



ON THE PERICHORETIC SUBJECT IN LIGHT OF THE TRINITY

di
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As the title suggests, we focus on the meaning of perichoresis as it applies to the human subject and his or her relationship to God. We take as our starting point the historical development of the term within Greek philosophy and literature and then move on to its Christian meaning within the context of Trinitarian theology and Christology. Finally, we extend the theological usage to include an understanding of the Mystical Body of Christ.

What do “red-hot irons” and Christians have in common? The juxtaposition might conjure up an instrument of torture, when in fact it was actually used by the early Christians as a metaphor for understanding the Trinity and explaining the word *perichoresis*¹. The word seems to have entered Christian literature with the writings of Gregory of Nazienzus and Gregory of Nyssa² who first used the term in the context of Christology and then later extended it to the Trinity. However, “*perichoresis* as a *terminus technicus* originally appeared in the late Patristics (7th and 8th century)”³ beginning with Maximus the Confessor⁴ and through his writings “it irretrievably entered the theological endeavor through the influential work of John Damascene (circa 750 AD), *De fide orthodoxa* (On the Orthodox Faith)”⁵. The term itself dates back to the writings of the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras who used it to describe “the cause of separation between previously-mingled things,” in contrast to the patristic *perichoresis* which “is the cause of joining one thing to another, i.e. it is the cause of unity”⁶. Nevertheless, Anaxagoras meaning while technical was of rare occurrence. Aristophanes for example in his play *The Birds* used it in the literal sense of “go around or circle”⁷ and seems to have reflected the common Athenian understanding of the word.

The fact is words have meaning and words change meaning. Words can be used literally or metaphorically, analogically and heuristically, belong to the realm of common sense or theory. For example in English the word *circle* has a common sense meaning which can be used to describe the shape of a ring or a wheel, and yet few people would be able to give a technical mathematical definition of the term. One can also speak metaphorically of a circle of friends. When we turn to the word *perichoresis*, we are confronted by a technical term in theology which has primarily a heuristic meaning⁸, in that the full life of the Trinity is beyond our reach. Similarly, we cannot claim or expect to have a full understanding of the dual nature of Christ. With this said, for the purpose of this essay we shall take as our starting point Stamatović⁹ summary of the word *perichoresis*:

The concept of *perichoresis* had been devised in a great struggle to understand/explain that something can be united without blending and be different

1) In Latin it has been translated as *circumincessio* and as *circumin sessio*. Cf., S. Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, Open Theology, www.degruyter.com/view/j/opth.2016.2.issue-1/opth-2016-0026/opth-2016-0026.xml, 2016; p. 313, and B. Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, U. Toronto, Toronto 2007, p. 413.

2) S. Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, cit., p. 319.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 303.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 317, n. 61.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 303.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 310.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 308.

8) A *heuristic* notion is the notion of an “unknown that will become known when the anticipated act of understanding occurs.” (B. Lonergan, *Insight*, Darton Longman and Todd, London 1973, p. 63). For example, the word *heaven* or *paradise*, although in common use, also suggests a fuller meaning that can only be anticipated but has not been reached. Indeed its full meaning can only be achieved in death.

9) S. Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, cit., p. 321.

without separation, and the main representatives and fervent exponents of that *perichoretic* conception were Gregory of Nazianus and Gregory of Nyssa.

Their *perichoretic* conception can be defined as a view by which two or more different entities create unity by entering into each other without blending or merging, but either of them remains what it is and, at the same time, participate in the others. Or more briefly: *perichoresis* or permeation is unity of the different, where the difference remains completely preserved despite the communication of one to the other.

The meaning of *perichoresis* as permeation clearly shows that this is primarily a physical notion, derived from the observing of nature, and the examples of which can be shown in the nature ... In this connection, one should have in mind that *perichoresis* is used in philosophy and theology not so much in this literal as in a metaphorical sense. Namely, *perichoresis* in its literal meaning is permeation which takes place between physical and physical, but in philosophy and theology it is taken more as a physical symbol for something happening between the spiritual and the physical, or between the spiritual and spiritual. *Perichoresis* is, therefore, especially in theology, a metaphorical expression.

