

## **Glorification: Perichoresis Or Participation**

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Systematic Theology 517: Christology, Soteriology, and Eschatology

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May 7, 2019

In the last chapter of Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus*, Twombly argues based on John Damascene's work that the language of perichoresis should not be used for man's relation to the Trinity but instead that communion and participation are the proper language for such a truth.<sup>1</sup> At the close of the chapter, he powerfully states:

It is in the final scene that our restored image and deified flesh will manifest themselves and the instability inherent in our present experience of participation will be removed. The final state will move participation closer to the permanency of mutual indwelling.<sup>2</sup>

That man's glorification shifts participation towards perichoresis, or theosis, seals the Eastern Orthodox emphasis in the book. While Twombly's survey of the doctrine of perichoresis in John of Damascus is helpful, the closing statement says too much. In this paper I will argue that, from a Reformed perspective, man's glorification through his communion and participation in the Trinity does lead to a oneness that is not perichoretic<sup>3</sup> but is still advanced and fuller than earthly communion. The doctrine of theosis<sup>4</sup> places heavy emphasis on our union with Christ.<sup>5</sup> The Reformed doctrine of glorification better explains the future intimacy of the heavenly union

<sup>1</sup>Charles C. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood: God, Christ, and Salvation in John of Damascus*, Princeton Theological Monograph 216 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 88–103.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 94, citing Norman Russel, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 168, writes and quotes, "Even in the strand of Eastern teaching exemplified by Maximus the Confessor, Russell concludes that he 'is anxious to exclude both a Eutychian fusion of the divine and the human and an Origenistic ascent of the pure intellect to an undifferentiated assimilation to Christ. Deified human beings become god in the same measure that God became man, but although penetrated by divine energy they retain their created human status.'"

<sup>4</sup>See Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 79–95, for a helpful discussion of theosis from a Protestant understanding.

<sup>5</sup>Letham, *Union with Christ*, 91, comments Protestants should not confuse theosis for apotheosis. He also says that regeneration, sanctification, and glorification are seen as one process in Eastern Orthodoxy. *ibid.*, 97–98, writes, "The three indwell the one who loves Jesus. The faithful thus have a relation with the Trinity that is far, far closer than they enjoy with other human beings, no matter what relationship they may have with them. This goes beyond fellowship to communion (or participation) and is strictly a union, a joining together that is unbreakable... The Son unites a *single* human nature, while the Spirit *countless* human person are involved. With the Son there is a *personal*, whereas the Spirit *pervades* or *indwells* us." (emphasis original).

because it fully maintains the creator-creature distinction for the image-bearer's restored union with the Godhead precisely because Christ eternally mediates man's relations to the Trinity.<sup>6</sup> I will begin the argument by discussing how oneness demands participation and then surveying texts which express both trinitarian perichoresis and christological perichoresis which oppose a soteriological, ecclesiological, or eschatological perichoresis. I will then consider texts expressing union with Christ under the scope of the doctrine of glorification. Finally, I will observe 2 Pet 1:3–4.

### **Participation, Not Perichoresis**

Biblical math has a strange way of unifying the great mysteries into the number one. There are three persons in the one godhead. The three persons each perichoretically reside within one another. God the Son is two natures in one person, who is filled with the Spirit and eventually takes the Spirit as his own, allowing us to call the Holy Spirit the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Church is a body of many members who are each one person with two parts and yet all individual believers compose one assembly, and the Church, filled with the Spirit, is united to Christ, and in that union is united to God the Father. This oneness-in-many is located somewhere at the root of Christian theology.<sup>7</sup> The dangers of this beautiful oneness language can be appreciated all the more in contrast to the many beliefs which seek to either remove the acknowledgment of the diverse (ex. unitarianism, monarchianism, Arianism, monism, pantheism, Erigenism, varieties of mysticism, etc.<sup>8</sup>) or the acknowledgment of the unity (ex. polytheism,

<sup>6</sup>Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 321, also warns of possible pantheism.

<sup>7</sup>That is, trinitarianism, perichoresis, incarnation, being filled with the Spirit, and union in Christ as the Church all utilize similar ideas within theology to communicate oneness yet with their own distinctions, yet the Church is not one as the Trinity is one, nor is a human being one the same as Christ is one. Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood*, 104–105, in his epilogue, points out how Chalcedonian language allows theological concepts in Trinitarianism as well as in Christology to interpret each other.

