

Christological Perichoresis

an ecological doctrine of creation

Abstract

Any analogy can express the trinitarian doctrine. We must not use it to promote social, political or ecclesiastical regimes. In my view, it is not trinitarian as Moltmann claims, but Christological perichoresis that can be known as a starting point for an ecological doctrine of creation. I reclaim the patristic Christological perichoresis, by showing how in bringing together different entities, such as God and Nature, and looking at them in unity as the one person of Christ, we acknowledge the perichoresis between divine, humanity and nature. For Christological perichoresis the whole creation is included in God's recreated cosmos, in response to the redeeming power of Christ who entered the web of life as a creature.

Christological perichoresis goes further than the ecofeminist model of scientific interrelatedness between the cosmic beings, as it speaks of the creator who sustains and recreates the cosmos. The effects of the hypostatic union in Christ between creator and creation extend through the cosmos. God created all that exist, making them tunable between them and with God as relation of origin. The self-emptying of God in Christ questions all constructions about the Trinity, as time/space bound.

Key Words Christological perichoresis, Trinitarian perichoresis, ecofeminism, interrelatedness.

Introduction

One of my motivations for focusing on perichoretic relations as the co-inherence in Christ of the human and divine natures is that it illustrates the relationship between God the Creator and the creation. My goal is for a healed relationship among humans and between humans, the earth and its beings, which will lead to a holistic perichoretic consciousness and a culture opposing domination-systems and the exploitation of nature. The eco-theological problem is one of humanity being in non-perichoretic relationship within itself, God, and the rest of creation. To heal this rift is a process of cultivating perichoretic relations between them, in Christ. In this article I trace the development of the concept 'perichoresis' as a preliminary to studying its promise, potential, and implications for ecotheology.

A Brief History of Trinitarian Perichoresis

The Definition of Perichoresis

The Eastern Church Fathers quote both the verb and the noun from Anaxagoras where it means revolution, rotation as cosmic differentiation, ordering, continuation; extension. The noun περιχώρησις names the process of making room for another around oneself, or to extend one's self round about. Theologically the term developed over the first seven centuries of the Church-history. August Deneffe distinguishes a static sense as 'coinherence' and a dynamic one as 'interpenetration.' He linked perichoresis to the stoic concept of mixture, which means a complete mutual interpenetration of two substances that preserves the identity and property of each intact.¹ The noun περιχώρησις is met in Maximus' work first in patristic writing.² From Anaxagoras to John of Damascus its meaning of becomes a new one, in an Christological context. Perichoresis has biblical roots.³ The biblical basis for the mutual indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the other Persons is lacking. The fathers contextualized 'περιχώρησις' from Anaxagoras' cosmological, mechanistic context to use it in an Christological and Trinitarian context.

Eastern Church Fathers

Athanasius the Great at the first Council of Nicaea, argued against Arius and his doctrine that Christ is of a distinct substance from the Father. Athanasius shows the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son by giving the illustration of a king's portrait, the Father is in the Son as the subject of a king's exact portrait can be.⁴

The Cappadocian Fathers insisted on 'three persons but one essence' to preserve the Nicene Trinitarianism from Arianism.⁵ Gregory of Nazianzus preached of one God, three in unity and equal; each distinct in its own property, each God because of

¹ Verna Harrison, 'Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35/1 (1991), p.54.

² My historical analysis of trinitarian perichoresis depends in part upon the work of G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S-P.C.K., 1964), pp.288-301.

³ John 10. 34-8 11-17. 21.

⁴ Αθανασίου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀλεξανδρείας, *Τὰ Εὕρισκόμενα Πάντα, Κατὰ Ἀρειανὸν Λόγος Τρίτος*, PG τ. 26, 2, 5A, 332.

⁵ 'Cappadocian Fathers', in Walter Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), pp.205-6.

consubstantiality. There is in the Godhead an identity of hypostatic substance; distinct as each differs in relation to origin.⁶ If there are no hypostases in God of one essence, the indwelling of the Godhead is questioned. Gregory of Nyssa wrote the treatise, *To Ablabius* to prove that ‘there are not three gods.’ He explains that trying to know the divine nature we do not express what the essence of the nature is.⁷ The one divine nature rejects diversity in essence. Creation and redemption are trinitarian acts;⁸ in God’s manifestation to the cosmos, it is three divine persons in περιχώρησις.