In addition, there is a difference between the Christological and Trinitarian *perichoresis*. In the Christological one, *perichoresis* expresses the unity of different natures in one and the same person, and in the Trinitarian one it expresses the unity of different persons/hypostases in one and the same nature. That is: in the Christological *perichoresis* the "two *what's*" are united "in one *who*", while in the Trinitarian the "three *who's* in one *what*." But one should have in mind here that the permeation of divine and human nature in one and the same person implies that the person is divine even in its human aspect, for a red-hot iron is not a mere iron, but a red-hot iron.

In the light of these understandings, we analyze the term from the threefold perspective of (1) the Trinity, (2) the Incarnation and (3) creation. Our focus will be on how it applies to the relationship between God and us, which until now has rarely been addressed. Moreover, given that most knowledge begins with experience, we need to distinguish between the psychological and ontological component of *perichoresis*, meaning that we need to recognize that *perichoresis* as a concept always refers to an ontological reality which, although enhanced by our psychological experiences, is not the same as it. Otherwise we will be in constant flux as to how we are using the term in any given instance. Ontologically speaking, the Trinity is one God in three persons, while Jesus has two natures in one person. Both of these represent ontological realities without necessarily being part of the human experience.

The role of experience

With the exception of some theological dogma, all knowledge begins with experiences mediated by our senses and our inner world of desires, emotions, sentiments and consciousness. They can be subsumed into four subdivisions: physical data, intellectual pursuit, interpersonal relationships and religious faith or some combination of these. For example, our knowledge of divine things can be mediated by our religious and mystical experiences, which in themselves are also related to both our internal and external experiences of the world around us. The reference of Francis of Assisi to *brother sun and sister moon* is a case in point. Moreover, if a mystical experience is authentic then it also presupposes the grace of God ("We love Him because he first loved us" 1 John 4:19). As Aquinas reminds us, grace presupposes nature and transforms it (S. Th. I, q2, a2 ad 1), and indeed, we may consider this transformation of nature by grace as a *perichoretic* event. Our interest for the purpose of this essay is purely theological and consequently the literal understanding of the word which pertains to the relationship "between physical and physical," as understood by the stoics will not be of direct interest to us, although it will serve as a metaphor for grasping the theological meaning of the term.

Physical data: One of the first examples used to explain the dual nature of Christ was that of a *red-hot iron*, an expression borrowed from the Stoics¹⁰. The Stoics were alchemists and fire was one of the four basic elements. Iron too was a substance and the coming together of fire and iron to constitute a red-hot iron was aptly described as a form of *perichoresis*¹¹. Each substance co-existed and permeated the other without mixing or blending and yet they were one. For the early Christians this served as a simple analogy for trying to comprehend the two natures of Christ. Indeed, it is still a valid metaphor, in spite of the fact that our scientific understanding of red-hot iron would nowadays be quite different¹².

Intellectual pursuit: A second example of "physical and physical" can be associated with the so called "psychological trinity," first expounded by St. Augustine and then elaborated upon by Aquinas and in modern times by Lonergan. It should be noted that "Augustine presents more than twenty triadic psychological analogies for exploration"¹³. Our purpose here is not to criticize nor suggest that Augustine approach is more or less better than others. Nowadays, it is popular to criticize his approach as too cerebral and lacking in its interpersonal dimension. Regardless, the fact remains that his Trinitarian triad is an important analogy for grasping *perichoresis*, even though Augustine never used the term. In an act of insight, in that moment of Eureka, one captures simultaneously the act and the

10) S. Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, cit., p. 319.

11) "We can rightly say that there is a close correlation between *perichoresis* and the Stoic term *χωρῶν δῶλον*, but they probably did not use the term *περιχώρησις* at all," (S. Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, cit., p. 317, n. 60).

12) Modern physics conceives of fire not as a substance in the Greek sense but rather as a form of energy that is absorbed and released by the electrons of the red-hot iron as quanta of energy.

