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PERICHORESIS AND PROJECTION: A RESPONSE TO KILBY'S TRINITARIAN MINIMALISM

GREGORY S GORSUCH*

University of Edinburgh

ABSTRACT: The use of *perichoresis* by Miroslav Volf (1998) and others spring from significant themes within the Scriptures, most notably from Christ's prayer that reveals the entire divine-human relationship as filial in nature based on a mutuality of *how* they relate: 'I pray . . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; in order that they may be one in us' (John 17:21). This predicates mutuality, not in the divine 'transcendence into the substance of being,' but on the shared character of relationality, *perichoresis*, experienced within the immanent Trinity and progressively reflected within human social relations. Karen Kilby concludes otherwise that any consideration of *perichoresis* outside of expressing the mystery of relations within the immanent Trinity is problematic, ultimately only mirroring human social relations. This essay argues that accurate reflections of *perichoresis* are increasingly observable within social relations and emerging within various disciplines of thought that then bring greater coherence and meaning to the Scriptures, theology, and the faith community. Using a perichoretic ontology, this essay will provide significant meaning to Matthew 12:32 (otherwise considered meaningless) and other passages. If a perichoretic ontology subsequently transforms our understanding of Christ's redemptive action in the world and promises to resolve many historically persistent theological anomalies, the notion of *perichoresis* must rise within the theological project.

KEYWORDS: *perichoresis*, perichoresis and projection, Trinity, Matthew 12:32, *analogia spiritus*

Introduction

The use of *perichoresis* by Volf (1998), Gunton (1991, 1993), Moltmann (1981, 1992), James Loder (1992, 1998), and others springs from significant themes within the Scriptures, most notably from Christ's prayer that suggests the entire divine-human relationship as filial in nature, based on a mutuality of *how* they relate: '[I pray] that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; in order that they may be one in us' (John 17:21). Rather than focusing on mutuality in transcending

* GREGORY SCOTT GORSUCH (PhD University of Edinburgh) Adjunct professor Azusa Pacific University (et al.); currently on research/writing sabbatical. Email: greggorsuch@fuller.edu.

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substance of being (or Hegelian Geist), these theologians claim that human relations to some degree analogically reflect *perichoresis*—the relationship experienced within the immanent Trinity. Karen Kilby concludes that any consideration of *perichoresis* outside of expressing the mystery of the relations within the immanent Trinity is ultimately problematic and simply mirrors human social relations or misplaced ontological considerations. Furthermore, she thinks no one 'can pretend to find, outside of a few proof texts in the Gospel of John, any very clear help in the New Testament in understanding' *perichoresis* as grounds for associating human and Trinitarian relationality (Kilby 2000: 441). Her cautionary qualification of 'any very clear help' hints that indeed there just might be more. This essay reveals substantial evidence within the text and why this evidence is entirely unclear to her yet apparent when a metaphysics of *perichoresis* informs our reading (Cf. Gorsuch 2022, 2023). First, it is surprising to hear any theologian discounting such explicit expressions within the Scriptures, especially in a book some New Testament scholars consider to be the most theologically developed Gospel (e.g., Robinson JAT 1985, et al). Secondly, as stated, this essay will attempt to reveal predominant themes and other passages throughout the New Testament that expose a perichoretic ontology active and emerging within human relations. Within the Hellenistic ontological structuring of subject-subject, many of these passages become difficult, diminished, and in one specific case completely meaningless. If this understanding of *perichoresis* then creates greater coherency and novel meaning within the text, and for one passage provides coherent meaning (so it seems) for the first time in theological history, then *perichoresis* as understood within human socialization might not be mere projection. If so, perichoresis as a hermeneutic key for ontology should not only be considered a viable research program but offering something other programs are unable to provide. [Note from the outset that the theological forces of Modernity expend no small effort to erase the original ontological language of Christian faith within the Scriptures, e.g., most modern translations of Heb. 11:1 employ psychological language subverting the original ontological meaning (e.g., u`po,stasij from substance and reality to conviction, and e;legcoj from demonstration and sense of proof to assurance (Köster, 1972: 586-88). Concerning John 17:21, even Volf points to the commentaries of Bultmann and Lightfoot who give kaqw.j ('as') a sense of "similarity" or "resemblance" rather than analogically reflecting the significance of something relationally ontological in nature (Volf, 1998b: 212). For a fuller explanation of a 'relationally ontological' see Gorsuch, "Perichoresis as a Hermeneutical Key to Ontology" (2022).]

De-Hellenization and Hermeneutical Evolution

Heaven knows that countless theological experiments and wanderings have turned into questionable 'social, political, or ecclesiastical regimes' (Kilby 2000: 444).

Some, however, have turned into reformations, ecclesial renewal, and an expanding understanding of the Christian faith and practice (love). It is also undeniable that *secular* disciplines and art motivate and condition many of those expansions. As a basic example for use in this essay: If a Christian man in the West today loved his wife the same way a Christian man did in 1850, he might be considered abusive. Though the contributing factors to the prominence of today's western women in marriage and society are complex, the secular writings of a few pivotal women in the early twentieth century were undoubtedly a significant factor (e.g., JI Murdoch, V Woolf, et al). Undeniably, the meaning of our theological words, actions, and paradigms constantly expand, and such expansions in our meaning-frame will affect our textual reading.

