therefore [Maximus] comes to apply *perichoresis* to the problems of Christology, we find that it means reciprocity of action.”¹⁶ This means that the two natures in Christ have a “singleness of action and effect” much like a hot knife cutting and burning as it moves through an object.¹⁷ Pseudo-Cyril continued to take up the term Christologically to explain how the two natures in Christ are unified. He used *perichoresis* to explain that Jesus’ divine and human natures exist with permeation, but without confusion. Prestige teaches, “[w]hat pseudo-Cyril appears to have in mind is a permeation of co-inherence between the two natures.... The two natures are not confused, but as each occupies the whole extension of the same hypostasis they must, on the physical metaphor, be regarded as interpenetrative.”¹⁸ The patristic use of *perichoresis* in Christology, to show (1) singleness of effect within a mutuality of action and (2) permeation without confusion in the human and divine natures of Jesus, anticipates its more fruitful appropriation for the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁹

In the sixth century, *perichoresis* was used to temper the suggestion of tri-theism in Trinitarian doctrine. Prestige aptly sets the context for the Trinitarian appropriation of *perichoresis*,

¹⁵ G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1936), 293. See also Graham Buxton, *The Trinity, Creation and Pastoral Ministry: Imaging the Perichoretic God*, (London: Paternoster, 2005), 130, which points out that Maximus “drew from Gregory’s Christological use of *perichoreo*.”

¹⁶ Prestige, 293.

¹⁷ Prestige, 294.

¹⁸ Prestige, 295.

¹⁹ Prestige views the use of *perichoresis* in patristic Christology as something “forced” but describes it as something “admirable” as it relates to the Trinity. Prestige, 296.

But owing at first to the accidents of controversy, and later to the abstract tendencies of the sixth century, the aspect in which God came to be more commonly regarded was that of three objects in a single *ousia*. The uppermost term is now *hypostasis*, and it becomes an eminent practical necessity to formulate a definition which, beginning from the uppermost term, will equally well express the truth of the monotheistic being of God. Without such a definition, the recurrence of tri-theism was almost inevitable.²⁰

It was pseudo-Cyril in the sixth century and John of Damascus in the eighth century who applied *perichoresis* to the Trinity and thus articulated a theological construct that appreciated the “three objects” while resisting tri-theism.²¹

The patristic fathers resisted tri-theism by articulating an understanding of the co-inherence of the three persons of the Godhead or *perichoresis*. Prestige explains, “This definition was provided in the formula of the *perichoresis* or circumincession of three co-inherent Persons in a single substance.”²² Reflecting further on the fact that the three persons of the Godhead maintain one *ousia* while each possessing a perfect *hypostasis*, pseudo-Cyril taught that the three persons of the Trinity “possess co-inherence in one another without any coalescence or commixture.”²³ Verna Harrison illustrates this by saying,

The Father gives all that he is to the Son. In return, the Son gives all that he is to the Father, and the Holy Spirit, too, is united to the others in mutual self giving. This relationship among the

²⁰ Prestige, 297. For more on the development of perichoresis in the Patristic era, see Verna Harrison, “Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, 35 (1991): 53-65. For the development of the Trinity, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed., (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 252-79 and Lewis Ayers, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University), 2004.

²¹ Buxton, *The Trinity*, 131.

²² Prestige, 297.

²³ Prestige, 298.

persons is an eternal rest in each other but also an eternal movement of love, though without change or process.²⁴

Prestige defines the patristic doctrine of Trinitarian *perichoresis* as “the co-inherence of the three Persons in one another.”²⁵

This definition illumines how earlier patristic theologians used the concept of *perichoresis* if not the actual word. Athanasius is an excellent example of one who used the concept of *perichoresis*. He does so in his teaching on the relations of the divine persons. Concerning the Father and the Son, Athanasius observed, “that the Son is omnipresent, because He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him.”²⁶ Applied to the Spirit, Athanasius realized, “that the Spirit belongs to the *ousia* of the Word and belongs to God and is said to be in Him; He is not called Son, yet is not outside the Son; if we partake of the Spirit we possess the Son, and if we possess the Son we possess the Spirit.”²⁷ It seems that in the patristic era there was a generally accepted concept of *perichoresis*. In light of Prestige’s definition we might define this as, *the co-inherence, without confusion, of the three persons of the one God*. The concept of *perichoresis*, if not at all times the word itself, has had a pervasive impact on the patristic development of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Perichoresis – A Contemporary Word

A variety of theologians draw on the patristic understanding of *perichoresis* as they seek to articulate the doctrine of the Trinity today.²⁸ As the social nature of

²⁴ Harrison, 64.