13) A. Hunt, *Trinity*, Orbis, New York 2005, p. 19.

content, the act and the inner word that proceed from it as a real experience. It helps us grasp one aspect of the mutual penetration and distinction between the act and its content, which although simultaneously united are also distinct, with the content requiring formulation as a concept. It reminds one of Aquinas *verbum incomplexum*. As Robert Doran notes, it more than any other analogy serves to capture the immanent Trinity, in the sense that it expresses the immanent life of a person analogous to the one God. This is even more substantially grasped "by emphasizing that the proper analogue of the divine Word is not just any inner word proceeding from just any act of understanding but the judgment of existential value proceeding from a grasp of evidence bearing upon one's self constitution"¹⁴.

Interpersonal Relationships: We learn of *perichoresis* through our own relationships with each other and with God. God is Love and consequently we get a first emotional understanding of *perichoresis* when we fall in love. As Lonergan notes in the intimacy between a husband and wife, there is an emotional identification which "occurs in sexual intercourse when both partners undergo a suspension of individuality and fall back into a single stream of life."¹⁵ And again we are reminded in the Book of Genesis that "... a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gn. 2:24), a phrase which Saint John-Paul II notes expresses "the very sacramentality of creation, the sacramentality of the world. This experience of being one flesh, the experience of "mutual interpenetration of the "self" of the human persons, of the man and of the woman"¹⁶, serves as another example of *perichoresis*. Indeed, it is worth noting that the word "interpenetration" as used in the above citation has also been used to translate the word *perichoresis*¹⁷. And finally we have the words of St. Augustine, who although never actually used the word, seems to have captured something of its essence when within the context of marriage writes: "thus as it was said of those *They shall be two in one flesh* (Gn 2:24), so it may equally be said of these "Two in one mind"¹⁸.

The experience of faith: The experience of falling in love then is crucial if we want to have more than a superficial grasp of *perichoresis*. It opens us up to the other as gift and offers us the opportunity to be mutual gifts for one another. Moreover, the deepest expression of this mutuality is not necessarily to be found in marriage (although it can include it) but with the experience of religious conversion, what Lonergan calls "other-worldly falling in love."¹⁹ Indeed, for many of the mystics it is a nuptial experience in which the person is conscious not only of his or herself but also of the mutual presence of a loving God characteristic of the interpersonal indwelling that awaits us in heaven. We see this reflected in Chapter 5 of Ephesians where the Pauline text compares marriage with the Church.

14) R.Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?*, U. of Toronto Press, Toronto 2005, p. 35.

15) B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1971, p. 59.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 142.

17) S. Stamatović *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, cit., p. 316, n. 53.

18) Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, NCP, New York 2000, p. 323.

19) B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, cit., p. 240.

This nuptial dimension of being Church is also reminiscent of Chiara Lubich's experience in the sense that it incorporates all of the Mystical Body of Christ and has a distinctively Marian touch. She writes:

Translation: The two (or more) souls united by love (which is achieved through being self empty) and by the Eucharist are truly Church. I think that the Church-Soul of which the Fathers speak, is above all, Mary. Therefore, the Church being Soul is Mary. And this is the Soul that the Word marries because the Word cannot but love Himself in her, in him. And the Word in the Soul finds His Spouse, the Church, Mary And Mary was already in that cell which was us²⁰.

Note Lubich's use of the word "us" indicates that the experience was a collective one, which serves as an analogy of the Trinitarian *perichoresis*. In a certain sense, it reflects the collective experience of the disciples on Mount Tabor. Similarly in Sr. Faustina Kowalska, we find many episodes where she is overwhelmed by the inner presence of God who is one with her and yet distinct. For example:

Today, the Majesty of God enveloped and transpierced my soul to its very depths. The greatness of God is pervading my being and flooding me so that I am completely drowning in his greatness. I am dissolving and disappearing entirely in Him as in my life-source, as in perfect life²¹.

These are just two of the many mystical experiences passed onto us throughout the centuries, which serve in different ways to convey a heuristic understanding of *perichoresis* in the theological sense. However, it should also be clear that in the more literal sense used by the Greeks, the same experiences convey from the perspective of a *Trinitarian ontology* a *perichoretic* relationship between us and God. We shall say more about this later.