According to **Nilus of Constantinople** the Son fills and contains all things, contained in the Father who fills and contains all things, while contained in the Son.⁹

Leontius of Byzantium¹⁰ used the verb ἀντιπεριχωρέω meaning that Christ’s natures are interchangeable. The one Christ is in both.¹¹

Pseudo-Cyril applied ‘περιχώρησις’ in a trinitarian sense to the idea of coinherence.¹² He sees two causes of divine unity: the identity of essence and the mutual perichoresis presupposing their threeness.¹³ Both ousia and hypostases had been explained; the doctrine needed to be defined from the aspect of either term. Perichoresis needed to shape a definition starting from the term hypostasis that would express the truth of one God. Without it, tritheism could appear. It is not now perichoresis ‘to’ but ‘in’ one another. Perichoresis ‘to’ one another speaks of equivalent or alternative persons; ‘in’ one another that they are co-extensive, forming the reverse of ousia’s identity.¹⁴

⁶ Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787) their History and Theology* (Collegeville Minnesota: A Michael Glazier, 1983), pp.116-7.

⁷ Του Γρηγορίου Επισκόπου Νύσσης, *Περί του μη είναι τρείς Θεούς*, PG, τ. 45, 121.

⁸ Χ Ανδρούτσου, *Δογματική τής Ὀρθοδόξου Ἀνατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας* (Αθήνα: ΑΣΤΗΡ, 1956), σελ.92.

⁹ Νεΐλος Ἀββάς Ὑπερέχιος *Epistolarum Lib. 2 ΑΘ’* PG τ. 79, 213.

¹⁰ Leontius of Byzantium, *NIDCC New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p.592.

¹¹ Ευσεβίου του Αλεξανδρέως Ευσεβίου Επισήμου Λεοντίου του Βυζαντίου Μοναχού *Τα Ευρισκόμενα Πάντα λόγοι Γ’ κατά Νεστοριανών και Εντυχιανιστών Λόγος Β’* PG τ. 86, 1, 1320B.

¹² Κύριλλος Αλεξανδρείας, *De Trinitate* 10, PG τ. 77, 1144B, J.-P. Migne, *Ελληνική Πατρολογία*, (Αθήνα: Κέντρον Πατερικών Εκδόσεων, 1994).

¹³ Harrison, ‘Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers’, p.60.

¹⁴ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p.297.

According to **Nicephorus of Constantinople** the idea that the divine persons ‘alternate’ περιχωρούν ‘into’ one another is a heresy.¹⁵

John of Damascus is the last of the early church fathers to discuss ‘perichoresis.’ For him, there is not in creation an image showing trinity’s nature. Things created cannot describe the uncreated divine essence. Each trinitarian person is related to the others as to itself, having their being in one another without coalescence or commingling.¹⁶

Trinitarian perichoresis verifies the consubstantiality of the divine persons against Arianism,¹⁷ the distinct persons against modalism.¹⁸ Perichoresis avoids subordinationism¹⁹ in the trinity. Without it, the trinity would be tritheism or polytheism. Christological perichoresis proclaims: one person in Christ against Nestorianism’s idea of two persons united and two distinct natures against monophysitism’s²⁰ confusion of the elements of Christ in one nature.²¹ The eastern fathers knew God as one being in three presentations.

The Use of Perichoresis by Modern Theologians

The defence of a social conception of the trinity started with Moltmann,²² who retrieves John Damascene’s doctrine of trinitarian περιχώρησις.²³ For him, through the idea of perichoresis, the social doctrine of the trinity expresses the eternal indwelling and community of the divine persons as basis for differentiation and unity of God.²⁴ Trinitarian perichoresis can be the starting point for the account of all analogously dualistic relations reflecting the mutual indwelling and interpenetration

¹⁵ Νικηφόρου Αρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως *Τα Ευρισκόμενα Άπαντα, Epistola D Leonem III Param.*, PG τ. 100, 184D.