²⁵ Prestige, 284.

²⁶ Prestige, 284.

²⁷ Prestige, 284

²⁸ I do not want to leave the impression that the concept of *perichoresis* was lost from the eighth century until the contemporary renaissance of Trinitarian reflection. As one prime example, the Council of Florence (1438-45) certainly made use of the concept of *perichoresis* when it wrote: “The three persons are one God not three Gods....Because of this unity the Father is entirely in the Son, entirely in the Holy Spirit, the Son is entirely in the Father, entirely in

God continues to be studied and applied, *perichoresis* is consistently employed to speak of the relational dynamics of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is helpful to consider several definitions of this term to see if the concept being used today is congruent with the patristic articulation. Helpfully *perichoresis* is a novel enough term that most contemporary theologians provide a definition when they employ its use.

Karl Barth cautiously made use of the term *perichoresis* and defined it in relation to the Trinity, suggesting, “the divine modes of existence condition and permeate one another mutually with such perfection, that one is as invariably in the other two as the other two are in the one.”²⁹ Gerald O’Collins’ definition is simply stated as “The reciprocal presence and interpenetration of the three divine persons.”³⁰ Catherine LaCugna champions *perichoresis* as “a defense both against tritheism and Arian subordinationism” and teaches “*perichoresis* means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion.”³¹ Miroslav Volf articulates *perichoresis* as “the reciprocal *interiority* of the Trinitarian persons” explaining that “in every divine person as a subject, the other persons also

the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is entirely in the Father, entirely in the Son,” quoted in Stephen Seamans, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005), 141.

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G.T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 425. Barth was very cautious in his use of *perichoresis*. He was concerned that it could be misused in a manner that would lead to (1) modalism and conversely (2) tri-theism. Barth cautions, “We can only say that the doctrine of perichoresis, which admits of misuse in a one-sided emphasis on the involution of interpenetration (Ineinander) of the three modes of existence, also includes the other element, by which we should be warned against misuse, namely, regarding the involution as a convolution (Miteinander), presupposing the eternal independence of the three modes of existence in their eternal community. And in any case it may be stated quite definitely, that to systematize the one-sidedness...is absolutely forbidden, because it would mean the dissolution of the three-in-oneness into the neutral fourth,” Barth, 456.

³⁰ Gerald O’Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (New York/Mahway N.J.: Paulist Press, 1999), 206.

³¹ Catherine Mowery LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 270-271.

indwell; all mutually permeate one another, though in so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons.”³² Finally, Paul Fiddes writes, “The term ‘perichoresis’ thus expresses the permeation of each person by the other, their coinherence without confusion.”³³ These definitions show a resonance with the patristic Trinitarian concept of *perichoresis*.

The concept of *perichoresis* in both its patristic and contemporary use contains two salient features. The first is that the three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) mutually dwell in one another. In the patristic concept, defined above as *the co-inherence, without confusion, of the three persons of the one God*, the word *coinherence* captures the idea that the Father, Son, and Spirit mutually dwell in one another. Each of the contemporary theologians captures this meaning as well: Fiddes uses the same word as in the patristic concept, “coinherence,” Volf’s phrase is “mutually permeate,” LaCugna employs “being-in-one-another, permeate,” O’Collins utilizes “interpenetrate” while Barth articulates, “permeate one another mutually.” Each of these words or phrases captures the reality that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mutually dwell in one another.

The second salient feature of *perichoresis* is that there is to be no confusion of the persons of the Godhead in this mutual indwelling of divine persons. This means that despite their mutual indwelling, the Father, Son, and Spirit are and remain distinct persons and, although they are one, are never confused: the Son is never the Father, the Spirit is never the Son, and so forth. The patristic concept, along with Fiddes and LaCugna, clarifies this through the use of the words “without confusion.” Volf emphasizes this when he teaches that Father, Son, and Spirit “do not cease to be distinct persons.” O’Collins seems to safeguard any confusion of the divine persons

³² Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 209.