Theological Understanding of the Perichoretic Subject

As previously noted, the word *perichoresis* first entered Christian theology in an attempt to understand heuristically and analogically the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Ironically, until recently the more literal and metaphorical meaning as it pertains directly to Trinitarian ontology and the human subject were overlooked. This is not surprising in that the Christian notion of *perichoresis* has the Trinity as its starting point and consequently the full meaning of the term as it relates directly to us presupposes this prior development.

The Trinity: The Trinity is essentially unknown to us. Indeed, the Fourth Lateran Council reminds us that "between Creator and creature no likeness can be

20) C. Lubich, *Paradise*, fn. 59, unpub.

21) F. Kowalska, *Divine Mercy*, Marian Press, Stockbridge 1987, p. 379.

discerned without a greater unlikeness having to be discerned"²². However, in a way analogous to a blind person trying to understand the color "red", we can extrapolate from our own experiences (both natural and supernatural) to arrive at some insights of the inner-life of the Trinity. A blind person cannot see the red-hot iron but can feel the heat that radiates from it.

Each of the four categories of experiences mentioned above offers some understanding of the *perichoretic* relationship between the three persons of the Trinity. The first example, of the red hot iron, functions on the level of common sense. It gives us an image of a *perichoretic* relationship without having to do heavy intellectual work. The second experience associated with the so called psychological Trinity is natural but stems from introspective analysis. Through it we immediately grasp how the act of insight generates simultaneously the "inner word" while being distinct from it. The two together constitute a single reality of an act of understanding and serves as a good intellectual example of how one might grasp by analogy the Father-Son procession within One God. Moreover, with the recognition that "nothing can be loved that is not already known," we arrive at a second procession that characterizes love as an expression of our knowing and willing. The third and fourth quality of experiences offer a richer experience than the other two. Through the mystery of conjugal love and even more so through the experience of "other-worldly falling in love," we are permitted through grace to participate in the economic Trinity both individually and collectively. Faustina writes:

I knew, more distinctly than ever before, the Three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But their being, their equality and their majesty are one. My soul is in communion with these three; but I do not know how to express these words; yet my soul understands well. Whoever is united to One of the Three Persons is thereby united to the whole Blessed Trinity, for this Oneness is indivisible. This vision, or rather, this knowledge filled my soul with unimaginable happiness, because God is so great. What I am describing I did not see with my eyes, as on previous occasions, but in a purely interior manner, in a purely spiritual way, independent of the senses²³.

Chiara Lubich offers an inter-personal experience of mutual indwelling characterized by what she refers to as being "The Word of God." For Chiara it is a collective experience, typical of the Focolare Movement and of her charism of unity and also characteristic of a Trinitarian ontology. It is not reserved for the elite but is open to all. It is where the economic meets the immanent Trinity. The interpersonal dimension of this is beautifully captured as follows:

Translation: In heaven there will only be Word of God and in this unity among us there will be the harmony of a new Gospel song composed

22) Cited in: E. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, Continuum, New York 1994, p. 27.

23) F. Kowalska, *Divine Mercy*, cit., p. 205.

by the Mystical Body of Christ. Each one of us will be a Word, but since each Word is all of The Word, each one of us will be a Word, will be a harmony = a unity. The new song will be the harmony of harmonies! The song of the Trinity²⁴.

Two natures and one person in Christ: A proper understanding of Trinitarian ontology rests upon a grasp of the *perichoretic* natures of Christ. Indeed if He is all-in-all and we are members of his Mystical Body then we can never hope to fully understand ourselves and our being “made in the image and likeness of God,” without some understanding of Him. This means that from a Christian perspective the unity of the cosmos requires a top-down approach to understanding creation and not a bottom-up approach characteristic of Darwinian evolution and natural selection. It means that the creation of a human person requires a collaboration of the divine and the human. Indeed, this is substantially confirmed in *Humanae Vitae*²⁵. It means the model of personhood is Christ, who happens to be both God and man and since he is both the Alpha and the Omega of history, our understanding of ourselves both individually and collectively can only be fully understood in the context of the Mystery of Christ and the Incarnation.