¹⁶ Ιωάννου Δαμασκηνού, *Εκδόσις Ακριβής της Ορθοδόξου Πίστεως*, Α, 8 (Θεσσαλονίκη: Εκδόσεις Π. Πουρνάρα, 1989), σελ.58, 64, 66.

¹⁷ ‘Arianism’ *Formation of Christian Theology, Volume Two, The Nicene Faith, Part 2* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), pp.22-8.

¹⁸ ‘Modalism or Sabellianism’ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p.42.

¹⁹ ‘Subordinationism’, J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1974), p.938.

²⁰ ‘Monophysitism’ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils*, pp.196-7.

²¹ ‘Perichoresis, Christological’, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 11 (Washington DC: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp.128-9.

²² Karen Kilby, ‘Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity’, *New Blackfriars* 81:956(2000), 432-45.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp.174.

²⁴ John 14.11, 10.30

of trinitarian perichoresis: God in the world, the world in God; heaven, earth in God's kingdom; soul, body as a whole in the life giving Spirit; woman, man as whole human beings.²⁵ Life as perichoresis designates an ecological doctrine of creation.²⁶

Some of Moltmann's ideas served as reference points for feminist and ecofeminist theologians, struggling against dualisms in patriarchal structures. For Moltmann, female metaphors of God are symbols of metanoia. Masculinity, femininity and all dualistic relations are sinful, requiring holistic healing processes and redemption. According to Moltmann, the ecumenical and ecological resonance in God's incarnated Wisdom and the indwelling Spirit as trinitarian perichoresis embody justice for women and the entire creation.²⁷

According to Boff, ecological discourse is about the web of relationship that constitutes and sustains the cosmos and makes it possible to speak of God as a trinity of persons. This is a dynamic metaphysics not a static, ontological one. Christians know God as communion, not as the result of persons who upon being in and for themselves thereupon began to relate. If there were 'one' divine figure, solitude would prevail. Were there 'two,' it would be the dual narcissism of a couple. A 'third' figure forces the others to turn their gaze from each other to other directions, dialectic of three interrelated, distinct persons.²⁸ Trinitarian perichoresis emerges as a modern concept in tune with our cosmology, encountering all closed systems.²⁹

Mark Wallace, critiques Moltmann³⁰ who sees humans as God's proxies representing creation before God. Moltmann's anthropocentrism, as knowing humans as the 'apex of creation,' suited to loosen the dumb tongue of nature'³¹ shows an inability to celebrate nature for its own sake-not lesser than humans nor in need of human mediation, but as a sacred place with its own values and goods. According to Wallace, Moltmann's ecotheology is 'soft anthropocentrism'. By privileging humans in the cosmic order, Moltmann disproves his ecological doctrine of creation.³²

²⁵ Moltmann bases this thought on Barth *CD IV/1*, pp.200f.

²⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1997), pp.15-7.

²⁷ Catherine Keller, 'Pneumatic Nudges: The Theology of Moltmann, Feminism, and the Future', in Volf (ed.), *The Future of Theology Essays in Honor of Jürgen Moltmann*, pp.142-53.

²⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1997), pp.155-6.

²⁹ Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, pp.24-26, 154-6.

³⁰ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp.187-190.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.187-90, 71.

³² Mark Wallace, *The Fragments of the Spirit* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p.165.

Johnson envisions a triple helix. The double helix carries the genetic code of human life. The strands of the helix do not arise from each other but are together. The relations may be modelled on human analogies for the interaction of male-female, parent-child; friend-friend. If God's image is the reference point for the community's values, the triune sym

bol critiques patriarchal domination in church and society.³³

According to Wilson-Kasner, relationship for theological anthropology is based on the nature of God, whose life we are invited to share united with Christ. For her, feminism, considers mutual interrelatedness as basic. The unity of body, mind, movement, sound in dance offer a metaphor for unity and diversity in the divine life.