We live in a world in which our understanding and capacity to love steadily emerges in fits and falls throughout history—love, right relationship, and *perichoresis*. As a technical term, *perichoresis* closely associates with love, given that God is love. Despite the rising technocratic effect of evil among global leadership and its *increasing* impact upon the majority (social engineering, Plato 1991, Book X, passim), history reveals the sidebar of an evolving *capacity* of love steadily emerging within the world. In this regard, I would argue that we are just beginning to experience and understand love. In this respect, the contextual expression of love by Paul to the Corinthians and the life of Jesus were a good albeit *foundational* beginning, but like our personal development throughout a lifetime, the Church throughout history, and humanity through time, our evolving concept of love and the image of God within humanity constantly transform 'from one degree to another' (2 Corinthians 3:18). [Bonhoeffer tells us, 'Those who behold Christ are being drawn into Christ's image, . . . on this earth they will reflect the glory of Jesus Christ. . . . The transformation into the divine image will become ever more profound, and . . . will continue to increase in clarity. This is a progression in us from one level of understanding to another and from one degree of clarity to another, toward an ever-increasing perfection in the form of likeness to the image of the Son of God.' (2003: 286)] Everything is evolving. So, is it that shocking to expect the same in our experience and understanding of *perichoresis*?

As expanding heuristic capacities, forms of life, and more inclusive paradigms emerge throughout history, our capacity to draw fuller meaning from the text should increase. For example, note that there was no word in first-century Greek for *relationship* as we currently use it; a living dynamic that forms between and in distinction from the participants (Cf. Gorsuch 2022). In this respect, our purview into the text increases as linguistic capacities flourish. Therefore, a radical de-Hellenizing and fuller understanding of Jesus' prayer might read, 'Father, help them to relate as we relate, in order that they might relate with us.' Otherwise, what in us is being trans-

formed from one degree to another into his image? What is it that Paul claims is steadily being brought into synchronicity with God throughout history until God is 'all in all' (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)?

Therefore, more radical than the work of Volf, this essay argues that *the dynamic of perichoresis* itself holds the world together and is identifiable as an *emerging* metaphysics through a glass darkly that more than hints at its reflective correspondence to the *perichoresis* of the immanent Trinity. *Perichoresis* is the very ground of our mutuality with God. Though its Christology is fiercely Chalcedonian, this thesis correctively situates it within a more robust understanding of *perichoresis*, the Trinity, and human redemption.

Radical De-Hellenization of Prolegomena

Theology still largely deliberates the embattled issue of theological prolegomena within the residuals of Hellenistic metaphysics—*analogia entis*, subject-subject relations and the asymmetrical priority of substance (and Word). TF Torrance, however, insisted that 'we must operate with an *open* epistemology in which we allow the way of our knowing to be clarified and modified *pari passu* with advance in deeper and fuller knowledge of the object and that we will be unable to set forth an account of that way of knowing in advance' (1969: 10). Theologically this inverts our typical methodological considerations. Therefore, to know God in Christ necessitates a fundamental epistemological openness, a relational disposition through which our *entire* spirit must become vulnerably open. If DB Dabney is correct, and the word is constructed upon a *preceding* breath (spirit), then

> we must insist against Barth that it is the *Spirit* of God and not simply the *Word* of God that is properly basic to Christian theology, then against Schleiermacher we must maintain that it is the Spirit *of* God and not *human* spirituality that is the proper subject matter for an appropriate prolegomenon to theology. . . . The Spirit of God is not human spirit aspiring to the divine, but neither is it the subjectivity of God making an object of the human. . . . Rather than *sub*jective or *ob*jective, the Spirit is better conceived as *trans*jective; that is to say, that by which we as individuals are transcended, engaged, oriented beyond ourselves, and related to God and neighbor from the very beginning. [Dabney 1996: 160-161]

Dabney's consideration suggests that a metaphysical grounding (contingency) for faith and theology would better rest in a trinitarian coupling of Christ *and* the Spirit, acknowledging the asymmetrical priority of God's Spirit. The modern use of *perichoresis* began in earnest with Jürgen Moltmann's over-simplified use, Colin Gunton (1991, 1993), and is currently most developed by human developmentalist James

Loder (1992, 1998). The utilization of Søren Kierkegaard by Loder presents a notion of *perichoresis* that transcends these Hellenistic proclivities and immediately offers a hermeneutical key to a Christian metaphysics 'in motion,' resolving Derrida's prohibition on metaphysics as conceded to Marion. Derrida then spent the last ten years of his academic life reading Kierkegaard. [Conversation with C Raschke, Seattle 2017.]