³³ Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 71.

through the use of the words “reciprocal presence” in his definition. Finally, Barth is also concerned that the divine persons do not become “convoluted.” If in Barth’s definition the reference that “one is as invariably in the other two as the other two are in the one” is not clear enough, his further teaching about *perichoresis* makes it explicit. Barth taught, “we should be warned against misuse [of *perichoresis*], namely, regarding the involution as a convolution presupposing the eternal independence of the three modes of existence in their eternal community.”³⁴ In both patristic and contemporary use *perichoresis* resists any confusion of the divine persons.

Bringing the two salient features of *perichoresis* together will define the concept this term carries in both its ancient and contemporary use. The concept of *perichoresis* can be defined as *the mutual indwelling, without confusion, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. With this definition established we will now return to pastoral theology. Several of these theologians will aid us in understanding how *perichoresis* opens up a participative understanding as we move toward a perichoretic theology of leadership.

Perichoresis and Pastoral Theology

Several pastoral theologians emphasize the vibrant exegetical environment the doctrine of *perichoresis* inhabits. Not only is the doctrine well established biblically, but it welcomes Christ’s disciples as participants in the mutuality of Father, Son, and Spirit. Most scholars point to the Gospel of John when articulating this understanding of *perichoresis*.

In particular, Jesus’ high priestly prayer of John 17 receives close attention in the discussion about *perichoresis*. It is here, in Jesus’ prayer, that the link between the mutuality of the Trinity and the disciples is made. Jesus prays, “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John

³⁴ Barth, 456

17:21).³⁵ Jesus' words to the Father, "just as you are in me and I am in you" establish, in part, the biblical basis for the doctrine of *perichoresis*. Jesus' words reference the mutuality of the Father and the Son, and, presumably, the Spirit.³⁶ Jesus also opens up this rich relational environment to his disciples, not just so that they might mirror at a distance the unity of the Godhead, "that all of them may be one," but, profoundly, that they "may also be in us." In light of this verse and how Jesus' followers might "be in" the life of the Triune God, Fiddes comments, "But human persons can dwell in the places opened out within the interweaving relationships of God."³⁷ In Fiddes' view, there is room within the relational space opened up for us by God to participate within the life of the Trinity. This reality is illustrated well by one of the more compelling images of *perichoresis*.

A cluster of scholars share a favorite image of the perichoretic union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This image aids us in understanding how disciples might be included in such a profound relational space. This favorite image of *perichoresis* is that of a dance. The image of a dance is compelling because it incorporates both movement and participation as it provides a measure of definition to dynamics of the Triune God.

From ancient times there was a connection between *perichoresis* and dance. The Greek word for *dance* and *perichoresis* share the same philological home. While Eugene Peterson equates *perichoresis* with the Greek for "dance around,"³⁸ Fiddes suggests it is more of a "play on words."³⁹ Nevertheless they both use this image to illustrate the perichoretic unity of the Godhead and how we participate in that unity. Peterson teaches,

³⁵ NIV will be used throughout unless otherwise stated.

³⁶ In 1 John 4:13, John includes both disciples and the Holy Spirit in such perichoretic relations: "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

³⁷ Fiddes, 50.

³⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44-45.

³⁹ Fiddes, 72.

He was active in this way as Father, Son and Holy Spirit long before we showed up on the scene, and he has clearly made it known that he wants us in on what he is doing. He invites our participation. He welcomes us into the Trinitarian dance, what I earlier described as the *perichoresis*.⁴⁰

Fiddes articulates his vision of the divine dance as “the partners not only encircle each other and weave in and out between each other as in human dancing; in the divine dance, so intimate is the communion that they move in and through each other so that the pattern is all-inclusive.”⁴¹ Fiddes adds, “All such passionate actions, at every level, share in the movements within God which are always making space with the divine dance for new participants.”⁴² For both of these scholars the relational vibrancy of Father, Son, and Spirit invite our participation. As the Triune God is active in giving and receiving love, joy, and delight within the Godhead, we are invited to participate in this giving and receiving. It is this movement of “worship and mission” that allows us to view leadership as a participative activity. Fiddes says, “The point of Trinitarian language is not to provide an example to copy, but to draw us into participation in God, out of which human life can be transformed.”⁴³

For a theology of leadership the notion of being drawn into participation with God has profound implications. Primarily, it roots all leading not in the leader’s capabilities or techniques, but in a movement of grace that begins with and in the Triune God. According to the Father’s will, Christ leads the Church, and the Holy Spirit actualizes this as specific people are caught up in this flow of grace and lead with Christ in specific contexts. Rooted in such a participative Trinitarian theology those who take up the mantle of leadership will

⁴⁰ Peterson, 305.