According to LaCugna, when the doctrine of the Father's monarchy weakened because of the Cappadocian doctrine of intra-divine relations, the idea of perichoresis replaced it. A divine person is by nature in relation to the other persons.³⁴ Perichoresis avoids locating the divine unity either in the divine essence or in the person of the Father; it locates unity in a communion of persons.³⁵ LaCugna prefers the image 'divine dance'. For her the claim of feminist theology that a human community of equals is an icon of God's relational life is made by turning to the economy of salvation and of human community that Jesus proclaimed, revealing the reign of God. The starting point in the economy of redemption locates perichoresis not in God's inner life, but in the mystery of the communion of both divine and human persons. One perichoresis includes God and humanity.³⁶ LaCugna develops a relational ontology of persons, both human and divine in communion.³⁷ For her, Wilson's Christology shows that though equality and mutuality among persons are basic to trinitarian theology, theological anthropology and soteriology, a sphere of intra-divine relations is a fragile basis. She critiques perichoresis in Boff, who equates the divine essence with perichoresis. The divine relations and the idea that divine life consists of

³³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is, The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1999), pp.222-3.

³⁴ Κύριλλος Ἀλεξανδρείας, *ΣΤ' Ἐξήγησις Ὑπομνηματικῆ Εἰς τὸ Κατὰ Ἰωάννην Εὐαγγέλιον* Λόγος Πρώτος, PG 73, 81.

³⁵ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), pp.270-1.

³⁶ LaCugna, *God for Us*, pp.270-74.

³⁷ LaCugna, *God for Us*, p.275.

a mutual revelation of the persons is scholastic theology far from the biblical witness to the role of each person, it is a reified account of divine essence.³⁸

On the Use of Perichoresis by Modern Theologians

Challenging the Social Doctrine of the Trinity

According to Kilby, the use of social analogies to the trinity is problematic.³⁹ For modern theology, person is a technical term in the trinitarian formula; for social theorists, our society's meaning of person should return to the trinitarian idea for today personhood leads to individualism.⁴⁰ According to Moltmann to avoid absolutism, we can adopt a social doctrine of the trinity for a ruler's monarchy does not accord to the trinity. If one probes further into Kasner's feminist tribute of the social trinity, a suspicion of projection arises. For her, the trinity is a mutuality of persons who choose to go out and enter in relationships. According to Moltmann, the trinitarian persons do not exist and then enter into relationship, but are comprised by their relationships. According to Kilby, the divine perichoresis is beyond our experience; projection is doubtful; what is projected onto God is reflected back onto the world. The doctrine is not a descriptive of God, but a Christian structuring principle. Theologians must not use it claiming an insight into God's life to promote social, political or ecclesiastical regimes.⁴¹ Coakley argues that Gregory's of Nyssa trinitarian theology is about the unity of divine will and action; not probing into the details of Godhead's nature. Gregory not starting from the three is not a 'social' Trinitarian. The tack is of 'communion' between the persons not 'community.' Gregory's analogies for the trinity stress the indivisibility of the persons and the fluidity in their bounds. An apophatic sensibility attends any talk of God's essence.⁴²

³⁸ Graham Buxton, 'On the Trinitarian doctrine of perichoresis.'

http://www.taboradelaide.com/downloads/downloads_about/staff_articles/On_the_Trinitarian_doctrine_of_perichoresis.doc

³⁹ Karen Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', first published in *New Blackfriars* 81:956, (October 2000), pp.432-445.

⁴⁰ For a similar line of thought in a different context, see also chapter 1 of John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp.27-49.

⁴¹ Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', 432-45.

⁴² Sarah Coakley, 'Persons', in *Powers and Submissions, Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.112-120.

Perichoresis: Analogia Relationis devoid of Analogia Entis?

In his social doctrine of the trinity, Moltmann stresses the ‘perichoretically consummated life processes’ of the persons who ‘must not be reduced to three modes of being of one divine subject,’ and whose unity ‘cannot be seen in a general concept of divine substance.’ The unity of the persons is neither substantial nor numerical, but a unity of communal love. Perichoresis is used without the mutual interpenetration in the one divine nature of the persons,⁴³ yet it needs an ontological basis for relations if it is not just a conceptual relationship. Even quantum theory shows how energy is exchanged on the subatomic level between the smallest particles that for their wave-like behaviour assume something substantially existing in dynamic relation that elicits energy when colliding.⁴⁴ The fact that God is the Father adds to the mode of being, a person. There are no persons without relation, neither relation without persons. If ‘person’ is known in trinitarian terms of relation and context the persons do not only subsist in the common divine substance; they also exist in their mutual relation, an idea expressed in the early church’s doctrine of trinitarianism. Persons realize themselves in one another by virtue of love.

