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Petr Cincala

THE LEGACY OF GOD'S LEADERSHIP

Introduction

We are living in times when organizations of all kinds are striving to build high-performance teams. Glenn Llopis (2012), author of an article entitled “5 Ways Leaders Must Build a Family Environment to Achieve Excellence,” makes a rather surprising statement in *Forbes* magazine:

[Organizations should consider] a family approach to business that emphasizes trust and values. A teamwork environment where camaraderie means having each other's back and not judging one another. A workplace culture that celebrates opportunities, transparency, and the opinions of all to enrich conversations and diversity of thought. (para. 1)

According to Björnberg, Dias, and Elstrodt (2016), research shows that family-operated businesses outperform their competitors. There are many benefits, including greater revenue, employment growth, stability, trust, commitment, strategic long-term thinking—the list could go on. A family type of informal leadership provides generous career opportunities, inspires employees with a sense of involvement, and encourages personal responsibility. Most importantly, it provides emotional connectedness and ownership. On the other hand, an authoritarian leadership style, formal policies, and rules are linked with the least healthy business organizations (Björnberg et al., 2016).

As you can see, the notion of shared leadership is seriously explored by secular businesses. With this in mind, it may be beneficial to look at this topic from the perspective of the triune Godhead in the light of Scripture. Although there are numerous texts in the Bible relating the Trinity and leadership, we will limit our focus particularly to two of the most vivid places dealing with God in His three persons: the first letter of John and Matthew 28:18–20.

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God's Business According to 1 John

The first epistle of John is a summary of what it means to be Christian as it was revealed to and experienced by the beloved disciple of Jesus. Toward the end of his life (at 96 years of age), the apostle John wrote a letter in which he summarized the nature of God's "business" of dealing with humankind and how humans can participate in it. John attempted to describe the essence of a Christian worldview. Based on his writings, we would like to explore the implications for leadership.

At the beginning of his epistle, John starts (perhaps echoing Gen. 1:1) with a reference to the beginnings of God's plans with this earth (1 John 1:1), similar to the way he starts the book of John. Some Christians like to call God's original plan with humans the Story of Redemption. Long before our world was created, the Godhead met and roles were assigned to each of the three "team" members. The plan of One becoming Messiah—the Redeemer—was laid out so that under every possible circumstance, God could continue to give life not only as the Creator but also as a Redeemer. Running the universe is a cosmic leadership responsibility, and on top of that God handles our rebellious world. How does He do that?

John describes God giving us life so that we have a good time with each other, perhaps even having a "party time" of sorts with God the Father and Son, as they seem to be having a good time of fellowshiping together (1 John 1:2–3). The joyful socializing with ever-fellowshipping God has a deeper purpose—it draws us out of darkness to Him who is light (1 John 1:5–7)! And here is the amazing part: when we fellowship with Him, He does His business—He cleanses us from sin, from all unrighteousness, and from rebellion (1 John 1:7, 9).

We have, however, fallen out of loving harmony with God, and sin has become our reality. John repeatedly warns in his epistle not to sin. One of his primary concerns is that we overcome sin (1 John 2:1). Interestingly, in the brief letter there are 28 references to the issue of sin. As a matter of fact, the rest of John's letter can be summarized in two main topics: (a) Admit you are a sinner. If you claim you are not, you are a liar, fooling yourself (1 John 1:8, 10; 2:4, 9; 4:20). (b) Focus on loving God and loving others (1 John 3:14, 18; 4:7–12, 19–21; 5:2–3), and not on loving the world or idols (2:15–17; 3:1, 13; 4:3–5; 5:21). You can do that by coming to Jesus and following the lead of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:2; 3:24; 4:2, 13; 5:6).

So how exactly is God going about doing His business of saving the world and stopping us from sinning? According to John, God wants us to keep His commandments and His Word (1 John 2:2–7), live in His truth (1 John 1:6), walk in His light (1:7; 2:9–10), and get to know Him more (1 John 2). We

Christians are familiar with these “requirements,” as they are foundational to what being a Christian is all about. God is our “boss,” and He has certain expectations from us. If we want to be part of His business, we simply need to fulfill His expectations, right? This model is so common in our world that no one questions its validity and effectiveness.