The mystics seem to have a better understanding of this. Persons like Faustina and Padre Pio appear to have had an inner intimacy with Christ that pervaded their consciousness that might be described as a form of *perichoresis*. Their experiences can serve by way of analogy to grasp the dual nature of Christ. Jesus was the mystic *par excellence*. Indeed, in many ways, we can only fully understand mysticism in reference to Him. The experience of the mystics suggests that we are correct in affirming the person of Christ had one consciousness, nevertheless his. No other person will ever claim that he and the Father are One, that he who Sees the Father sees me, and that he would send the Holy Spirit. These are unique characteristics of God.

At the same time, Jesus was human. He grew in age, wisdom and understanding as does any child. For him to be aware of the *perichoretic* indwelling did not mean that he necessarily understood it. His challenge was to “make the ineffable effable”²⁶. Awareness is an experience of self, not an intellectual understanding. This also meant that he learned about the things of this world through human experience, understanding and judgment, in a way that did not detract from his divinity. He learned carpentry from Joseph and many other things too. Nevertheless, regarding things that pertained directly to God, because of his *perichoretic* relationship with the Father and the Spirit, certain knowledge was probably self-evident to him, if he posed the right questions (and perhaps he did not) and if it were necessary for his mission. In that regard, consider the following quote from Sr. Faustina following upon a vision of Jesus entering her room:

24) C. Lubich, *Paradiso*, 82, unpub.

25) Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, Ch. 2, 8.

26) F. Crowe, *Christ and History*, Novalis, Ottawa 2005, p. 82-83.

I rarely have such visions. But I more often commune with the Lord in a more profound manner. My senses sleep and, although not in a visible way, all things become more real and clearer to me than if I saw them with my eyes. My intellect learns more in one moment than during long hours of thinking and meditating, both as regards the essence of God and as regards revealed truths, and also regard the knowledge of my own misery²⁷.

Certainly if the mystics like Faustina could “learn more in one moment than during long hours of thinking and meditating” through their own (limited) experiences in the form of locutions, then how much more so did Jesus learn instantaneously because of his *perichoretic* natures, without in anyway compromising his humanity or divinity? He fully participated in the Divine consciousness as experience, in a way analogous to how some mystics experience the divine, without ceasing to be human. He had the consciousness of a single subject which we conceptually grasp from one perspective as divine and from another as human, which combine without confusion into the single consciousness of the person of Christ.

The perichoresis between God and Creation

In the light of the previous clarification, we are now in a position to extend the use of the term *perichoresis* to describe our relationship with God and creation²⁸. Indeed, mystical experiences by definition which add greatly to our understanding of the word pertain directly to the Creator-creature paradigm. Nevertheless, there has been a notable delay in extending the term to include God's relationship with creation. This probably resides in the fact that *perichoresis* as used by Christians also seems to imply some type of isomorphism or homogeneity²⁹ between the persons of the Trinity (Atanasius: “everything you can say of the Father you can say of the Son except that the Father is not the Son”). In contrast when we consider the relationship between God and his creation, this homogeneity no longer applies. Instead, the creator-creature paradigm suggests some type of subordination between the two. For this reason a plethora of other terms, all mediated by grace, such as analogy of being, the analogy of faith, panentheism, sublation, co-creators with God and Mystical Body of Christ, have been introduced to describe our relationship with God and with one another. With this in mind, let us consider each term separately to see how it adds to our understanding of *perichoresis* between God and creation.

27) F. Kowalska, *Divine Mercy*, cit., p. 346.

28) Bryon Jeonggut Lee, *Celebrating God's Cosmic Perichoresis*, Pickwick Publ., London 2011.

29) Dermot Lane has pointed out that, indeed, within the context of Christology the current “underlying assumption here is that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the human and the divine nature in Jesus which of course is quite false.” (Dermot Lane, *The Reality of Jesus*, Paulist Press, New York 1975, p. 114). A one-to-one correspondence is essential to the definition of isomorphism.