Kilby's arguments, like so many, still hinge upon the residual influences of the language and metaphysical orientation of Greek metaphysics and Newtonian notions of spacetime. In this regard, metaphysics must integrate the established scientific evidence and theories of relativity and quantum physics (Cf. Gorsuch 2023); they are not. Even Jesus and the New Testament writers struggled to communicate the fullness of their experiences that overflowed the banks of their given metaphysical and linguistic capacities. Kilby's proposal 'is not that one should move from the social back to, say, a psychological approach to the Trinity—this would simply be to look for a different insight—but rather that one should renounce the very idea that the point of the doctrine is to give insight into God' (Kilby 2000: 443). Regardless of new insights, the mysteries and wonder of the Trinity and God are safe. Furthermore, some of what a perichoretic ontology illuminates in God's character would seem like projections when viewed through antiquated paradigms—subjects being inside each other (a metaphysics of being) verses a mediating relational dynamic between them (*perichoresis*). Might not the very dynamic of divine *perichoresis* itself be the light upon which every*thing* we know and experience bends and receives meaning? Unlocking theology from the strictures of relationality as subject-subject, *perichoresis* as a metaphysical orientation transcends the pejorative notion of time and sequential cause-and-effect relations (passim Gorsuch 2022) creating *moments* of instantaneous mutual co-conditioning (a non-local interaction, *trans*-causality).

Kilby goes on to say that 'as long as Christians continue to believe in the divinity of Christ and the Spirit, and as long as they continue to believe that God is one, then the doctrine is alive and well; it continues to inform the way they read the Scriptures and the overall shape of their faith' (2000: 433). But is this true? First, Christ repeatedly calls us to do 'as' he does when relating to the Father (John 16-17) (conversation with M Folsom), which suggests more than mere psychological interactions, rather perichoretic ontological dimensions within our intimacy. Second, as stated, there are Scriptures and scriptural themes whose fuller meanings lie unseen simply because of these Hellenistic residuals, yet they come alive with meaning and with more profound biblical coherence when viewed through the lens of a perichoretic ontology. Christian redemption according to Christ has to do with not only 'knowing' him but, even more important, *how* he is known, which necessitates psychological descriptors and other considerations. Shockingly, Jesus prioritizes this antecedent *how* of belief

over belief in him! However, before engaging in this exegesis, we must first consider what Kierkegaard discovers about relationality that initiates a new metaphysical orientation. [Cf. Gorsuch 2022 and 2023]

Kierkegaard, *Perichoresis* & *Analogia Spiritus*

Kierkegaard's Johannes Climacus argues that 'it is necessary to risk everything' to undergo transformation. Encounter with a living God necessitates that we relax our control and need for certainty, and willingly enter the unknown. Only in such humility can the Spirit holistically relate God's fullness to our fullness. Kierkegaard hints at the *how* of belief in a short parable:

> If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a *false spirit*; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the *entire passion of the infinite*, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol. [1968: 179, my emphasis]

Only when the Spirit of God that guides us into all truth (John 16:7-15) engages our whole self (Jeremiah 29:13), our spirit, can we truly know Christ. *Human spirit is the entirety of the person in relationship to another*. This is the necessary state of openness, or 'self-donation' (Volf 1998) that Jesus requires to be known as Christ, as God. Unless our spirit fully enters the transformative matrix between our spirit and the Spirit of God, Christ in truth remains unknown—all truth, for that matter, remains obscure—despite one's conviction otherwise.

Here, Kierkegaard's novel understanding of relational dynamics informs our knowledge of *perichoresis*, which represents an irreducible relational ontology that maintains the distinction of personhood while at the same time constituting them *qua* persons from within the formative matrix of the relational unity itself. For Kierkegaard, this mutuality becomes a positive third term that intensifies the polarities (Loder 1992: 209):

> Man is a [relation between two factors] . . . the temporal and the eternal. . . . In a relation between two, the relation is the third term as a negative unity. . . . If on the contrary the relation relates itself to its own self, the relation is then the positive third term. . . . If this relation which relates itself to its own self is constituted by another, the relation doubtless is the third term, but this relation (the third term) is in turn a relation relating itself to that which constituted the whole relation. [Kierkegaard 1941: 146; Cf. also 1968: 187]

The creation of the third term of the relationship itself is 'spirit' that becomes self or social relations, a compounding perichoretic pattern at every level, creating a dynamic living tension, not a material synthesis. For Kierkegaard, spirit and the relationship are one and the same.

That Power that transparently constitutes relationship (gestalt) is He who is 'before all things, and in Whom all things hold together' (Colossians 1:17). Formulating the dynamics of *perichoresis* in this way challenges the conventionally understood dual structure of relationality, 'subject-object' or 'subject-subject,' and instead posits an alternative tripartite consideration of subject-relationship-subject. This tripartite relational structure, in which the human spirit enters a *moment* of mutual co-conditioning with the divine Spirit, presents the possibility of *analogia spiritus*—a pre-reflexive transformational dynamic facilitating holistic change and meaning—the essential dynamic within perichoretic relations. This phenomenon transpires before the emergence of image and is only experienced 'through the limbic system, via emotional or passionate involvement' (Loder 1992: 272). Paul expresses this in Romans 8:16,26: 'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit,' . . . making 'intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.' Loder gives an example of the asymmetric priority of Spirit:

> To be convicted of sin . . . would be unbearable . . . if it were not that such a realization is preceded by the grace that makes such a realization not only bearable but profoundly generative of a new being. The Creator Spirit must create *ex nihilo* in individuals as it created at the beginning of the whole of creation. Thus, mortification precedes the illumination in our accounting of it, but in the sphere of the spirit, the illumination precedes and anticipates the mortification. [1998: 116]

The grace and righteousness of Christ are 'evident only in the sphere of the Spirit'; therefore, *analogia spiritus* must engage before regenerative gestalt.