What Kind of Language is Trinitarian Language?

Ecofeminists challenge all language as translation of experiences. According to Coakley, we know ‘Father’-trinitarian language as metaphorical⁴⁵ since Gregory of Nyssa discerns human from divine fatherhood. If Gregory makes a parallel move, human ‘father’ language can be analogical derivative from the divine, instead of divine ‘Father’ language that is either metaphorical or analogical based on human prototypes. For Gregory the names father and mother bear the same meaning for there is ‘neither male nor female’ in God.⁴⁶ Gender stereotypes must be ‘reversed, undermined and transcended’. A plethora of biblical allegorical references draws us beyond complacency. Gregory’s ‘analogies’ show an apophatic sensibility for the

⁴³ Randall E. Otto, ‘The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology’, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 54/3, (2001), 373.

⁴⁴ Otto, ‘The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology’, 366-84.

⁴⁵ Sarah Coakley here touches McFague’s ‘Metaphorical Theology’.

⁴⁶ Παναγιώτης Χρήστου, (Επόπτης), *Γρηγ. Νύσσης Έργα 7* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πατερικά Εκδόσεις «Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς», 1989), σελ.234-7.

divine essence, to be known as ‘metaphors’ in modern terms. Each one bears a sense of the ineffable divine nature, exposing the limits of what we say about God.⁴⁷

Does ‘Communion’ Belong to the Level of ‘Substance’?

A work related to John Zizioulas substantiates the ‘social trinity of the east’, where ‘personhood’ is prior to ‘substance,’ according to Coakley.⁴⁸ For her, Gregory of Nyssa does not prioritize ‘person’ over ‘substance,’ a polemical in Zizioulas’s⁴⁹ thought, who discusses the terms in the patristic era of both Athanasius and the Cappadocians. Zizioulas prioritizes neither ‘person’ over ‘substance’ nor ‘substance’ over ‘person.’ For him, in Athanasius’ ontology, the Son’s being belongs to God’s substance, an idea Athanasius used to argue against the Arians. By connecting the Son’s being with God’s substance, he transformed the idea of substance. ‘Father’ is a relational term.⁵⁰ ‘Has God ever existed without God’s own Son?’⁵¹ Given the character of God’s being, substance is known only as communion.

A relational term, ‘hypostasis’ entered into ontology; an ontological category ‘hypostasis’ entered the relational categories of being. To identify God’s being with a person rather than with ousia makes possible a biblical doctrine of God the Father while solving the problem of homousion, as for the relation of the Son to the Father. In making the Father the ground of God’s being, theology founded the Son’s otherness on one ousia. Athanasius’ relational idea of substance becomes in the work of the Cappadocians the ontology of personhood.⁵² According to Zizioulas, the ontological position of the eastern fathers might be that no substance-nature exists without person-hypostasis. The ontological cause of being is not substance or nature but person or hypostasis. Being is traced back not to ousia but to the person of the Father.⁵³ Coakley’s Latin exegesis gives priority to divine ousia.⁵⁴ To admit that there was a time when only ousia existed, implies that the prosopa were not eternal. Perichoresis safeguarded the *ομοούσιον* of the trinitarian persons and replaced the

⁴⁷ Coakley, *Powers and Submissions, Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*, pp.128-9, 124-127.

⁴⁸ Sarah Coakley, ‘Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction–Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of the Song’, *Modern Theology*, 18/4 (2002), 434.

⁴⁹ Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, p.123.

⁵⁰ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp.84-5, 60 footnote.

⁵¹ Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* PG 26, 2, Λόγος Πρώτος 33.

⁵² Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, pp.83-9, 67, footnote.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.41-2, 37footnote.

⁵⁴ Coakley, ‘Persons’ in the ‘Social Doctrine of the Trinity’, 123, 52 footnote.

patristic doctrine that God's unity belonged to the Father. The model of perichoresis does not locate the divine unity either in the divine essence or in the person of the Father; it locates unity in a communion of persons.⁵⁵ God's life is shown by the perichoretic relations of the divine persons. Creation and redemption are trinitarian acts;⁵⁶ in God's manifestation to the cosmos, it is three divine persons in περιχώρησις.