⁴¹ Fiddes, 72.

⁴² Fiddes, 97.

⁴³ Fiddes, 66.

view their ministry as a means of participation in the mutual, ecstatic ministry of the Triune God.

Evidence of such mutuality in leadership is the development of trust between leader and those being led. Fiddes applies his participative theology to pastoral leadership, teaching,

Correspondingly, as we share in the self-giving movement of Father and Son in the power of the Spirit, we see that the only authority lies in being trusted....[With pastoral leadership] authority cannot be imposed but only won through humble service. It is when pastors have won trust through their serving that people will allow them to lead them in initiating new things or putting an end to the old. No other authority is of any worth.⁴⁴

A perichoretic theology of leadership participates in Christ's leading of the Church, and is worked into the life of the Church through a mutuality that fosters service and trust in those who lead and are led.

Accordingly, a perichoretic theology of leadership resists some of the assumptions of contemporary management theory. This is especially true of the first of Pattison's concerns mentioned above, "Human beings can control the world and colonize the future effectively so long as they have the right techniques." A perichoretic theology of leadership relieves the human emphasis inherent in management theory. Our role is to participate with God in Christ's leading of the Church by the Spirit. Thus the genesis of leadership does not begin with technique, competence, or even spiritual gifts but with a movement of grace within the Triune God. Such a participative understanding of leadership will seek to establish a mutuality-in-leading exhibited through a vibrant, relational trust.⁴⁵ It will not treat people as a

⁴⁴ Fiddes, 100.

⁴⁵ Community also is crucial in a perichoretic theology of leadership. While there is not space to develop this more fully here, it is assumed throughout this article. See Dwight Zscheile, who at least begins to develop the communitarian implications of a Trinitarian theology of leadership.

means to an honorable end, but sees the deepening of relationships as integral to all leadership pursuits. In this way power will not be used to control but to encourage, guide, and excite. It will always be aware that this is a movement of grace which begins within the life of the Triune God.

A perichoretic theology of leadership begins in the interweaving movements of the Triune God. The source of pastoral leadership unifies it as our participation in what God desires and initiates. Since it is rooted in the life of God, this theological perspective both aids pastoral leadership by questioning some of the assumptions of management theory and roots leadership in the rich historical, biblical, and theological understanding of divine *perichoresis*. The question now turns to how this movement of leadership which begins in God is actually expressed in the leader's diverse giftedness and particular self. In cadence with divine *perichoresis*, the question now turns to how this movement of grace is realized in the church.

Perichoresis and Spiritual Gifts

The doctrine of *perichoresis* roots a theology of leadership in the dynamic unity and diversity of the Triune God. In this section, we will consider how Spiritual Gifts participate in this flow of grace from God into the church and world. In what follows, I will examine and question the conventional understanding of Spiritual Gifts, explore the biblical teaching of Spiritual Gifts, and then offer an understanding of giftedness that is remarkably consistent with the perichoretic understanding of leadership. This discussion will affirm leadership as a movement of grace originating in the Triune God. We participate in this movement through our diverse gifts and particular selves.

The view of Spiritual Gifts I am proposing will not bring people to a point of discovering whether they possess gifts of leadership but will place them in a position of finding out how to participate in making the flow of God's grace real. This view, I believe, is more

consistent with the biblical teaching about Spiritual Gifts than the “discover your spiritual gift and use it” perspective. Vivally for a perichoretic theology of leadership the participative view of Spiritual Gifts offers an expression of giftedness as a movement of grace which begins in the Triune God.⁴⁶ As such it facilitates a participative understanding of ministry and leadership.