The analogy of being (*analogia entis*) and the analogy of faith: The essence of God according to Thomas Aquinas is to exist. Therefore, by definition Being because it is pure Act, cannot be grasped in its Essence by created being. Nevertheless this does not prevent us from developing a notion of Being, and of trying to understand our relationship to it. One expression of this heuristic notion is by means of the "analogy of being." There are two aspects to it: First as contingent beings made in the image and likeness of God (an essential unity), we are capable of perceiving something of his nature, and of having a relationship with him; secondly as mere creatures expressed by a *unity in tension*³⁰, we are unable to grasp the mind of God. Indeed, the IV Lateran Council reminds us that the dissimilarities between us and God far outweigh any attempt to describe the similarities.

With these distinctions in mind, we can by means of analogy understand both our similarities and differences to God. If God is pure being then each one of us by virtue of our nature and existence, by virtue of the fact that we are made in God's image and likeness, represents an "analogy of being." Consequently there is an implicit metaphysics operative within each one of us. Przywara's unique contribution to this analogy would 'be the word "dynamic"' ³¹ and its relationship to faith. Indeed, as we grow in faith there is a dynamic and "constant change" within us. It is only in properly "holding together the polarity between God's transcendence and immanence" that we properly perceive the delicate balance expressing the similarities and dissimilarities between us and God, as underlined by the Fourth Lateran Council. The analogy of being according to von Balthasar is Przywara's way of reconciling the relationship between the created and the uncreated and of helping us to understand the "ungraspable point of encounter with the living God" ³². Karl Barth, a contemporary of von Balthasar and Przywara, rejected the "analogy of being" as a creation of the anti-Christ ³³. Instead, he responded with a theory of dialectic in which the opposition between God and man as uncreated and created being comes together as an "analogy of faith" grounded in Christology.

But what is the difference (if any) between Barth's "analogy of faith" and Przywara's "analogy of being," we might ask? Przywara's formulation of analogy begins with natural theology, and is formulated in the language of Aristotelian/Thomistic metaphysics. Indeed, it is rejected by Barth for this reason, who regarded this approach as "unfaithful to revelation in principle" ³⁴. In contrast Barth not only begins with Christology, but with a Christology more akin to the viewpoint of Dun Scotus, who viewed the Incarnation as predestined prior to any Fall ³⁵. Therefore, to talk of creation as good in itself and assign it a meaning independently of the Incarnation made no sense to Barth. It acquired its goodness because of the Incarnation unlike the Thomist view where the world was created good inde-

30) E. Oakes, *Pattern of Redemption*, cit., p. 32.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 35.

32) *Ibid.*, p. 41.

33) *Ibid.*, p. 62.

34) *Ibid.*, p. 56.

35) *Ibid.*, p. 66.

pendently of the Incarnation. In either case, for both Barth and Przywara "The relation [between God and creature] must be described as a middle ground lying somewhere between two extremes, and this we call analogy"³⁶. However, since the possibility of such an analogy for Barth resides not primarily in "being" (the analogy of being) but rather in "God [who] has created the creature and therefore ... established the truth of the relationship"³⁷ between God and man mediated by faith in Christ (the analogy of faith), there are real epistemological differences between the two approaches. This is reflected in the lives of the mystics and Pascal's famous quote that "the heart has its reason which reason cannot comprehend." Barth relies on the metaphor of a reflector radiating back the light from on high to capture his analogy. In contrast von Balthasar, while not fully disagreeing with Barth focuses on the metaphor of "I am the vine and you are the branches," to describe the same analogy. He is perhaps closer to Przywara's viewpoint.