<sup>8</sup>For an example of a religion seeking to merge with the divine, see the Hare Krishna text A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *The Nectar of Instruction: An Authorized English Presentation of Śrīla Rūpa*

modalism, tritheism, adoptionism, Nestorianism, etc.)<sup>9</sup> of these distinct-yet-one relations within the biblical theology of these major doctrines. Twombly observes that perichoresis sums up all the trinitarian and christological debates which preceded John of Damascus.<sup>10, 11</sup>

Ephesians 4:3–6<sup>12</sup> provides another aspect of oneness: “...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The repetition of one (ἓν) emphatically points Christians to the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” while simultaneously highlighting the various distinct features of the faith. While there is a unity here, and even though the Father is said to be over, through, and in all (πάντων or πᾶσιν), there is not a perichoretic unity.<sup>13</sup> While there is a trinitarian perichoresis which is differentiated from a christological perichoresis,<sup>14</sup> it is not proper to then discuss within the union of the Church in Christ<sup>15</sup>—whether in the past,

*Gosvāmī’s Śrī Upadeśāmṛta* (New York: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1975), 23.

<sup>9</sup>For a discussion on the importance of perichoresis for understanding personhood and the dangers for trinitarianism without perichoresis, see Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 1): Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 504–507.

<sup>10</sup>Twombly, *Perichoresis and Personhood*, 42, 87.

<sup>11</sup>For a theological and historical introduction to perichoresis, see Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 1)*, 489–493. Several of the passages cited by Kelly will be argued from in this paper.

<sup>12</sup>All Scripture references come from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

<sup>13</sup>Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 364, citing Norman Douty, *Union with Christ* (Swengel, PA: Reiner, 1973), 147, writes, “While it may be true that believers’ union with Christ is patterned after the Father’s, it ‘cannot possibly be said to be equal to it.’”<sup>13</sup>; See a similar discussion in Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 176, 188.

<sup>14</sup>Eberhard Jüngel, “Perichoresis/Circumincession,” *RPP* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011), 714, applies perichoresis to the incarnation saying, “christologically, the intense personal union (*unio personalis*) of the divine and human natures of Jesus Christ, remaining distinct after their unification (*nitio personalis*).”

<sup>15</sup>As a Protestant, Kelly writes, “[God’s perichoretic actions in human redemption] means that in some true sense God has made a place for us within the beauty of the divine circumincession (or *perichoresis*)” Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 2): The Beauty of Christ - a Trinitarian Vision* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2014), 16 While he acknowledges this, he does not press it.

present, or future—there being a soteriological, ecclesiological, or eschatological perichoresis.<sup>16</sup>

To use the term perichoresis in addition to participation would not summarize the distinctions between God and Church, rather it would collapse the creator-creature distinction.<sup>17</sup>

### Trinitarian Foundation

In John 10:30,<sup>18</sup> Jesus makes the explicit statement, “I and the Father are one.” Its context in 10:28–29 teaches that the elect cannot be taken out of Jesus’s or the Father’s hand, teaching that the action of one member of the trinity is the action of another.<sup>19</sup> Jesus’s statement in John 10:30 communicates the Father and Son’s co-divinity and their united actions.<sup>20</sup> This is confirmed in John 10:38, where Jesus explains that he is in the Father and the Father is in him.<sup>21</sup> Jesus doing the works of the Father (10:37) is possible because they are indwelling yet distinct.<sup>22</sup>

In John 14:9–11, this distinction within the Godhead’s oneness is again brought to bear.

<sup>16</sup>Jüngel, “Perichoresis,” 714, defines perichoresis as “a concept of reflection the reciprocal penetration, participation, and unification of values that are, and remain, different. The Eastern Orthodox understanding of a perichoretic glorification can be readily seen in Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity*, 3rd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 225–226. He does qualify though that this would be a (perichoretic) union with God’s energies and not God’s essence. “The Orthodox Church, while speaking of deification and union, rejects all forms of pantheism.”; Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 225, “Being sanctified does not involve becoming otherwise; it suggests being restored and renewed, perfect and glorified.” Allen uses the term incorporative union to discuss the Holy Spirit dwelling in Jesus and in Christians. See *Ibid.*, 225, 232.

<sup>17</sup>Again, Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 226, recognizes the potential for misunderstandings. Theosis is “true union” between God and man, but “Creator and creature do not become fused into a single being... we humans... retain our full personal integrity...” Ware uses perichoretic language to describe the union. Though he argues with qualifications to avoid misunderstanding, the doctrine still communicates such a blending as I argue here.

<sup>18</sup>For passages indicating God’s trinitarian nature with a perichoretic focus, see Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 1)*, 453–455.

<sup>19</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 232–233, “In guarding his people, he is obedient to the Father’s will; what wonder, then, if they are simultaneously guarded by the Father himself?”