Such an understanding of *perichoresis*, then, maintains Kierkegaard's insistence that the absolute relates to the Absolute (Spirit) and subsequently the relative to the Relative (Christ) (Kierkegaard 1968: 347). These dynamics can then be located within the dialogical cycle even though they maintain a holistic relational dynamic. In short, Kierkegaard's infinite qualitative difference between the infinite and finite, the eternal and the temporal, is not so much the difference between God and humanity, but because of Jesus Christ, those polar distinctions create the 'condition' in which they are both in God and analogically reflect in humanity. This then necessitates that each person (God and human) constitutes from dual aspects in themselves. In this respect, God's Spirit holistically relates directly with the spirit of human beings through *analogia spiritus* in co-conditioning relations that then condition human

gestalt—*perichoresis*. Therefore, the poles of time and eternity within each person (divine or human) maintain their respective distinction within persons and between persons without them collapsing into the other or essentially mixing (e.g., in God: Christ/Time, Spirit/Eternity; presented in detail Gorsuch 2023). *In other words, each associating pole within each person conditions that of the Other before each person's personal gestalt or constitution in time*. The holistic dynamic of *analogia spiritus* takes asymmetrical priority over personal gestalt within dialogical interactions, and the quality (or genuineness) of the gestalt depends upon the degree of 'infinite resignation' into *analogia spiritus* (the 'leap'). In this regard, Kierkegaard's insistence that the absolute relates to the Absolute in asymmetrical priority to a person's relative gestalt will be important to the forthcoming exegesis. [The use of the 'Other' within this essay has only tangential relation to that of Levinas, but as is implied by Christ in the forthcoming Matthew 25:31-46 passage, in all human relations, we encounter the mediating contingency of Christ (Time) and the Spirit (Eternal) active in creating and supporting all relationships. Even in our relations to the 'least of these,' Christ is indeed present.]

Method: Greater Scriptural Meaning & Coherence

So, how can we critically assess the research programs of *perichoresis* as a potential 'transcendental' for Volf or ontology for Gunton against the perichoretic prohibition of Kilby and others? Nancey Murphy has adapted for theological use the assessment method of adjudicating competing research programs developed by philosopher of science Imre Lakatos and others. Lakatos argues that the ascendant progressive research program will explain more of the data and provide a greater coherence for the greater set of data available (Murphy 1994: 260;1996: 102). In this brief essay, Matthew 12:32 blossoms with cogent meaning, and far richer meaning for corresponding passages like Matthew 7 & 25, Ephesians 6:17, Acts 2, et al. It will also begin to bring the lost story of Jacob to its rightful prominence within theology, a story buried as deep as Matthew 12:32 by today's theology. These and more will open vistas into the unseen theological ground that position us to resolve historically persistent theological anomalies (Cf. Gorsuch 2023), which brings us to Mark Husbands' interesting consideration:

> Our reflection upon the work of LaCugna, Volf, and Moltmann shows the extent to which contemporary theology inhabits a culture in which less than adequate attention is given to the task of reading Scriptures. The promise of dogmatic theology, however, lies in its commitment to carry out its work in deep conversation with the biblical witness. [Husbands 2009: 135]

This complements the earlier cited concerns of Kilby, claiming that little outside a 'few proof-texts in the Gospel of John, [offer] any very clear help in the New Testament in understanding' or substantiating Volf's use of a social Trinity (Kilby 2000: 441). Therefore, though we already have an indirect admission by Kilby discounting some significant passages within canonical literature, it seems most of the participants in this dialogue agree with this biblical criterion of adjudication.

Exegesis

From the New Testament vantage point of the eschaton, there are few passages in the New Testament that speak of the criterion of salvation. Each hint at seemingly unknown criteria active in salvation. In Matthew 25:31-46 the resurrected seem confused and in disbelief as Christ states to each person whether they lovingly related to him or not. Evidently, there will be 'many' who thought they never encountered him but did and those who thought they did but did not. 'Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to me. . . . Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' Only those who never practiced Christianity nor 'believed' in Christ would be confused by their being identified as having related in some way directly to him, even if through others. And, only those who thought themselves Christ believers would be confused by Christ identifying them as never having loved him, even if through others. If they were loving and genuinely open to knowing 'the least' of these, then it seems Christ identifies this as loving him. There appears to be a subtle, even hidden, criterion within human relations at play here that initiates entrance into the redemptive process.

This passage is further clarified when Jesus reveals in Matthew 7:21-23 that, 'Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name . . . and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me!' Note that Christ does not say a few 'Christians,' but *many*: and not that he once knew them and later he did not, he never knew them. Therefore, Christ's constant call to believe and follow him carry the soteriological criterion that such belief necessitates *authentic* relationship and *genuine* knowing of him. Even the description of love by Paul states that all our 'sacrificial' helpfulness to others is nothing if it does not contain love (1 Corinthians 13). In other words, *our helping actions* might or might not reflect love or perichoresis. Just like our beliefs, our actions are conditioned by *how* we relate to others as much as to *whom* or with *what*.