Sublation: Barth and Przywara realized that to avoid falling into theopanism a proper understanding of analogy is necessary. Ontologically speaking, the Incarnation is a supernaturally created reality that sublates³⁸ the natural order. However, an important distinction is necessary. In the Word made flesh both the human and divine natures are not sublated but rather are such that "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation..." co-exist, as cited in the Council of Chalcedon. In other words, Christ, although God does not sublate the human, he is human. Nevertheless, with the resurrection, the Risen Christ is coextensive with the whole of the universe in such a way that he is the vine and we are the branches (the Church). Seen from this perspective, all of creation can be viewed as sublated in the risen Lord. It can be seen as the finality of both operative and cooperative graces which presuppose nature and transform it, always respecting the distinction intended by the analogy of being. The coexistence of the two has its parallel in us by means of habitual grace, which is God's life in us. Experienced from our psychological perspective we are distinct from Him, seen from God's perspective we, because of his immanence, exist as an ontologically sublated reality (as mystic experiences seem to indicate), without mixing or confusion and yet united in Him, with the full psychological impact being felt in the *eschaton*. Some mystics already obtained a glimpse of it on this earth. Consider the following observation of Chiara Lubich:

Translation: It was Jesus in our midst – so alive and present because of the Pact that we were living – that brought forth very special graces. It was like a large eruption, so to speak, of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, because of how we lived the Word, we were very united among us. And so, the fire [of the Spirit] was not only

36) *Ibid.*, p. 63.

37) *Ibid.*

38) Lonergan defines sublation in this way: I would use this notion in Karl Rahner's sense rather than Hegel's to mean that which sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, puts everything on a new basis, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context. (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 241).

in us but also among us and with us and on account of this fire we were united with the presence of God in all of creation. We perceived, therefore, with the senses of the soul, with the sight of the soul, the presence of God in everything, not in a pantheistic sense of God being identical with all, but in the sense that God was beneath everything, and that everything was bonded together in love. This is how we perceived the true reality of things. It seems to me that this experience can be repeated and remain if the necessary conditions are fulfilled³⁹.

In that regard, there are two aspects to the *perichoretic* relationship with creation, one reflects our personal relationship of God, the other our relationships with one another and with all of creation. Indeed, just as Jesus is the one mediator between God and man, there also is only one mediator between Jesus and Creation, exemplified in the teaching that Mary is Mediatrix of all graces the “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet.” It is also important to note that such a *perichoretic* relationship between us and God is multifaceted in that human liberty is fully respected. Nevertheless, the final recapitulation of all in Christ at the end of time does not occur in spite of human freedom but precisely because of it. Precisely because of our liberty and freely chosen choices, we are co-creators with God both in this life and in the next. The *eschaton* assures us that our final destiny will be fulfilled through a sublated act of the Holy Spirit who will bring to fruition who we really are in accordance with our co-creative skills, choices and actions which is always mediated by grace .

Panentheism: Although not widely in use, there seems to be a growing trend to incorporate the final *perichoresis* between the Triune God and creation into some type of panentheistic model⁴⁰, while others like Polkinghorne cautiously reserve the term only for the *eschaton*⁴¹. Regardless of the context, if such a term is to be embraced by Christians, It is important that it not be interpreted as an enriched form of pantheism, in which God too is perfectible and becoming, or indeed some form of theopanism. Rather it must respect the transcendent nature of God. To do so it seems to me a proper panentheism ought to include both an analogy of Being and an analogy of Faith characterized by both metaphysics and theology that expresses a life of faith manifested as a kenotic and co-creative act with God and creation. Panentheism as coined by Krauss literally means “all in God.” However, to respect the analogy of Being it is important from a Christian perspective to recognize that “all in God” really means “God is in all” through his immanence and Being through his transcendence and the relationship between the two is one of *perichoresis*.

The Mystical Body of Christ: Regardless of what terms we use, the culmination of the ontological *perichoretic* process is our full realization as Church, the

39) Chiara Lubich, *Paradiso*, 11, fn 22, unpub.

40) The German philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781–1832) seeking to reconcile monotheism and pantheism, coined the term *panentheism* (“all in God”) in 1828. In more recent times, the term is favored by Jurgen Multann (a contemporary German theologian) and his followers.

41) J. Polkinghorne, *Faith, Science and Understanding*, Yale Univ., New Haven 2000, pp. 89-95.