<sup>20</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary On The New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 312, citing D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 395, writes, “this statement has more in view than a mere oneness of will between Jesus and the Father.”

<sup>21</sup>Bruce, *John*, 236, “This mutual knowledge is now said to be based on in a mutual indwelling.”

<sup>22</sup>Perichoresis is given as the solution to understanding the Trinity in light of the Godhead’s works, and against heretical notions, in Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 1)*, 549–551.

Jesus affirms that if someone has seen him that he has also seen the Father (14:9). Jesus's question ("How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?) shows the problem with trying to only see Jesus apart from the Father: one cannot see Jesus and not see the Father. Jesus affirms here also that he is in the Father and the Father is in him and that when he speaks, the Father who dwells within him speaks (14:10a, 11, cf. 14:20).<sup>23</sup> Jesus is not just talking about oneness with the Father but a distinction within the oneness and a coexistence between him and the Father.<sup>24</sup> This is perichoresis: the Son and the Father are one, united in essence and action, yet they are distinct in person. Where one of them is, so is the other; what one of them does, so does the other.

### Union And Perichoresis

The Son of God, within his incarnation,<sup>25</sup> is also an example of perichoresis.<sup>26</sup> John 1:14,<sup>27</sup> Phil 2:6–7, and Heb 2:14<sup>28</sup> teach the incarnation's basics, that the Son "partook of the same things" as mankind, specifically "flesh and blood."<sup>29</sup> Colossians 2:9 more than affirms Christ's unity but elevates it one step further: "the *whole fullness* of deity dwells bodily," that is,

<sup>23</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 431, points out that the Apostle John uses functional unity to imply ontological unity in the Trinity.

<sup>24</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 460, "The relation between the Father and the Son is not completely reciprocal, yet each can (in slightly different senses) be said to be in the other. The Father abiding in the Son does his works; the Son rests from, and to, eternity in the Father's being."

<sup>25</sup>This paper will not be exploring the relationship of perichoresis and ubiquity in the incarnation.

<sup>26</sup>Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 2)*, 241, cites Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, English edition. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1971) in a discussion of Christ's incarnation as perichoretic.

<sup>27</sup>John Gill, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, Newport (Springfield, Mo: Particular Baptist Press, 2003), 19, discusses the perichoretic relationship between the two natures well when he says the divine took the human "by the assumption of the human nature, the Word taking it into personal union with Himself..."

<sup>28</sup>A. W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17th repr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 133, "It is not merely that the Lord of glory *appeared* on earth in human form..." (italics original).

<sup>29</sup>John Henry Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, ed. A. H. McNeile, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: Clark, 1985), 19, calls John 1:14 "the climax of the Johannine doctrine of Christ as the Word."

πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος, or “all the fullness of deity.”<sup>30</sup> It is not just a part of the Son of God’s deity which indwells the Son of God (contra kenoticism) but the fullness thereof.<sup>31</sup> This clause though is emphatic; τὸ πλήρωμα affirms Christ’s dual natures; πᾶν pulls the rest of the Trinity into the verse. Colossians 2:10a helps to corroborate this: “and you have been filled in [Christ].” Believers have been filled with the Spirit but here Christians are filled *in Christ*. While the ἐν here could be translated “with” or “by,” verse 10b’s mention of Christ’s authority suggests “in” as the better translation. It is true that Christ sent the Spirit and that Christ baptizes Christians with the Spirit, but Christians are filled with the Spirit, not Christ. Yet, it can be said that Christians are filled with the Spirit and through perichoresis with the Father and the Son. Christ was the embodiment of “all the fullness” of God thus believers are filled with the “all the fullness” of the deity.<sup>32</sup> Though Christians are not themselves God-men, they commune participatorily in the Godhead through the perichoretic man; Christians are filled with the deity, by the deity, and in the deity.

Paul makes a most astounding claim in Gal 2:21: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” He does not give the converse; this statement is only true unidirectionally. Furthermore, this statement is couched in the language of action and instrumentality. Paul declares himself “crucified with Christ” and to be “[living] by faith in the Son of God” (Gal

<sup>30</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, ed. David Allan Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Bruce M. Metzger, vol. 44, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 111, quoting H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. R. Dickson (W. P. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1875), 358, “the *essence* of God, undivided in its whole fullness, dwells in Christ in His exalted state, so that He is the essential and adequate image of God.”

<sup>31</sup>M. Dennis Hamm, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, CCSS (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), states the fullness is granting access to God’s presence through the incarnation and that Jesus is the fullness of “divine life, grace, and power.”