Even more shocking, Jesus requires this antecedent *how* of belief over belief in him! Here we get an even clearer example of this preceding activity or relational disposition. After the Pharisees had just misidentified him as someone related to Satan, and knowing their theological sophistication, he dissects their accusation revealing

their dispositional mistake of presuppositional closure to knowing his full identity. *He resituates salvation from* what *is thought about him to* how *they came to those thoughts*. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him (Matthew 12:32). To know Christ, one must undergo an antecedent dynamic of *analogia spiritus* just before gestalt if Christ is to be known as God. This parallels his insistence that we are willing to pick up our cross daily and expose ourselves to the Spirit of God that conditions all unveiled and open spirits (2 Corinthians 3:16-18). This is openness to God and authentic relations with the Other. Christ was quite clear: to follow him we must be willing to allow our existing knowledge and understanding to transform into a new state of knowing—of knowing him, of knowing the truth of others and ourselves, of knowing the truth of anything (1 Corinthians 8:1-2). For Volf, persons 'self-donate' themselves to the other to be affected or transformed by reality. But even Volf, to a minor degree, still struggles with residual Hellenistic forms of relationality—subject-subject—as do we all. In other words, Volf emphasizes self-donation to the other person without acknowledging the antecedent transformative third term of the relationship into which we are thrust—that dispositional dynamic that Christ exposes in Matthew 12:32, which precipitates genuine self-donation. In self-donation we see only the person before us, but it is the life of the relationship itself into which we are thrown and through which the participants analogically affect or transform each other.

Mutuality becomes a positive third term for Kierkegaard, and furthermore, says Loder, 'the reality of mutuality becomes self-conscious, or aware of itself as such' (1992: 291). Bonhoeffer similarly illustrates this:

> Two wills encountering one another form a structure. A third person joining them sees not just one person connected to the other; rather, the will of the structure, as a third factor, resists the newcomer with a resistance not identical with the wills of the two individuals. Sometimes this is even more powerful than that of either individual—or than the sum of all the individuals, if this is at all conceivable. Precisely this structure is objective spirit. [1998: 98]

For Bonhoeffer, 'objective spirit' is the emergent social structure of community, a living, tangible shape of a social relationality. Nevertheless, any non-negotiable beliefs that are not open for conditioning in the face of authentic relationship to that degree imprison the person within the self. Jeremiah tells us that we will seek God and find God only when we search for God with *all* our heart, not a portion of our heart, not with a bifurcated soul in which we suppress various aspects of self, social identities, wealth, knowledge, or relational enmeshments from ever entering the

dark cocoon of transformation (*analogia spiritus*). When we in infinite resignation become whole within our relations (passion), as Kierkegaard suggests—we become spirit. When our selves bifurcate and fragment, we fall from perichoretic relations and to that degree from reality. The Pharisee's undertow of not allowing their professional and religious status, theological acumen, employment security, power, and privilege into the cocoon of transformation through which Christ could then be fully known by the Spirit of God to their spirits (whole self). The Pharisee's unwillingness to become spirit bound the two hands of the Irenaean God (Christ and the Spirit), shielding them from the full presence and identity of Christ.

It is the Spirit of God that guides us into all truth (Jn 16:7-15). But unless *all* our self *antecedently* releases into the transformative matrix of our relations with the Spirit of God, Christ in truth remains unknown despite our convictions otherwise (Matthew 12:32). Truth or theological dogmatics are not a sword one possesses and wields across time; it is an existential gift in each moment of Time. It might be better understood as the quality of each relationship (Ephesians 6:17; the Greek text indicates that the 'word of God' modifies 'Spirit' not 'sword.') Also, McFadyen tells us, 'Christian Truth, therefore, is not primarily propositional; it is relational: it concerns the proper relationship of humanity, creation and God' (1993, p.447). This is the meaning of Matthew 12:32. No other understanding of this passage is coherent with the Scriptures nor accommodated within any non-perichoretic theology. Considering all that the New Testament says about the necessity of belief in Christ, how is it that *Christ* can say blasphemy and speaking against him will be forgiven? The only answer is that *he here exposes a necessary antecedent quality of personal openness ('self-donation') that then allows the full truth or knowing to be created within us and between us—analogia spiritus*. If we resist, blaspheme, speak against, or dispositionally close off from this antecedent 'conditioning' by the spirit of the Other, then they (Christ) are never wholly known. Christ's call throughout the New Testament to others with less intellectual sophistication simply assumes such genuineness without parsing the act of faith as in Mt 12:32.