Mystical Body of Christ. It is the final end of evolution. It incorporates the Analogy of Being, the Analogy of Faith, sublation, panentheism, Eucharistic theology and ecclesiology. The motor behind this final thrust towards a corporate sanctity in which Christ is all in all (Ep 1;23) is due to the action of the Holy Spirit who cooperates with us, allowing us free reign to bring about our fulfillment and completion within the Body of Christ, while preserving our individuality and freedom as adopted children of God. The *eschaton* can be seen as a Eucharistic transformation of the cosmos in which each one of us will fully experience who we are as members of the Body of Christ. And through us, as members of the risen Christ, all of creation will be renewed forming a new heavens and a new earth embraced by a "woman clothed with the sun" (Rev 12:1). In her embrace of her Son, she also embraces each one of us and through us all of creation. In this embrace the term Trinitarian Ontology reaches its maximum expression as the Mystical Body of Christ.

Nevertheless, it is important to realize that the Church is on journey through history and that this journey has reminded us many times that the final act of redemption can only be achieved by means of the Cross. Humanity chose the path of suffering and death. Christ being one with us chose not only the same path but transformed it in a way that expressed the fullness of faith as he cried out without understanding "My God, my God why have you forsaken me" (Mk 15:34) and then died. That cry together with his death defined a Trinitarian Eucharistic event that reached heaven and culminated in the Resurrection, a resurrection that embraced a wounded humanity which including Jesus and transformed it into the new heavens and new earth. Piero Coda relying on the words of von Balthasar summarizes it this way:

Translation: The form of this "unthinkable" divine action is that of a Eucharistic-trinity, because in that moment of darkness, when he thought that he was at the maximum distance from God, Christ at the same moment experienced unity with the Father: [an event] anticipated during the Passover meal, when the most sinful negation of God was willingly accepted and became the source of grace, expressing eternal love between the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit:

here God the Father creates by means of the Holy Spirit, the Eucharist of the Son, the final fulfillment of his Incarnation [...] In the Eucharist, God the Son concludes a new and eternal covenant with humanity, in which He who is God gives of Himself, regardless⁴².

The fact is because of Christ's abandonment, our pain and suffering, isolation and desolation, depression and emptiness, are already here and now a full psychological participation in the divine *perichoresis*. In our misery and through our faith we experience who God is and the full significance of *agape*. This is

42) P. Coda, *Dalla Trinità. L'avvento di Dio tra storia e profezia*, Città Nuova, Roma 2011, p. 478.

described in a very beautiful way by Chiara Lubich in reference to what she calls *Jesus Forsaken*:

So that we might have Light, you *ceased to see*.
 So that we might have union, you experienced separation from the Father.
 So that we might possess wisdom, you made yourself "ignorance."
 So that we might be clothed with innocence, you made yourself "sin."
 So that God might be in us, you felt him far from you⁴³.

Indeed, Lubich closes the nuptial and hermeneutical circle of paradise by recognizing that she has "only one spouse on earth, Jesus Crucified and forsaken," who shares our history with us in the present moment. This love of Jesus Forsaken (as Lubich refers to Him) passes into a higher dimension when it becomes a collective embrace of the spouse. The Mystical Body of Christ is then present among us and within us, as we become living churches. In this sense the *eschaton* is already in our midst and the *perichoresis* between the human and the divine becomes a real experience within the present moment both individually and collectively.

To conclude: In this era of climate change and unprecedented natural disasters in which the elements too seem to be in rebellion, in this era of economic, social, political, moral and spiritual breakdown, we, together with all of creation, are living a *perichoretic* experience of God being all in all, even if it is not according to our individual wishes and desires. Humanity through sinfulness chose this path and God made it his own so that we can have the fullness of life in Him, here and now. It defines what Lonergan calls the "*Law of the Cross*"⁴⁴. This experience is further enriched when we embrace it mutually out of our love for God and one another, and enriched even more when it is characterized by the presence of Jesus in the midst. The only additional thing that the *eschaton* adds to our current *perichoretic* experience is that in the final Resurrection there will be no more pain or death. It will be a different and happier experience of *perichoresis* but not necessarily a better one. In this sense, the fulfillment of creation is an eternal presence, here and now.

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43) C. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, NCP, New York 2007, p. 94.

44) B. Lonergan, *De Verbo Incarnato*, Pont. Univ. Gregoriana, Roma 1964, pp. 568-586.