<sup>32</sup>Handley C. G. Moule, *Colossian and Philemon Studies: Lessons in Faith and Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1900), 144, “But [the incarnation] is brought unspeakably *near to us* by that fact, made as it were gloriously tangible and accessible to us His human brethren, to whom this wonderful Bearer of the divine Fulness is now joined as Man. Yes, He is joined to us, and we to Him; He is in us, and we in Him. And thus this Fulness is for us, His members. We are in Him; and It is in Him. So we are as it were immersed in It, and filled with It, as a vessel dipped in the sea is filled with the very sea itself” (italics original).

2:21). Paul's language is strongly participatory here. This can be seen again elsewhere (Col 2:12–13, 20; 3:1), "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:3–4). Christ is not waiting on the believer to appear; the waiting is unidirectional.

### Trinity And Incarnation

First Corinthians 2:10–16 gives another expression of mutual indwelling. Here the Spirit is described as searching "the depths of God" and comprehending "the thoughts of God."<sup>33</sup> In these passages, Paul discusses how Christians can know the things which God has revealed (1 Cor 2:10), and he points to the need for "the Spirit who is from God" to understand what has been revealed (2:12) and to teach "those who are spiritual" (2:13).<sup>34</sup> Paul explains further that the fundamental difference between "the natural person" (2:14) and "the spiritual person" (2:15) is "the mind of Christ" (2:16).<sup>35</sup> In this passage, believers are said to have the Spirit in such a way that they have Christ's mind as well. Perichoretically speaking, believers have both the Spirit and Christ because the two of them are mutually indwelling, yet the Spirit and Christ are not said to have the mind of the believer.

In his high priestly prayer Jesus references his trinitarian origins and his incarnate ministry's purpose, highlighting Jesus's trinitarian perichoresis and the soteriological, ecclesiological, and eschatological participation of believers in the immanent life of the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> The repetition of the words  $\epsilon\nu$  and  $\epsilon\nu$  throughout the passage imply a union and a oneness, and

<sup>33</sup>Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1&2 Corinthians*, 12th repr. (Edinburg, UK / Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 39, interprets the passage to indicate the Spirit's "personality and divinity."

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 40, argues that this passage is only speaking of the apostles, not the whole Church.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 46, while not commenting on the relation of the Spirit being of Christ, does indicate that the verse points to Christ's divinity.

<sup>36</sup>Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 513, "Final completeness and unity can of course be achieved only when the number of the elect is accomplished at the time of the end, but these words do not exclude the nation that the church may be complete at every stage of its growth."

the *iva* clauses represent intent, purpose, and result.<sup>37</sup> Jesus's mediatorship makes possible union between fellow Christians<sup>38</sup> and also between God and men because his divine nature is perichoretically in God and his human nature allows others to participate through him.<sup>39</sup> When referencing his trinitarian origin, the mutual indwelling is given and established (17:5); when referencing other people, the participation is partially accomplished (17:11, 25–26),<sup>40</sup> will be partially ongoing (17:20–22), and will be completed (17:23–24). When referencing his incarnation, Jesus represents God to men by giving them what God has given him while maintaining the uniqueness of God's name, and he represents men to God as he seeks to pray for them (17:9, 15, 20), keep them (17:11–12, 15), sanctify them (17:17, 19), and teach them (17:3, 6–8, 14, 21, 25–26).<sup>41</sup> Jesus accomplishes<sup>42</sup> this because the Father has given him authority (17:2), work (17:4), people (17:6, 9–10), knowledge and words (17:7–8, 14), a name (17:11–12,

<sup>37</sup>James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 440 calls the unity one that is "parallel" to the Trinity's, "This means that the church is to have a spiritual unity involving the basic orientation, desires, and will of those participating." That Christ is praying for unity means, says Boice, that it must still be obtained. If Christians were perichoretically one, there would be no need for prayers of it. At the very least, this establishes a non-perichoretic union before glorification.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 4:444, suggests that the imagery of the body indicates an "interdependence" and a "subordination involving a diversity of function" within the Church.

<sup>39</sup>Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 228, emphasizes the importance of understanding Christ's incarnation as the basis for perichoretic union. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John: Two Volumes Complete in One*, 13th repr., NTC (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1988), 2:366, suggests that when believers partake in Christ's blessings, then "they will be *one*, just as the Father and Son are *one*" (italics original).