Christological Perichoresis

Gregory of Nazianzus⁵⁷ applied the verb perichoreo first to Christology: Christ made all things; the names of the natures are mingled as the natures mutually perichorize. In Epistle 101 we read of how divine and human natures unite in Christ. The renewal of creation has been the work of the incarnated Creator Λόγος who made it. The natures and the titles mutually reciprocate.⁵⁸ According to Harrison the interchange of names is grounded ontologically in the mutual interpenetration of natures, which Gregory identifies by the terms admixture and mixture. Here perichoresis indicates the exchange of titles, activities and attributes, termed as ἀντίδοσις τῶν ιδιωμάτων in Maximus' wording that is an exchange of properties. The Alexandrians could find Cyril's basic insight that the person of the incarnate is identical with that of the divine Word.⁵⁹ Maximus alludes to this text. In his wording perichoresis is ascribed to both of Christ's natures and to their energies that for him are consistent with their natures. Maximus was the first church father to develop a theological definition of perichoresis related to the hypostatic union of Christ after studying the texts of Gregory of Nazianzus whom he follows in the Christological use of the term. In Maximus' texts, first the verb περιχωρέω appears. In his scholia on Dionysius⁶⁰ he quotes περιχωρέω of the two natures of Christ from Gregory of Nazianzus,⁶¹ the seventh century opponent of the monothelism heresy.⁶² The human

⁵⁵ LaCugna, *God for Us*, pp.270-1.

⁵⁶ Χρ. Ανδρούτσου, *Δογματική τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ανατολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας*, (Ἀθήνα: ΑΣΤΗΡ, 1956), σελ.92.

⁵⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, NIDCC, p.435.

⁵⁸ Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κων/πόλεως, *Ἐπιστολή PA' B 87 C Προς Κληδόνιον πρεσβύτερον κατὰ Ἀπολλινάριον*, PG τ. 37, 182.

⁵⁹ Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787)*, p.176.

⁶⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Scholia on Dionysius* epistle 4.8.

⁶¹ Τοῦ ἐν Ἀγίοις Πατρὸς Ἡμῶν Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου, *Ἐπιστολή PA' B 87 C Προς Κληδόνιον πρεσβύτερον κατὰ Ἀπολλινάριον*, PG τ. 37, 182.

⁶² The council of Constantinople, III (680) the 6th Ecumenical Council of the Church, ruled out Monothelism and settled for Dyothelism. Both natures, human and divine are perfect consubstantial

nature hypostatically and unconfusedly is united with the divine. Maximus uses the verb περικεχώρηκε (ambig. 112b D) meaning ‘reciprocal’.⁶³

According to John of Damascus, the Word appropriates to Himself the attributes of humanity and imparts to the flesh His own attributes by way of communication in virtue of the perichoresis of the parts, one with the other, and the oneness according to subsistence. The natures of Christ interpenetrate one another but each keeps its own individuality unchanged. The flesh of the Lord was not defied and made equal to God by change, alteration, transformation, or confusion of nature.⁶⁴ In Christology, perichoresis shows how the savior’s two natures are united while distinct, making his human sufferings salvific. The Fourth Ecumenical Council ruled that Jesus Christ is ‘in two natures’, in opposition to the doctrine of monophysitism. The unity of person involved was what was called αντίδοσις ιδιωμάτων that is ‘by reason of this unity of person to be known in both natures, the Son of Man is said to have come down from heaven when the Son of God took flesh from the virgin from whom he was born.’⁶⁵ The Council of Chalcedon accepted the synodical letters of Cyril to Nestorius and the Orientals in keeping with those creeds. In their definition, they distinguished between person and nature; the person of Christ being one, his natures two.⁶⁶ Since the incarnation, the divine and human natures remain forever mutually present. Even after his death, Christ comes both in humanity and in divinity. The Christ confessed by Christians exists eternally, one and the same both before and after the salvation economy, yet divinity is not subject to death.