Questioning the Conventional Definition of Spiritual Gifts

The enormous popularity of Spiritual Gifts in recent years comes with an assumed definition. One contemporary representative example is articulated by Bruce Bugbee who states, “Spiritual Gifts are divine abilities distributed by the Holy Spirit to every believer according to God’s design and grace for the common good of the body of Christ.”⁴⁷ Scholars, however, have begun to question the assumptions such a definition brings.⁴⁸ In the popular view Spiritual Gifts are assumed

⁴⁶ For a discussion of a Trinitarian understanding of the *charisma* and leadership see Rob Muthiah, “Charismatic Leadership in the Church: What the Apostle Paul Has to Say to Max Weber,” *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 9(2), (2010). As it relates to Christian leadership he says, “In relation to leadership, the equality of value among the charismata does not call for the elimination of leadership in a community, but rather it calls for a mode of leadership which does not elevate the leader over others and which is exercised interdependently with the other charismata” (18).

⁴⁷ Bruce Bugbee, *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 52.

⁴⁸ For instance in John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 329, Stott concludes his discussion of Spiritual Gifts in Romans 12 by saying, “It is evident that we need to broaden our understanding of spiritual gifts.” For an excellent and detailed discussion of Paul’s theology of *charismata* see, Siegfried S. Schatzmann, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987). Ken Berding has also been questioning the assumptions around contemporary Spiritual Gift teachings. See Kenneth Bearding, *What Are Spiritual Gifts? Rethinking the Conventional View* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006) and his “Confusing Word and Concept in Spiritual Gifts: Have We Forgotten James Barr’s Exhortations?” *JETS* 43(1) (March 2000): 37-51. Many of my own ideas on reconsidering contemporary assumptions about Spiritual Gifts come from a class I took by Dr. Ken Radant called, “‘Spiritual Gifts’ and the New Testament Concept of Giftedness,” at ACTS Seminary, summer 2001.

to be (1) a distinct category of abilities (2) given by the Holy Spirit that (3) are used to build up the body of Christ.⁴⁹

The conventional view assumes the New Testament speaks of spiritual gifts more or less as a technical term. This perspective assumes the Apostle Paul was using gift language to speak of a definable set of gifts the Spirit has implanted in believers who are left, presumably, to discover them.

This has given rise to the plethora of Spiritual Gift inventories that promise to help us discover our Spiritual Gifts. The idea is that there is a gift or gifts within each one of us and it is up to us to discover it. This has led one New Testament scholar to comment,

One of the fads among evangelicals in the final decades of the twentieth century has been that of finding your spiritual gift. There was hardly a church or youth group that did not have such a conference or seminar...nonetheless the New Testament scholar in me winced on more than one occasion. *I could not imagine Paul understanding what was going on at all!*⁵⁰

It seems the contemporary assumptions regarding Spiritual Gifts may not be in line with the biblical teaching associated with it.

Exegetical Concerns

Contemporary biblical scholarship seems to suggest that the New Testament does not speak of Spiritual Gifts in the manner in which they are commonly referred to today. In short, Spiritual Gift is not a technical term for a distinct group of gifts. Schatzmann states, “Paul

⁴⁹ This breakdown of the conventional view of Spiritual Gifts is based on Berding who says, “There are three main components in any conventional definition of spiritual gift: (1) the entity itself is an ability or an enablement; (2) it is given by the Holy Spirit; (3) it is to be used in building up the community of believers,” Berding, *What Are*, 25.

⁵⁰ Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 163, emphasis added.

employed [*charisma*] in a ‘nontechnical’ general sense.”⁵¹ The evidence for questioning this assumption is twofold. First, the New Testament does not use the term Spiritual Gift in a technical sense. Second, the gift lists appear to be simply examples of giftedness and are not attempts to define precise categories of gifts.⁵² Each of these concerns will be dealt with in turn.