<sup>40</sup>John Charles Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, vol. 3 (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1957), 212, claims, "Of course there cannot be literally such unity between Christian and Christian, as there is between two Persons in the Trinity. But the unity... may be a close, intimate, unbroken unity of mind, and will, and opinion, and feeling." Ryle has here removed all sense of mystery in the union; it is only a union of reason and emotion, not mystery. Likewise, cf. Ibid., 3:227.

Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL / Nottingham, UK: IVP Academic, Apollos, 2011), 381, "As the Father and the Son are distinct entities whose deeper unity consists partly in the fact that they indwell each other... , perfectly sharing each other's thoughts, intentions, resolutions, desires and delights, so the unity of the church is a matter of mutual love and common purpose among individuals and local communities."

<sup>41</sup>Nicolas Ellen and Jeremy Lelek, "The Hope of Eternity," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling: Changing Lives with God's Changeless Truth* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 209–222, "He prayed for our oneness, protection from the evil one, our sanctification, and our experience of genuine love from God the Father."

<sup>42</sup>Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy*, 79. For Eastern Orthodoxy, Christ only makes theosis possible, not something assured.

26), and glory (17:22).<sup>43</sup> Of this list only the name of the Father is not given in turn to the people the Father has given the Son, yet Jesus prays that the Father would “[keep] them in [his] name” (17:11). Jesus prays that though he will be absent from the disciples, he is coming to God; he therefore asks God to “keep [the apostles] in [the Father’s] name,” which is also Jesus’s name (17:11). This Jesus prays ἵνα, in order that or towards the result of,<sup>44</sup> the apostles may be one as the Father and the Son are one (17:10).<sup>45</sup> In verse 17:20 the language of mutual indwelling comes out in full.<sup>46</sup> Jesus desires that “they may all be one”<sup>47</sup> like the Father and the Son are “in” one another (17:21a).<sup>48</sup> This phrase is linked to another ἵνα clause; Jesus desires that all believers “may be in [the Father and the Son]” (17:21b).<sup>49</sup> In some sense Jesus understands this his giving the glory he has<sup>50</sup> to believers allows believers to “be one” as the Father and Son “are one” (17:22).<sup>51</sup> He is emphatic about this, repeating the idea of believers’ mutual indwelling through a

<sup>43</sup>In discussing the meaning of fellowship, Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:443 defines fellowship “at its base has something to do with sharing something of having something in common.” Christians then have great unity with each other because their “fellowship in the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), and with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14)...involves the totality of [Christian] experience of God’s grace.”

<sup>44</sup>“89.49 “Iva,” *L&N* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996).

<sup>45</sup>Gill, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 517, notes the apostles’ oneness would be of “likeness,” not “equality.”

<sup>46</sup>Bruce, *John*, 335, “The unity for which he prays is a unity of love; it is, in fact, their participation in the unity of love which subsists eternally between the Father and the Son.”

<sup>47</sup>Gill, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 523, again pushes that the unity is one of “faith” and possibly “affection.” The emphasis on likeness and not equality is important. Christ’s language might in other words be described as analogical.

<sup>48</sup>Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 230–231, relates perichoretic oneness as a command. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2:364, suggests that the connection to the Trinity must imply a spiritual unity and that a “merely outward” unity is a “very common misinterpretation.” He then gives a more practical view highlighting doctrine. *ibid.*, 2:366, claims the union mentioned in 17:23-24 is “not only of faith, hope, and love but of life itself.”

<sup>49</sup>Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 513, “The believers are to be, and are to be one, in the Father and the Son, distinct from God, yet abiding in God, and themselves the sphere of God’s activity.”

<sup>50</sup>Gill, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 524, emphasizes that the glory is not the preexistent glory but the Gospel.

<sup>51</sup>On the importance of theosis for Eastern Orthodox veneration of saints and icons, see Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy*, 99.

ἴνα clause stating Christ's desire for believers to "become perfectly one" (17:23a).<sup>52</sup> Jesus goes on to say he desires all "may be with [him] where [he is]" (i.e., in the future in heaven) so that believers can see God's eternal and lovingly given glory<sup>53</sup> (John 17:24). Jesus concludes with a final ἴνα clause that the love of the Father for the Son and the Son himself "may be in them" (17:25–26). To claim that humanity's existence is perichoretic in heaven based on a prayer for earthly unity is to insert a sneaking pantheism into Christian soteriology and eschatology; salvation becomes a lot more like nirvana than it does a recreated heaven and earth.<sup>54</sup>

### Union In Glorification

As I have tried to show through the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, as in accord with Scripture, man is not perichoretically joined to God before or after death but rather goes on participating<sup>55</sup> in him even into glorification. What must be addressed next is the question of whence glorification comes. There are two states to glorification,<sup>56</sup> one before the return of Christ and one after, commonly referred to as the intermediate state<sup>57</sup> and the

<sup>52</sup>Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 20, here argues that, based on John 17:22-23, if God and man are to be perfectly one, man must be made like God just as God became man in Christ. For the classic quotation cited by Eastern Orthodox scholars defending theosis, see Athanasius of Alexandria, "On the Incarnation of the Word," in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), § 54.3.