The authors of the two most extensive commentaries on Matthew, who presumably researched every accessible consideration of this passage, concede that it is otherwise meaningless in relation to the rest of the New Testament. [D Hagner tells us Christ's insistence that 'anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him,' is a difficult passage that does not exactly encourage optimism in the exegete (1993: 347). Furthermore, W Davies and D Allison say, 'Matt 12.32 has no obvious meaning. . . . We remained stumped' (1991: 348), and U Luz (2001) finds no explanation satisfactory. When Hagner encountered this author's exegete of this passage in 1993, he conceded that indeed it brought coherent meaning to this pas-

sage in relation to the rest of the New Testament.] This coherent understanding of this passage according to the perichoretic theology presented in this essay not only complements the rest of the Scriptures it also expands our theological insights into Christ's redemptive action and our understanding of *how* humanity relates with God.

Language & *Perichoresis*

The typical bifurcating of language into the postliberal first and second order languages is taken to task by this passage and New Testament theme. Kilby reports:

The doctrine of the Trinity, I want to suggest, does not need to be seen as a descriptive, first order teaching - there is no need to assume that its main function must be to provide a picture of the divine, a deep understanding of the way God really is. It can instead be taken as grammatical, as a second order proposition, a rule, or perhaps a set of rules, for how to read the Biblical stories. [Kilby 2000: 443]

Just as Jesus prioritized *how* he is known (the character of the relationship) over the *who*, so it is with theology. The terrestrial horizon upon which postliberals separate language games can be loosely associated with Dabney's earlier consideration of *sub*jective (first order) and *ob*jective (second order). A perichoretic horizon represents an entirely inverted understanding of language as *trans*jective. In other words, a holistic exchange of meaning transpires between persons in asymmetrical priority to relative linguistic and grammatical gestalt. [As Ian McGilchrist has powerfully shown us, the holistic activity of the right hemisphere should be *Master* over its *Emissary*, the defining/ordering left hemisphere. passim Part One, 2010.]

The Pentecost event as the proleptic portending of fully redeemed humanity (Acts 2: 5-13), obviating our current state of redemptive and perichoretic development, might inform our understanding of how language truly works. Regardless of the language spoken, each listener (~~in~~)commensurably understands the Other within each listener's meaning-frame (mother tongue)! We might assume that those with less developed meaning-frames *intuited* the *ad extra* meaning and vice-versa. Intrasystematic language games are contingent upon an active and living objective spirit that emerges within each developing community. *Analogia spiritus* transparently supports *this* within each community. The proleptic intersystematic dialogue of Pentecost, however, was contingent upon the activity of God's Spirit as well as human intrasystematic contingencies (Cf. Gorsuch 2023). Therefore, a shared holistic function mediates meaning between them and then associatively conditions the relative aspects within each person's specific meaning-frame, rather than the words alone first constructing meaning within each separately. The latter is Hellenistic, the former perichoretic; each contain both aspects (temporal/eternal) but asymmetrically prioritize different polarities. The persistent residuals of *analogia entis* within our understanding of language are the reason why Matthew 12:32 has gone so long

without being fully understood (e.g., 'indwelling' the other, the dialogical logic of subject-subject, the asymmetrical priority of language meaning resulting from the relativity of words (traces) over the holistic gestalt (rather than the priority of the holistic and instantaneous dynamic of *analogia spiritus* to the relative construction of personal gestalt), etc.). Christian dogma or second order grammatical language are asymmetrically contingent upon the level of *perichoresis* within their reading. The degree to which our 'grammatical' use is perichoretically divorced from first order experience is predictive of an ensuing fecundity of theologies bobbing in Christendom's sea of simulacra. The two cannot be separated any more than we can separate the dialogical dynamics at play within the irreducible dynamics of *perichoresis.*

One of the most playfully provocative statements Kierkegaard ever wrote teases and taunts us, even forces us into the radical nature of truth, meaning, and language.

> The truth is always in the minority and the minority is always stronger than the majority because the minority is ordinarily made up of those who do, after all, actually have an opinion, while the strength of the majority is illusory, formed by the crowd that has no opinion—and which at the next instant (when it becomes clear that the minority has the stronger view) adopts the view of the minority, which now becomes that of the majority: that is, it becomes nonsense by having the whole of the crowd and numbers on its side, while the truth is once again in a new minority. [Kierkegaard 2015: 120]

Why would truth (e.g., in the text) once held by a minority not be truth when later held by a majority? This is nonsense when truth (or adequacy) is simply the product of coherence, proper grammar, and that which is solely within the text. And though language is the house of being, Kierkegaard identifies truth as the character (*perichoresis*) of the relationship itself, existentially within (or between) those who have first entered in infinite resignation, thus opening themselves to the Other as spirit. In other words, the minority think, act, and move with a passion and authority (minority) that escapes those who enter the relationship (the reading) with truncated spirits (majority). The unbelieving Pharisees and those who thought the people of Pentecost intoxicated were those unwilling to pick up their cross, unwilling to suffer (Matthew 10:37-39; Luke 14:26,27,33). They had no real authority in their 'opinion'; they lived to that degree in 'illusion.' Kierkegaard knew well the antecedent necessity of *analogia spiritus* (passion) and that the actual difference between the goats and sheep was not *what* they did as much as their givenness to *perichoresis—how* they acted and engaged others.