The Bottom Line: God Is Love

However, the context of John's letter brings a slightly different twist to this idea. A frequency test of keywords used in 1 John reveals that when John speaks of God or when he addresses the readers, he uses family terms (son—22 times, brother—15 times, children—14 times, father—12 times, dear—6 times). Approximately every 20th word in John's epistle is a term that comes from a family/community circle and is relational/interpersonal.

John speaks in his letter a lot about God. When he does, he often refers to each of the three divine Persons in particular (Father—12 times; Son, Jesus or Christ—59 times; Spirit—7 times). Clearly, John portrays a communal (triune) God. One can summarize the whole letter in three words: “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). The three most frequently used words—“God” (64 times), “is” (103 times), and “love” (46 times)—permeate the whole epistle.

When John speaks about the new command, he refers to loving each other (1 John 2:7–10); when he talks about walking in the truth, he refers to love (1 John 3:18–19); when he discusses walking in light, he means to love others (1 John 2:9–10). The absence of love results in fear and hatred, turns us into liars, and causes us to live in darkness. By using these contrasts (love versus hate, love versus fear, light versus darkness, truth versus lies), John clearly wants to make a sharp distinction of what fuels God's operation and also what makes God's business of salvation work so powerfully.

God created us in His image to start with (Gen. 1:26), and He wants to restore His image in us at the end. Therefore, when John describes the qualities of Christian life in his pastoral letter, he repeatedly uses an expression “born of God” (1 John 3:9, 10; 4:4, 6, 7; 5:1, 4, 18). He also repeatedly mentions that we should “remain in God” (1 John 2:5, 6, 27, 28; 3:24; 4:13, 15, 16). John also talks a lot about knowing God, emphasizing the importance of loving God and having an intimate personal relationship with Him (1 John 2:3–5, 13–14; 3:1–2, 6; 4:6–8).

God's Operating System

The emphasis here is on operating under God's value system. This is apparent in the profound Great Commission text as recorded by Matthew (Matt. 28:18–20). Jesus' final words to the disciples are very well known. It is

striking that of the three tasks of the Great Commission—making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them—baptism is linked with the three persons of God, and it is through baptism that new believers are incorporated into the church to start their journey of faith (Andiñach, 2014, pp. 45–46). Baptism is a communal act. “Baptism marks our birth into the family of God. This is the context where I am made a disciple” (Chester & Timmis, 2008, p. 112).

But there is more to it. We understand that the biblical form of baptism is by immersion. To be baptized is as if someone has died and been shut in a casket. But then, in a moment, they come out, alive, but in a different way—with a clean record, relieved from all ailments (Rom. 6:1–10), to live a new life in Jesus. Baptism represents the beginning of a new reality, with God’s worldview installed into our operating system. We are symbolically immersed in God’s reality, dying to our former ways of life. Paul referred to this in Galatians 2:20 when he said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

Baptism according to Jesus was done “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19, NIV). We understand that in the times of Jesus, a name referred to a character, personality, nature, or one’s authority. Could we say that, through baptism, disciples were immersed into God’s character so they could reflect that character in their lives? Can we say that baptism symbolizes a moment in life when Trinitarian mentality gets embedded into our way of thinking? If yes, what implication does it have for a Christian leader?

God as a Leader

Let’s think for a moment about God as a leader. What kind of leader is He? According to 1 John, God is love. But love requires at least two or three to be activated. Love could not exist without relating well to one another. The Triune God exists in perfect harmony due to love and unity. The three persons of the Godhead are loving each other, and thus are the source of love for the whole universe. Not only is God a social being (relating leader), He is a community in and of Himself (shared leadership of three leaders). So, to follow the pattern of God’s leadership (i.e., to be in His image) means that a Christian leader is not leading alone, but is part of a communal/shared leadership group. Moreover, should not Christian leaders who are “in God” act in and on love? What would happen with a company/organization if the leadership was heavily centered on simply loving?