<sup>53</sup>Gill, *An Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 527, argues this glory is Christ's "glory as Mediator," "not the simple abstract glory of His Deity..."; Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2:365, argues that Christ being in the disciples and believers being in Christ, that "this is their glory" (italics original).

<sup>54</sup>Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 213, cites a John of Damascus quote without citation. Though I searched I have been unable to locate the source. John of Damascus supposedly said that Christians are to be, "assimilated to God through virtue."

<sup>55</sup>For a discussion on the importance of perichoresis for the life of the Christian, see Kelly, *Systematic Theology (Volume 1)*, 515–518.

<sup>56</sup>A third could here be added if inaugurated glorification was discussed, or, the glorification that already exists for the saints in the already/not-yet paradigm.

<sup>57</sup>Against Roman Catholic dogma, there is no such thing as purgatory. I here recommend the argument against purgatory as found in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 589–611. This provides enough detail to understand the argument, but purgatory is outside the scope of this paper. See Catholic Church, "The Final Purification, or Purgatory," in

resurrection, respectively. Twombly's suggestion that man's union with God in heaven is a step from participation towards perichoresis as regards the two states, but one could see glorification unfolding in two steps instead of one. Man's glorification could be said to move from partial participation to more participation to fuller participation,<sup>58</sup> rather than a move towards full or semi-perichoresis; there is a progression, I contend, between the states of earthly life to intermediate state to final resurrection,<sup>59</sup> but that the two steps relate to participation not perichoresis. While both of these states weigh on the topic at hand, what can be said about the intermediate state is less pertinent to that of the final resurrection, and therefore, most of the discussion will be related to the final resurrection as it is that state which is most likely to be confused with perichoresis. It should be noted though that the intermediate state is not the final state and that there is therefore a distinction to be made between the two.<sup>60</sup>

Glorification suggests that man will be in a state of glory. Man, being a creature, has no glory; any glory he has of himself is fading (Ps 39:6; Isa 40:6; 1 Pet 1:24). All glory is thus God's glory (Rom 11:36; Gal 1:4; Eph 4:20).<sup>61</sup> God has decreed that Christians will be glorified (Rom 8:30) and he has given the Son that they may see glory and be transformed by it (2 Cor 3:18). God's purpose in decreeing man's glorification and the means of man's glorification is that

*Catechism of the Catholic Church: With Modifications from the Editio Typica*, 2nd ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 1030–1032. See also WCF 32.

<sup>58</sup>This could also be said to be three steps if one argues that initial glorification is the first step.

<sup>59</sup>Referring to John 17:24, Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, 3:229, writes, "After preservation, sanctification, and unity, comes participation of His glory.

<sup>60</sup>Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 4:641–642, "Like believers on earth, [believers in heaven] eagerly await the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the restoration of all things. Only then has the end been reached (1 Cor. 15:24)...If, then, the souls exist under some form of space and time, they cannot be conceived as being totally inactive...Though their work on earth is finished, this does not alter the fact that they still have other works to do in heaven."

<sup>61</sup>Greg Harris, *The Cup and the Glory: Lessons on Suffering and the Glory of God* (Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2006), 167, "Once witnessed no earthly or angelic glory ever comes close. In fact, no true glory exists other than the glory of God."

man may be glorified (2 Thess 2:13–14).<sup>62</sup> Per Harris, glory is one of the names of God (1 Sam 15:29) and a reward for believers, as discussed above.<sup>63</sup> At the least, part of what God does in glorifying man is bestowing his name upon them. For man to be glorified is for him to participate in God’s glory, not that he has glory of his own, but that he partakes of God’s glory.