When Maximus applies perichoresis to Christology, it means reciprocity of action. He offers as illustration the reciprocal actions of cutting and burning, shown by a red-hot knife.⁶⁷ Maximus tried to explain the singleness of action and effect proceeding from the two natures in Christ’s person. He calls the process perichoresis of the two natures ‘to’ one another, not ‘in’ or ‘through’ one another. This may suggest that the penetration of the created into the uncreated cannot be an exhaustive one. According to Pseudo-Cyril in Christ, divinity was the anointing element, as the

with God and man, preexistent and born from the virgin, Davis, *The First seven ecumenical Councils (325-787) their History and Theology*, pp.282-3.

⁶³ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, pp.292-3.

⁶⁴ Δαμασκηνού, *Εκδοσις Ακριβής*, Γ’ 3, σελ. 220, 222, Γ’ 4, σελ.224, Γ’ 5, σ. 226, 228, Γ’ 7, 238, Γ’ 8, 240, Γ’ 15, σ. 226, Γ’ 19, 304.

⁶⁵ Davis, *The First seven ecumenical Councils (325-787)*, p.176.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.176-188.

⁶⁷ Μάξιμος ο Ομολογητής, *Maximi Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG τ. 90, 340.

perichoresis of the entire Christ into the entire anointed humanity, yet the permeative union is one of grace. The two natures do not change into a compound nature; united hypostatically, they receive an unconfused perichoresis from one another. Divine nature, having penetrated flesh, offers to flesh a perichoresis with itself flowing from the divinity, a one-sided process. It was not enough to say that Christ has two natures united into one hypostasis. More is needed to express the relationship of union between the two natures. Pseudo-Cyril tries to avoid Monophysitism; it is not easy to avoid a confusing meaning in the terms ‘interpenetration’ or ‘coinherence’. He did not safeguard himself by realizing interpenetration and ἀντίδοσις just as terms; without a real basis, the term would not be intelligible.⁶⁸

The Chalcedonian Creed (451) expresses the union of Christ’s natures negatively, united ‘inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably’,⁶⁹ yet not explaining how this can be. Christianity is a communion with the living God in Christ, beyond explanation, affirmation or negation. The apophatic dimension of the unity of Christ’s natures remains. The patristic doctrine of Perichoresis remains as a monument of inspired Christian rationalism. Damascene popularised it. The term perichoresis was used by the church fathers to defend the one God in three hypostases and the one Christ in two natures against heresies. Gregory the Theologian explicitly relates both creation and incarnation; Λόγος as both creator and re-creator of the world. Thus we can face both incarnation and creation of the world as Christological perichoresis towards the world to create and recreate the cosmos. Maximus applying perichoresis to Christology speaks of the interchange in the moment of uttering the spoken word and in the idea it expresses, both named λόγος in Greek,⁷⁰ concepts that lead to creation when latent words are spoken. This approach opens up the cosmic dimensions of the continuous work of the trinity within creation through Christ.

Cosmic Christological Perichoresis

According to Maximus who uses ‘perichoresis’ in a soteriological context, the salvation of souls is the fulfilment of faith. This in turn is the true revelation of the

⁶⁸ Julian Stead, ‘Perichoresis in the Christological Chapters of the De Trinitate of Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria’, *Dominican Studies* 6 (1953), pp.12-20.

⁶⁹ Davis, *The First seven ecumenical Councils (325-787) their History and Theology*, p.186.

⁷⁰ G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, pp.292-3.

object of faith as the inexpressible perichoresis of what has been believed and the ‘completion of the cycle’ (περιχώρησις). For each person’s faith, what has been believed that relates to an end, concurring with a beginning, means the recurrence of the believers at the end to their own beginning. This idea relating the recurrence to an end that coincides with a beginning is decisive for the term ‘perichoresis’.⁷¹ Such repose is eternal enjoyment entailing participation in divine realities, meaning that the participant becomes like that in which she/he participates.