God created humans in His image, and it would be very difficult to argue that He would not want Christian leaders to function in His image. In the

same way the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “exist in and for each other, in a relationship of intersubjectivity, mutuality, and reciprocity” (Hill, 2012, p. 233), so are to live the beneficiaries of the communion of love and intimacy between the persons of the Godhead. John’s letter is trying to say to us that love is not an enhancement or bonus of the Triune God; rather, it is fundamental and inseparable to His being and His leadership. Could “the interior life of the Trinity . . . , the love, intimacy, unity and embrace of the members of the Trinity” (Hill, 2012, pp. 233–234) therefore be an inspiration, guide, and perhaps a model for Christian leaders to shape the nature and dynamics of their leadership?

The Dynamics of God’s Leadership

We know from Scripture that each member of the Trinity has been actively involved in “God’s business.” It was true from the beginning when our world was created. God the Father set forth the idea, Jesus the Word executed the plan, and the Spirit filled the newly created space with God’s presence. As a group, They invested Their collective attention in the creative process to maximize the outcome.

And it did not stop there. God’s Trinity has had characteristics, roles, and functions throughout the history of implementing the plan of salvation (Hill, 2012, p. 231). God the Father expressed His love by sending His Son to die for us (John 3:16) so that the Son could speak to the Father in our defense (1 John 2:1), and the Spirit could testify the truth by making God’s union evident (1 John 3:24; 4:13; 5:6).

When dealing with leadership, we talk about having a mission statement, often not realizing where this concept came from. Mission (*missio* = sent) is derived from the very nature of God. One of the core values of His leadership was “to send.” The Father sent the Son; the Son sent the Spirit and us. Each member of the Trinity has been uniquely involved in accomplishing a mission. The differences in the roles of Father, Son, and Spirit are rather complementary. We know the Father through His Son (John 17:3), and the Holy Spirit enables that knowledge in us (John 15:26; 16:13–15). There is a deep underlying unity among Them as They are “in” one another and They are one (John 10:30, 38; 14:10–11). Their identities have been bound together in “a profound and mutually determining way” (Köstenberger & Swain, 2008, pp. 19–21).

God’s Trinity makes an amazing shared leadership team. We find Them submitting to each other without any hint of establishing power over each other. Jesus submits all to the feet of His Father (1 Cor. 15:24). The Father submits all to the feet of Christ (Eph. 1:17–23), and the Spirit bows before

Them and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26, 27). Their unity in being, will, and work are equally affirmed in the Bible.

The shared leadership of the Triune God therefore has the following attributes:

- It exemplifies group creativity.
- It is relational rather than hierarchical.
- It has three distinct personal identities, which
 - lead together
 - each have their mission (i.e., are sending in nature)
 - demonstrate unity in being, will and work
 - complement each other
 - make an equal team
 - display mutual submission

After reflecting on these attributes of the Trinity, we can see a correlation with three major points made by Llopis (2012) in his research (mentioned at the beginning of this article) on future success of family businesses:

- Build emotional connections (= love one another)
- Develop responsible shareholders (= make disciples, baptize, teach)
- Establish clear rules and career paths (= the legacy of God's Triune leadership)

Conclusion

Christians are baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That has serious and tangible implication for the way we think, act, and do our business. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the *Father* and with His *Son*, Jesus Christ. . . . We know that we live in Him and He in us: He has given us of his *Spirit*" (1 John 1:3; 4:13, NIV). Through this biblical reflection, we see evidence from Scripture as to how this has profound implications for Christian leaders.

Just think, what would change in our leadership practice should the implication of Trinitarian leadership as described in 1 John and Matthew 28:18–20 be taken more seriously? What if Christian leaders were to never operate in isolation as single leaders? What if Christian leadership was centered solely in love? The way the Godhead transforms humans and how They go about leading the process is quite amazing and simply changes the rules of the game. Relational and shared leadership reflects the community of the Triune God in their relationships, priorities, decisions, and actions, and brings in a tremendous potential in empowering, participative, serving, and community-centered leadership. As various (even secular) organizations are

currently seeking for excellence in their businesses, they are—perhaps unintentionally—embracing a wisdom that comes from the Bible and that reflects the leadership of the Godhead. Are we, as Christian leaders, falling behind?

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