Glorification, precisely in the Christian being freed from sin, no longer suffering, and being in God’s presence, is that state of blessedness, in which the God who once was not seen is now the God of which mankind drinks freely and reflects. This state of glorification has begun now and continues as man, through seeing Christ, undergoes (μεταμορφώω) sanctification (ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, 2 Cor 3:18) at the least until the final resurrection.<sup>64</sup>

Paul’s language suggests a time of fulfillment for glorification will come (Rom 8:30; Phil 3:12; 1 Cor 15:50–54) in which people will keep their own personality,<sup>65</sup> yet further distinctions of duties and responsibilities in the glorified state will exist.<sup>66</sup> The glorified state will be a union of body and soul, yet without sin and suffering.<sup>67</sup> “[Fellowship with God in glorification] will be richer, deeper, and more blessed than it ever was or could be on earth.”<sup>68</sup> It is in the state of glory that God will “be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28) and that Christians will “live and move and have [their] being” (Acts 17:28). In addition to perfect knowledge of God and pure enjoyment of God,

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., “We will too, once fully, expanded, and on into eternity, since we will reign with Him forever—and be like Him.”

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 147.

<sup>64</sup>Bavinck, *Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, 4:693–696.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 4:697, “In all the metamorphoses to which all creatures subject, their identity and continuity are preserved.” See also Ibid., 4:727, “All will retain their own personalities....”

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 4:727–730.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 4:720–722.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 4:722.

Christians will be active in heaven.<sup>69</sup> Since Christians will be working, worshiping, and resting in the new heavens and the new earth, man’s transformation from one degree of glory to another is in some sense not complete. As Bavinck writes, “Eternal becoming is wedded to immutable being,”<sup>70</sup> and such will be the case for Christians at the marriage supper of the Lamb. In this way, as Christians will be glorified and will continue to grow in glorification, for man as a creature by nature is able to change or become, it will be in the state of glory that believers participate in a “mutual communion.”<sup>71</sup> Christians will move from seeing in part to seeing in full (1 Cor 13:12; 2 Cor 5:7; Jas 1:25; 1 John 3:2; Num 12:8; Job 19:26). They continuously grow, not being gods themselves—they will be transformed from one degree of glory to the next. When perichoresis is considered the end goal of Christian salvation, though, there is no longer a need for Christians to work in the new heavens and the new earth. When participation is the controlling language, man is completely blessed *and* the creator-creature distinction is upheld.

### **Partaking Of The Divine Nature**

If perichoretic language falls short and union in glorification suggests a state of becoming, then what does Peter mean in 2 Pet 1:4 (cf. 1 Pet 5:1) by believers “[becoming] partakers of the divine nature?” The Greek word for “partakers” is *κοινωνοί*, related to *κοινωνία*. The lemma appears 32 times in NA<sup>28</sup> (ex. 1 Cor 10:20, Phlm 17) and eight times in the LXX (ex. 4 Kgdms 17:11, Prov 28:24, Mal 2:14, Isa 1:23), communicating notions of sharing, partnership, or being a companion of good (e.g. Mal 2:14, Luke 5:10) or evil company (Prov 28:24, 1 Cor 10:18, 20). Bigg suggests the phrase is equivalent to *κοινωνία Πνευματικός*.<sup>72</sup> The questions

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 4:727–728.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 4:729.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 256.

raised are what is the source of and what is the manner of Christians sharing the divine nature.

The source of the sharing is God's divine power and grace working through a knowledge of God by his promises, providing "all things that pertain to life and godliness" for "his own glory and excellence" (1:3). Notably, Peter says sharing in the divine nature comes from ἀποφυγόντες ("having escaped", an aorist active participle, perhaps better translated "after escaping") φθορᾶς ("corruption") and ἐπιθυμίᾳ ("sinful desire") in addition to everything else (1:4).<sup>73</sup> What should be shocking from these texts is the lack of human action; Christians have become partakers apart from their own efforts; the text is couched in monergistic language.<sup>74</sup> It is only in light of God's gracious effort that Peter then tells Christians what they should do (1:5–8), what is meant if they do not do them (1:9), and then emphasizes Christians' election (1:9–12). Given Peter's logical flow, an inaugurated eschatology is emphasized:<sup>75</sup> Christians already share in the divine nature<sup>76</sup> and will more so until they fully do in glorification.

The manner of the participation can now be addressed.<sup>77</sup> Participation can either be of quality or equality; the latter is rejected.<sup>78</sup> Participation in the qualities of the divine nature are

<sup>73</sup>Richard Bolling Vinson, Richard Francis Wilson, and Watson E. Mills, "2 Peter," in *1 & 2 Peter; Jude*, Smyth & Helwys Bible commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2010), 294–297.

<sup>74</sup>See a helpful discussion in Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 179–181.

<sup>75</sup>R. C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 214, comments that this verse "was greatly misunderstood in the Patristic period of church history. Many...believed that Peter was teaching...deification, that salvation makes us like God, *and that the temptation given by the Serpent in Eden* is fulfilled in our redemption. We will never be gods, because even God cannot make another god. Any god that God could make would, by definition, have a beginning and would therefore be finite, dependent upon the one eternal God for its every existence. God cannot transfer deity to a creature" (emphasis added.).