This in no way relaxes the uniqueness or theological importance of Christ within our current Christian understanding. On the contrary, it simply introduces the necessity of *how* he is known (*perichore*tically). If then a growing understanding of

perichoresis from its initial and primitive use by the Church Fathers can effectively bring meaning to a passage that heretofore had none, then I submit that a research program utilizing *perichoresis* as a hermeneutical key for ontology is a viable and progressive research program in relation to Kilby's guarded trinitarian minimalism.

Postscript: Task of Theology

I would like to address why we do theology in the first place. To begin with, I am sure both Kilby and Volf live with a far more robust understanding of atonement theory than the typical understanding of first century Christians. Postliberal theologians and others struggle with expressing how such evolution of meaning within our theological development happens, but it does not occur by instituting prohibitions. The entire spirit of the Scriptures champions those who wrestle with God, who take risks. In the most championed act of faith in the Old Testament, Jacob not only projected his personal understanding and desire upon God, a scandalous theological move, he, in *transcending Fear and Trembling*, challenged the accepted theological dogma about God and pulled a new knowledge of God's grace and a new level of divine-human interaction from the future into the world. We know no nation of Moses, Abraham, or David, but only Israel—he who has seen the face of God and lived. Whether myth, allegory, or history, the canonical story still stands, yet no one seems to know what to do with Jacob (a theological embarrassment). Such champions wrestle and project, knowing that the Power within their midst, which mediates all relationships, will, upon such choices, transparently reveal whether their choice is right or wrong. For Kierkegaard,

> in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated. Therefore, even if a man were to choose the wrong, he will nevertheless discover, precisely by reason of the energy by which he chose, that he had chosen the wrong. For the choice being made with the whole inwardness of his personality, his nature is purified and he himself brought into immediate relation to the external Power whose omnipresence interpenetrates the whole of existence. [Kierkegaard 1944: 141]

[In neo-Platonic language, Noel O'Donoghue similarly notes: 'Sharing then, participation (in the active sense) is, at the source, at once the sharing of infinite sharing, and the giving of an infinite capacity for receiving: infinities meet in the finite. The creature is no less infinite than the creator, in the infinity of its radical dependence, its radical nothingness: on this ground rests the infinity of its receptivity: *homo capax Dei*. The mystic makes his own of this negative immensity of openness to the

infinite that shares its own being, and in this lived appropriation, *experiences the logic of infinity*, experiences that finitude reaching to the infinite, which is the centre of all creativity as it is the centre of all prayer.' [1979: 177f; my emphasis]

Therefore, the degree and character of openness within relations also contribute to the character of closure and, ultimately, one's level of conviction, passion, truth, and authority within the relationship and resulting knowledge or belief (Bonhoeffer 1998: 67). For Moltmann, like Kierkegaard, Loder, Gunton, Volf, and many others, theology is experimental, adventurous, and suggestive: 'There are theological systems which are not only designed to be non-contradictory in themselves but aim to remain undisputed from outside too. They are like fortresses which cannot be taken, but which no one can break out of either (Moltmann 1996: xiv).'

Theology as such is not about affirming *once and for all* the dogmatic doctrines of the faith, but 'imagination for the kingdom of God (1996: xiv),' in which various and diverse images give expression to a transforming gestalt that can never be 'conceptually' circumscribed or ossified. Therefore, without 'built-in safeguards' and in what some regard as reckless, what I perceive as dynamically impressionistic, such theology evokes a rich purview into the whole of our faith experience through often scattered but well-placed strokes. Theology's true strength and coherence emerge only within the richness of the theological gestalt it creates within the reader. (In other words, the 'realism,' whole picture, or meaning within theology must happen *between* the text and the reader. Impressionistic paintings force the viewer to enter the process of making meaning and require the proper relationship (e.g., three meters back), thereby allowing the appropriate relationship to emerge *between* them rather than referring or corresponding to 'reality'—realism.) Moltmann and Volf, as much as Barth or Luther have their 'here, I stand' moments, but each stand is provisional, for the *moment*, for that context; never did their explorations looking for more of God in the world cease. One only needs to consider the interdisciplinary explorations of Moltmann, Gunton, TF Torrance, and Loder within their life's work in contrast to Barth to see the radical difference in methodology. All these true explorers into the wild were constantly playing with all sorts of ontological issues. Even the early Barth employed Kierkegaard's attack on Modernity's transcendentals only to be frightened away as he began to articulate the full transcendentals of Kierkegaard and thus defaulted to his well-known Christological centrality. [What did Barth ever do with Matthew 12:32? Nothing. Throughout his exhaustive *Church Dogmatics*, he necessarily kept it in theological denial, as most do. Such a reading would have left his entire *Dogmatics* and Christological centrality exposed and found wanting.]