In the conventional view, the term Spiritual Gifts is used as a technical one. This perspective believes that this term references a definable group of gifts, most often a compilation of the various New Testament gift lists. The assumption is that Paul’s use of the word *charismata* is equivalent to the technical use of Spiritual Gifts. This assumption, however, goes against Paul’s use of *charismata*. Paul uses *charismata* seventeen times in the New Testament, for a variety of realities, from the “gift of God is eternal life” in Romans 6:23 to “we have different gifts” in Romans 12:6. Berding argues, “The difficulties for those who try to defend a technical use by Paul are significant. To be considered a technical or somewhat technical term, a word must be used consistently in related context with more or less the same meaning. But this is precisely the problem with the word [*charisma*].”⁵³ Paul employs the word *charisma* not just in reference to Spiritual Gifts, what a technical use would require, but for such diverse things as “salvation” (Rom. 5:15, 16), “eternal life” (Rom. 6:23), “marital status” (1 Cor. 7:7), his own visit to Rome (Rom. 1:11)⁵⁴, among others.⁵⁵ In this light a technical use of *charismata* is to say the least problematic.

What further confounds the technical use of *charismata* is that, at times, Paul does not even use the term in his teaching on giftedness. In Ephesians 4, Paul

⁵¹ Schatzmann, 4.

⁵² Stott says, “all the lists emphasize the *variety* of the gifts, each seeming to be a random selection of them,” 338.

⁵³ Berding, *Confusing Word*, 5.

⁵⁴ This is the only place the Greek words equivalent to “spiritual gift” (“*pneumatikon charisma*”) are used.

⁵⁵ Schatzmann shows the variety of the uses of *charismata*, 4-5.

refers to “grace” (*charis* v. 7) and “gifts” (*edoken* v. 11) but not *charisma*! If Paul had in mind a technical use of *charismata* one would expect him to use this word consistently and with the same general meaning whenever he employs it. This is precisely *not* the case in Paul’s writings.

The non-technical use of *charismata* is supported by the variety of gifts in the New Testament gift lists themselves. Paul provides a listing of “gifts” in three different contexts. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul provides four lists of “gifts.” The first is in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, then 1 Corinthians 12:28 and another in verse 29, and still another in 14:26. Paul also includes a list in Ephesians 4:11 and Romans 12:6-8. What is important for this discussion is that each of these passages contains a different listing of “gifts.” Not one “gift” is listed in all the lists and none of the lists follow any sort of identifiable pattern. In fact what Paul offers us is quite the opposite. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, where contextually we might assume Paul is speaking of the more supernatural kinds of gifts, he lists “helps” and “administration” right along with “healings” and “miracles.” Also in Romans and Ephesians where Paul is not dealing with specific concerns over the *charismata* as he is in 1 Corinthians, the lists remain diverse both in number and content.

What seems clear from this evidence is that Paul did not use *charismata* in a technical way. If he did we would expect a consistency of terminology and a consistency of lists of Spiritual Gifts. For Paul it seems Spiritual Gifts are not a definable category he gave a technical term to. The biblical data suggest that, for Paul, Spiritual Gifts are not something he could categorize and say, “these are the Spiritual Gifts, discover which one you have.” As I will argue below, it seems when it comes to Spiritual Gifts Paul had something more relational and dynamic in mind, something I believe remarkably consistent with a perichoretic understanding of ministry.

Beyond the Conventional View

Moving beyond the conventional view of Spiritual Gifts opens up a biblical perspective that is more relational and dynamic. When Paul teaches about giftedness it always has to do with grace. The close relationship between the words *grace* and *gift* in Paul's usage shows this. In Greek the word for *grace* is *charis*, while the word Paul at times uses for *gifts* is *charismata*. For Paul there is a clear etymological link between the two words. Even in Ephesians where Paul does not choose to use the word *charismata* for *gifts* he is still careful to emphasize that *charis* (grace) has been *doreas* (given) in 4:7. In Romans 12:6 Paul does bring the two words together saying, "We have different *charismata* according to the *charis* given us." In light of these exegetical considerations I would suggest that grace and giftedness are part of one unified, yet dynamic, movement originating in the Triune God in which we participate through our unique giftedness. In Paul's view giftedness means that we, in our particularity, are being God's grace.