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 214–215, "When Peter says that we are partakers...he is saying that if we are in Christ, then God the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in us... We do not become divine, but we partake of the presence of God in our very souls...God has one incarnate Son, and though we are indwelt by the His Holy Spirit, and by God's grace we are able to partake of His presence...It is the grace of God that keeps us from deity."

<sup>77</sup>Thomas Adams and James Sherman, *An Exposition Upon the Second Epistle General of St. Peter* (Birmingham, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), 39–45, will provide much the following discussion.

<sup>78</sup>Joh. Ed. Huther, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude*, trans. Paton J. Gloag, D. B. Croom, and Clarke H. Irwin, 6th ed., repr., MCNT (Winona Lake, IN: Alpha

found within the “reparation of the divine image within us...[T]o be created after God, is to partake of God’s nature; and this consists in justice and holiness.”<sup>79</sup> Participation can be seen through numerous biblical metaphors, such as being servants of a master, subjects of a prince, sons of a father, fellows with God himself, members of a head, branches of a vine, and a wife to her husband.<sup>80</sup> Each of these suggest not a perichoretic union but a source and its effects or parts. The source is God and its effects are godliness.<sup>81</sup> This would strongly set up Peter’s argument in the succeeding verses regarding godly character.<sup>82</sup> This also reflects back into 2 Pet 1:3. Another possibility is that it refers to Augustine’s categories of *posse non peccare* and eventual *non posse peccare*; the clause is linked to “having escaped” the corruption of sin.<sup>83</sup> Passages referring to the freedom of Christians become appropriate when talking about participation in the divine nature.<sup>84</sup>

Publications, 1980), 380, “not so much of the *substantia*, as rather of the *qualitas*”; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), 262, “For this ‘divine nature’ is not the *substantia* but the *qualitas*; it is more than the *imitatio*, it is rather the *imago Dei*. As a foreigner is naturalized, so we are fully transplanted into God’s kingdom and are naturalized in it so that what is in that kingdom is properly ours.”

<sup>79</sup>Adams and Sherman, *An Exposition Upon the Second Epistle General of St. Peter*, 40.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 40–44.

<sup>81</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC 37 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 291–295. Schreiner also is right to note that “Peter was not saying (nor did Eastern Christianity) that human beings will actually become divine or that they will share in the divine nature in every respect. Believers will share in the divine nature in that they will be morally perfected; they will share in the moral excellence that belongs to God.”

<sup>82</sup>Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 186–188, “Peter’s affirmation enters into the ancient discussion about the nature of the gods, humans, and the animal world. The question raised was not about humans becoming divine but rather which characteristics and attributes these different classes of beings shared or did not share.” He goes on to discuss the communicable attributes of God based on the word “partaker.” Green sees a link between developing moral character into godliness against the false teachers of Peter’s day.

<sup>83</sup>Robert W. Harvey and Philip H. Towner, *2 Peter & Jude*, IVP NTC 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 40; Huther, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude*, 380, notes that escaping the corruption “[does] not express the condition on which the Christian becomes partaker of the divine nature, but the negative element which is most intimately connected with the positive aim.”

<sup>84</sup>Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans [u.a.], 2006), 173–174, “What is important to note is that sometimes this participation in the divine nature was viewed” in the ancient world” as innate, a divine spark within the human being that simply need to be recognized or freed, and sometimes it is something to be obtained by effort.” Not so in Peter. Notably, Davids goes on to argue that this should not be interpreted as having the Holy Spirit or Christ or as a covenantal idea; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 181, contrarily, thinks that meaning is to be found in eternal life and possession of the Holy Spirit.

## Conclusion

Glorification is better described as a mutual communion than a mutual indwelling. While perichoresis can be seen within the immanent Trinity and the hypostatic union, when applied to salvation, perichoretic language threatens the creator-creature distinction and removes the language of action and becoming from the new heavens and the new earth. It is better to understand 2 Pet 1:3–4 as being an equivalent statement to being made into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) or having the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer. While the Eastern Orthodox view of theosis is neither apotheosis nor pantheistic, a perichoretic emphasis can amount to the same conclusion. Language of perichoresis should be avoided when speaking of humanity's present or future glorification.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup>For further reading on communion, perichoresis, and the like, see Allen, *Sanctification*. Also consider WCF 13.3; WLC QA 65, 69, 74, 82, 83, 85–87, 89, and 90; and WSC QA 37, and 38.

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