Kilby, on the other hand, with Mark Husbands and others, insist on a trinitarian minimalism. The scriptural passages upon which these theologians develop their

thinking have just as much correlative or greater meaning within a perichoretic paradigm and reading, so Husband's call for a 'commitment to carry out [his] work in deep conversation with the biblical witness' now beckons his response in supplying the theological community with his own meaning of Matthew 12:32. A lack of cogent response, or silence, from such theologians on this passage and scriptural theme diminishes their criticism and conversely strengthens the theological viability of *perichoresis*. I have attempted to show that their project of sniffing out projection in this situation is woefully inadequate and that the wave of *perichoresis* in theology is just beginning to swell. In this regard, what is emerging within various secular disciplines of thought can often creatively inform our growing understanding and experience of *perichoresis*. If it genuinely and analogically reflects divine *perichoresis*, it will continue to draw even more meaning from the text and greater fullness of life within the faith community. Though it is challenging to communicate a complete perichoretic metaphysics, *viz.* paradigm shift, in a brief 'primer' essay, one hopes it bears witness to how new meaning might emerge from Matthew 12:32. This essay presents only a whisper of what has already emerged to be creatively studied, explored, and deliberated (Gorsuch 2022 and 2023, et al). For now, I will offer two short examples.

God's perichoretic relation to humanity in Christ and the Holy Spirit opens the transcendent-immanent possibility that within the prereflexive de-liberation of *analogia spiritus* of our dialogical cycling, a person *holistically* enters into *mutual co-conditioning* relations with *God's Eternal action.* By drawing the human prereflexive dynamic into a mutual co-conditioning association with God's preeminent activity of creation 'before time' (*analogia spiritus*), persons of infinite resignation (passion/wrestling) partake in mutual freedom *with* God in Eternity. The Incarnation creates this possibility within God, and the Spirit in relation to human spirit creates it in humanity. [Enjoyably Cf. the film *Adjustment Bureau* (2011: Universal Pictures)]

Another perichoretic consideration suggests that *perichoresis* and its engine of *analogia spiritus* are what facilitate the relative relating to the relative and the absolute to the Absolute (Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* 1941, passim; 1968: 347). In short, human contingency rests upon the action of a more robust understanding of the Trinity than just Christ as *energized* by the Spirit. Thus, a perichoretic ontology does not create a universal frame of reference in which all things similar mutually relate (*analogia entis* or Hegelian Geist), but rather *a universal dynamic of relationality* through which all things different can mutually and meaningfully relate (*analogia spiritus*).

Broadly speaking, both the modal and social Trinity have elements of adequacy and error. They present a false dichotomy when we view through antiquated Hellenistic paradigms that forces a choice between the one or the many (subject-subject).

Kierkegaard, who was just as much a social theorist (Matustík and Westphal 1995) in tension with his call to differentiated personhood (*contra* Hegel), resists commingling of the two and insists they remain ontologically in dynamic, irreducible, and existential tension within the relationship (subject-relationship-subject). And so, we still flounder upon this half-read Kierkegaardian admonition in a largely Hellenistic/Hegelian sea. But Kierkegaard always speaks between the lines, indirectly, impressionistically. He requires a closer reading (three meters back).

Conclusion

The dual poles of existence, time and eternity, have come to earth in the great offense—God-man. In cycles of transformation, this offense continues to rise reflectively *within* and *between* all humanity, not as divine substance, but as the beginning of *perichoresis* and the evolutionary/redemptive answer to Christ's prayer that indeed hermeneutically centers the whole of the Scriptures. It will not be erased with the silver bullet of 'projection.' Hidden within the human dialogical cycle lies the mysterious blind spot, the repeating blackhole so dense not even light can escape. This is the night of *analogia spiritus*, the Kierkegaardian *moment*, the lightning strike just before the dawn of each new gestalt of the Word (Luke 17:24). Abraham hears the ineffable within the word, the gestalt of daylight—Abraham is transformed and does it. Jacob, however, wrestles in the darkness of *analogia spiritus* just before the dawn where no light can shine, and God is conditioned 'before time' by the ineffable within Jacob's passion—God is transformed and does it. If Abraham is scandalous for acting upon the ineffable within God's word, Jacob is mad for thinking he could somehow condition God from within the Eternal as God's Word was forming from the breath of God.

God (the Father) can only be known through the antecedent existential tension and mutual co-conditioning of our spirit with the divine Eternal Spirit before the gestalt into time (the relative), wherein 'speaking our words, the Word re-doubles his incarnation, or rather accomplishes it absolutely, since language constitutes us more carnally than our flesh. Such an incarnation in our words can be undertaken only by the Word, who comes to us before our words' (Marion 1991: 141). Therefore, we are irreducibly both interdependent and differentiated, alternatingly so, dialogically pulsing back and forth, back and forth, constantly—infinite and finite, eternal and temporal—until in passion we move with the Spirit and Christ altogether separate. [Similarly, Bonhoeffer argues, 'Thus there follows from our concept of time an idea that is quite meaningless for idealism, that *the person ever and again arises and passes away in time*. The person does not exist timelessly; a person is not static but dynamic. The person exists always and only in ethical responsibility; the person is re-created again and again in the perpetual flux of life. Subjective spirit becomes eternally signif-

icant only *in relation* to absolute spirit. . . . Idealism has no appreciation of movement' (1998: 48, second emphasis mine).]

Granted, these are brief explorations into one understanding of a perichoretic theology. Hopefully they will encourage within the reader and the academy a spirit of Jacob—far more scandalous than mere projections—a spirit that continues to wrestle from the future our full filial relationship accomplished by the crucified and resurrected Christ Jesus.

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[Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations from the NKJV.]