Those who question the conventional view of Spiritual Gifts see them as a more participative or relational encounter with God and his flow of grace. Berding suggests that viewing Spiritual Gifts as ministries is a helpful corrective to the conventional view and teaches, "All ministries are concrete ways in which God works his grace among his people."⁵⁶ Consistent with Berding a more theologically filled-out definition of giftedness is offered by Ken Radant. He teaches, "Any ability, office, role, circumstance, relationship, or experience in the life of the believer can be called a *charisma*—or Spiritual Gift—when it is viewed from the perspective that it is graciously given to us by God as his means of equipping us for the unique role he intends us to play in his Body the Church."⁵⁷ What these definitions emphasize is that the Triune God is graciously working in the church and world through his people. The emphasis

⁵⁶ Berding, *Confusing Word*, 11.

⁵⁷ Radant, class notes.

is on God and his grace not people and their gifts. This idea has profound implications for a theology of leadership.

This emphasis is remarkably consistent with *perichoresis* and the participative function of ministry. Our giftedness, then, is caught up in the flow of God's grace as the Spirit uses all that we are—not just the abilities he implants—to make God's grace real in the specific situations in which we live and minister. In this way we participate in whatever means *with* God as he directs our service in the church and to the world. We will now return and see what this means for a perichoretic theology of leadership.

Perichoresis, Giftedness, and Leadership

Our understanding of Spiritual Gifts is vital to the leading of the church. Along with the doctrine of *perichoresis*, the theology of giftedness articulated above challenges and holds in check some of the assumptions of management theory. Pattison cautions that in some theories of leadership, “Individuals should be subservient to organizational goals and to their superiors.... Relationships are fundamentally hierarchical and require clear lines of upward accountability and downward responsibility.”⁵⁸ In contrast, the theology of leadership articulated here, places all of God's people as participants in the flow of grace which originates within the Triune God. While it does not prescribe a certain ecclesial structure, it does caution against the misuse of authority and any kind of dominating tendencies. In this view organizational structures within a church must value love, grace, mutuality, trust, and every-member-ministry.

A perichoretic theology of leadership establishes leading as a manifestation and a means of God's grace. Leaders do not have the spiritual gift of leadership so much as their particular skills, abilities, positions, and experiences allow them to be a spiritual gift *through* participating in Christ's leading, by the Holy Spirit, to the

⁵⁸ Pattison, 289.

glory of the Father. They participate through their diverse gifts in a movement of grace that originates in the Triune God. This view of giftedness is remarkably consistent with the doctrine of *perichoresis*. A perichoretic theology of leadership values the unity of leading with God's grace with the particularity of the self who leads. It is important now to pay attention to our particular selves, for it seems the Triune God delights to use us in our particularity in his mission in the world.

Particular Selves

A perichoretic theology of leadership demands a personal, authentic expression of leadership. We only lead in and through our particular selves.⁵⁹ Our particularity in ministry finds its theological home within the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of *perichoresis* celebrates the unity of the one God in and through the particularity of three divine persons. The vision of leadership I find compelling does not require adherence to one proven model or style of leadership, but delights in the diversity of persons who lead as the Spirit involves them in and through their particularity in divinely cadent movements of gracious leadership.

Authentic self understanding is crucial for personal spiritual growth and integrity in all facets of ministry, leadership being no exception. David Benner writes, "Being yourself would not make any spiritual sense if your uniqueness was not of immense value to God. But each person is exactly that—of inestimable value to God."⁶⁰ The Triune God desires that we lead as the person he knows and delights in us to be. He does not desire that we lead as the person with the biggest church, or influence, or personality. He does desire that

⁵⁹ It should be emphasized that, just as in the doctrine of the Trinity, particularity is not something that is working against community. The two are necessary parts of one mysterious whole. This is true in the Church as well as in the Triune God.

⁶⁰ David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 15-16.

we lead as he does with the unity and diversity of our particular selves.

A perichoretic theology of leadership delights in just such authentic expression. A given leader is never left with the burden of leadership on his/her own. Instead, leadership is viewed as participating in Christ's leading of the Church by the Spirit to the Father's glory. In the New Testament we do not see or hear of leadership offering the promise that we hear today. We do see leaders like Paul and John leading effectively and uniquely. Their greatest concern is to lead with a deep intimacy with the Triune God (See Eph. 1 and John 17 respectively) and to discern how to participate with him in Christ's ongoing ministry in the world.⁶¹ Out of this intimacy, out of beginning to know ourselves fully even as we are fully known, we lead to the glory of God. This again encourages us to lead with our particular selves.