The deification that God fulfils transcends both time and eon surpassing all thought.⁷² The conception of participation in the divine shows that perichoresis means interpenetration here. Created beings penetrate into the divine, though this is brought about through God’s activity.⁷³ According to Harrison, the Christological perichoresis involves here more than that of the saints, a point to remember in considering discussions on the one-sidedness of perichoresis in Christ. In my view, Maximus stresses here both the anthropological and cosmic implications of the incarnation.⁷⁴

Neither Trinitarian nor Christological perichoresis describe God. It is not an insight into Christ’s divine nature. Any biblical or patristic reference to the unity of the divine and human natures of Christ shows a deep apophatic sensibility about the unity, exposing the limits of what we say about God and the cosmos in Christ.⁷⁵ Christological perichoresis is a Christian structuring principle, not a description of ‘how’ divinity and humanity are united in Christ. An encounter with Jesus involves a radical shift in ourselves as if we are reborn.⁷⁶ What brings us nearer to Christ’s truth does not come into our awareness through scientific reflection on cosmic structures, but through an encounter with the ultimate reality allowing us to sense a further dimension of pain as separation from creator Λόγος, the reality of our lives. The entire creation is waiting for the unity to be achieved.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, pp.293,99.

⁷² The biblical foundation of Maximus’ line of thought could be met in the verses: ^{NIV}2 Corinthians 5:18-20. Also the verse: Romans 5:10 etc.

⁷³ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, p.293.

⁷⁴ ‘Άγιος Μάξιμος ο Ομολογητής, *Προς Θαλάσσιον τον οσιώτατον πρεσβύτερον και ηγούμενον Περί Διαφόρων απόρων της θείας Γραφής ΕΡΩΤΗΣΙΣ ΝΘ’*, *Απόκρισις* PG τ. 90, 609.

⁷⁵ Coakley, ‘Persons’ in the ‘Social Doctrine of the Trinity’, pp.124-9.

⁷⁶ John 3,5. See in *M. Αθανασίου Έργα 1*, Έλληνες Πατέρες της Εκκλησίας, Σ. Σάκκου, (Θεσ/ίκη: Πατερικαί Εκδόσεις ‘Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς’, 1973), σελ. 260-1.

⁷⁷ Clarke, *Living in Connection*, pp.225,9,31.

Maximus refers to the time when ‘all will be in all,’ as the culmination of human ascent.⁷⁸ The idea also means co-inherence and all the notions we associate with perichoresis. God is everything beyond everything.⁷⁹ Maximus preserves a cosmic dimension in his theology. According to Apostle Paul, ‘creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God’,⁸⁰ a theme central in Colossians and Ephesians revealing God the Father’s mystery of will according to God’s purpose, set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in heaven and on earth, in him’ (Eph. 1: 9-10).⁸¹

In my view, it is not trinitarian as Moltmann claims,⁸² but Christological perichoresis that can be known as a starting point for an ecological doctrine of creation. I reclaim the patristic Christological use of perichoresis, by showing how in bringing together different entities, such as God and Nature, and looking at them in unity as the one person of Christ, we can acknowledge the perichoresis between divine, humanity and nature. Christological perichoresis supports the idea that the whole creation is included in God’s recreated cosmos, in response to the redeeming power of Christ who entered the web of life as a creature. Christological perichoresis goes further than the ecofeminist model of scientific interrelatedness between the beings of the cosmos, as it speaks of the creator who sustains and recreates creation. The effects of the hypostatic union in Christ between creator and creation extend through the cosmos. The self-emptying of God in Christ questions all constructions about the Trinity, as time/space bound. Christological perichoresis is seen as trinitarian manifestation extending to include all created beings in a coinherence with God and each other. Preserving distinctiveness, it enables interchange of life between various levels of reality in space/time as a Christian ontology of love.⁸³ An ecological, perichoretic view of creation brings hope for humans as co-members of the cosmos.

⁷⁸ Maximus the Confessor, ‘Texts Difficulty 41, 1313B, in Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.162.

⁷⁹ Χαράλαμπος Σωτηρόπουλος, *Η Μυσταγωγία του Αγίου Μαξίμου του Ομολογητού Εισαγωγή, Κείμενον, Κριτικόν Υπόμνημα, Μετάφρασις* (Αθήναι: 1993), σελ.150.

⁸⁰ Rom. 8: 19, 21-2.

⁸¹ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor The Early Church Father* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.63.

⁸² Moltmann, *God in Creation*, pp.15-7.

⁸³ Harrison, ‘Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers’, pp.63-5.