Three Pastoral Models

It is helpful to see how a perichoretic theology of leadership looks when applied in pastoral context. To encourage a continued sense of leadership as unity in diversity I will offer examples of this participative approach to pastoral leadership to Donald Capps' three pastoral models. The three models he articulates are the shepherd, the wounded healer, and the wise fool.⁶²

Capps begins with the popular biblical metaphor of pastor as shepherd. He writes, "The shepherd's own self-understanding focuses on the role of helpful guide."⁶³ The shepherd nurtures, cares for, and guides the sheep. This is familiar pastoral language. In participative terms,

⁶¹ Discernment is crucial to a perichoretic theology of leadership. The key for our purpose here is not to articulate how this discernment is done but to see the relational environment which is the context for such discerning. Graham Buxton has articulated the importance of discernment in pastoral leadership. See Graham Buxton, *Celebrating Life: Beyond the Sacred-Secular Divide* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 161-72.

⁶² Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 76-82.

⁶³ Capps, 77.

the shepherd participates with God in providing pastoral care and leads the flock into a fuller understanding of God and his personal concern for them. This is perhaps the classic view of pastoral leadership. A perichoretic theology of leadership breathes new life into it by showing the deep personal concern God has for people as pastors participate with him in this type of pastoral leadership.

Next Capps employs a model of ministry made popular by Henri Nouwen.⁶⁴ Concerning the wounded healer, Capps teaches, “The ultimate intention of the wounded healer is to see that suffering gives way to healing...healing comes not by distracting ourselves from painful experiences...but by living our pain, allowing ourselves to experience it fully.”⁶⁵ The wounded healer enters into the pain of others and seeks to make room for both self and God there. The wounded healer participates in God comforting his people. Wounded healers are precious people who lead others (individuals and communities) by helping them to experience God’s presence in the most painful and difficult of times. They participate with Christ in gently handling a bruised reed and keeping aflame a smoldering wick. This kind of leadership requires an acute sense of self understanding and the resources of a suffering God, another important element of Trinitarian theology. Wounded healers know what it means to participate in Christ’s suffering and like Christ make their wounds available for the healing of others.

Next Capps speaks of the wise fool. He informs, “The major function of the wise fool is to help us ‘to see ourselves in a clearer light.’”⁶⁶ The image is that of a clown who looks like a fool but is actually wise. The wise fool challenges the accepted norms and works to revise, through foolishness, the wisdom of the age. The wise

⁶⁴ See, Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

⁶⁵ Capps, 79.

⁶⁶ Capps, 80.

fool participates in God's desire to disarm the things of this world and to encourage the growth of the kingdom of God. These "fools" lead through the folly of the Gospel and participate with Christ in the transformation of the Church and the world.

Through these pastoral models we can begin to see how pastoral leadership is unified in that it is a movement of God's grace and is made real through our diverse expression of pastoral leadership. Our unique expression of leadership is something that God values and something he incorporates for his glory and mission in the world. While leadership begins in the unity and diversity of the Triune God, its realized expression is always in particular persons participating in community in God's gracious concern for the Church and the world.

Conclusion

Mirsolav Volf writes, "The nature of God's being, not just God's commands, is integral to the character of Christian beginnings and ends."⁶⁷ In the context of this article we can echo Volf by saying "that the nature of God's being is integral to Christian leadership." This is a theology of leadership that has at its source an understanding of the very being of the Triune God. It appreciates the perichoretic movement that occurs within God and suggests that leadership originates within those divine currents of grace. It argues that leadership is a movement of grace which believers participate in as their diverse gifts are caught up by the Spirit and they participate in Christ's leading of the church and world to the glory of the Father. This is accomplished through leaders' particular selves. This is a theology of leadership that values love, grace, mutuality, trust, and authenticity in its entire expression. It seeks to exhibit what Fiddes calls "true spiritual power" by participating in "the power of increasing the faith of others, guiding their prayer,

⁶⁷ Miroslav Volf, "Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity," in *God's Life in Trinity*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Michael Welker (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 3.

stimulating their service, and making liturgy a sacred drama through which people can live in the glory of the new creation.”⁶⁸ Here leadership moves in cadence with the Father’s will, as Christ leads his Church, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁸ Fiddes, 274.