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## Exploring the Relational Center of the Individualist/Collectivist Spectrum: A Literature Survey of Direct and Indirect Perichoretic Works

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Theology

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## Abstract

This thesis explores how the theological concept of perichoresis can interact with the individualist and collectivist spectrum in progressively fruitful ways. Chapter one explores a general understanding of the spectrum and perichoresis while structuring them around the idea of a relational center. Chapter two conducts a literature survey of works that advance the spectrum in their argument and actively use perichoresis, directly or indirectly, in their solution. Chapter three conducts a series of reflections and conceptual movements based on the literature survey results. The most decisive contribution formulates a five-stage adaptation to the IC spectrum integrating perichoresis. There is also insight into theological opportunities and an alternative metaphor for the linear IC spectrum entirely. These conclusions aim to generate new questions, connections, and insights into modern relationality. Additional works are in the appendix for future research and support.

Keywords: Individualism, Collectivism, Perichoresis, Relationality

## Summary for Lay Persons

The thesis aims to explore the idea of relationships and to demonstrate how relationships can improve in our modern times. In today's society, people tend to either value what they think about themselves or what the group thinks about them. These two values are individualism and collectivism respectively, and this paper wants to improve upon these values by applying a Christian belief called perichoresis. Perichoresis provides the belief in a certain kind of relationship that portrays a beautiful unity and shows one's uniqueness within the relationship. The concept of perichoresis is a mystery and is complex but is applied to God's nature and Jesus himself. The hope is that by applying this kind of relationship to our modern relationships, it will generate new insights, connections, and ideas of how people can treat each other.

This paper will review books and authors that have already attempted to use perichoresis to improve relationships. The books that will be selected are diverse and different to provide a better chance of discovering something new. After the books are summarized, this paper will present reflections on what the authors have shown in their works. Drawing on these thoughts and reflections, this paper will present a five-stage process of how to integrate the idea of perichoresis.

These five stages are valuable and helpful for improving how people relate in modern times. The first two stages provide insight into how to improve one's understanding of individualism and collectivism. Stage three adds the idea of relationships and how they can be more impactful on the spectrum between individualism and collectivism. Finally, stages four and

five start to imagine if individualism, collectivism, and relationships were improved, what that could mean for how we interact in our relationships today. These ideas are needed now more than ever in order to bring people together rather than alienating each others. The idea of perichoresis is beautiful and can contribute a lot of hope and creativity for relationships in our time.

## Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long and challenging journey that has required a lot of persistence and hope to see it through. I want to thank the Faculty of Theology and Huron University College for their funding, support, and compassionate leave during these past years through the pandemic.

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## Introduction

Reflecting on the world's current challenges can be overwhelming, but with persistence it can reveal unique terms that provide effective starting points for change. One unique pattern that gives rise to change is the understanding that most of the world's challenges happen through social interactions between people. War, economics, religions, climate change, technology, politics, and many more topics share a common overlap within the concept of relationships. The question is, where does one start to use this concept as a point of change?

Having grown up in Western Culture and within the Christian evangelical tradition, individualism and theology were two overarching values within relationships that were thoroughly understood. It was in seminary where there was an exposure to other traditions, church history, and doctrines that revealed the magnitude of how complicated the reality of relationships are in the world at every level. One personal discovery was learning about the details of the theological concept of perichoresis. This idea articulated a mysterious and complex relational dynamic that applies and values unity and difference at the same time. It was conceptually intriguing, intuitively resonating, and creatively hopeful. Continuing education and vocational ministry quickly revealed a natural bias toward an individualistic worldview but fostered curiosity toward other social understandings. By engaging with other cultures and beliefs, natural exposure to collectivism started to demand respect as much as individualism. If the focus turns to the concept of relationships, then awareness and working knowledge of individualism, collectivism, or perichoresis can lead to a spectrum of reactions, responses, and understandings. With persistence and reflection, the interaction between individualism,



collectivism and perichoresis can be a practical starting point of change for the world from the pattern of relationships.

### Statement of the Problem

This thesis attempts to address the primary problem embedded within a larger collection of cultural and theological dissonances of how individuals connect with God, self, and others. The modern context is in such a state of hyper-evolution that individuals face many novel opportunities and challenges that traditional understandings and conventional practice are ill-equipped to help navigate. Many individuals and groups possess an intuitive understanding of the “individualist and collectivist” (IC) spectrum, a pervasive belief that is not consistently understood and serves as a default social metaphor for many. It is limiting in its dichotomist understanding but opportunistic in its conceptual proximity to relational understanding. The core problem is moving through the IC spectrum’s limitations to explore its undiscovered potential. This problem is addressed by exploring a literature survey of works that contain both the IC spectrum and the use of perichoresis.

### Purpose of the Literature Survey

This literature survey aims to see how the theological concept of perichoresis can help explore the undiscovered potential of the IC spectrum. The theological concept is a complex relational dynamic that possesses centuries of reflection and is applied to complicated relational Trinitarian and Christological theologies. The theological concept also intuitively contains both IC spectrum characteristics as a part of its dynamic. Though the IC spectrum and the

perichoresis initially seem incompatible, this literature survey aims to explore the conceptual void between them.

## Research Questions

Here are some of the research questions this survey will hope to explore:

- How is the IC spectrum understood?
- What are the IC spectrum's limitations and opportunities?
- What characteristics align most closely with the concept of perichoresis?
- How is the concept of perichoresis understood and used in the literature?
- Are there applications that use the concept of perichoresis and the IC spectrum?
- Are intermediate concepts between the IC spectrum and perichoresis?
- How can this exploration lead to theological opportunities?
- How can this exploration contribute to a general understanding and interactions with perichoresis?

## Significance of the Survey

The significance of this survey is more out of a sense of need and desire. The need for new ideas, practises, and metaphors for modern relationality is imperative. Many modern developments across disciplines have created new relational mediums, meanings, and expectations for almost every generation, and many can be overwhelmed, apathetic, or simply hostile to the ongoing change. The IC spectrum is one understanding that contributes to the problems by its inherent limitations but possesses the potential to be adapted to help navigate

novel challenges and leverage opportunities. It can be hard to change the understanding of individualism and collectivism from within the systems of thought. However, the theological concept of perichoresis possesses enough similarity to connect and even more difference to provide a metaphorical vantage point to help imagine new things. Contrasting the IC spectrum with the concept of perichoresis can lead to new ideas and one approach to initiating positive change. The contrast can help the IC spectrum refine each end's understanding of itself, the dynamic between each end, add a third element to the spectrum, or reimagine it entirely. Any positive insight would be essential to help address the novel developments of today.

Another significant element of the survey is the desire to see the complexity of perichoresis become more conceptually accessible and applicable. If a conceptual movement in understanding from the IC spectrum to perichoresis, to any degree, is possible, then an opposite movement would be beneficial for those with theological understanding. To imagine incremental levels of understanding and metaphors between the IC spectrum and perichoresis could be a powerful and inspiring conceptual tool, especially in modern times. This dual movement could allow the church to offer its theological reflections in collaboration with the surrounding culture and help the Christian faith conceptually contribute to positive change in our communities.

## Structural Overview

The thesis is in the form of a literature survey that explores how perichoresis can interact with the IC spectrum in progressively fruitful ways across three chapters. In chapter one, an overview of the IC spectrum and perichoresis will help structure the focus and understanding of

the thesis. This structure is essential for guiding the survey research and providing a working knowledge of the two concepts. Chapter two will consist of the literature survey of works that use both the IC spectrum and perichoresis. All works will possess some argument or solution that references the IC spectrum and uses perichoresis, directly or indirectly. The works will vary in how strongly perichoresis is used or referenced. Chapter three will be a series of reflections based on the surveyed works and conceptual movements between the IC spectrum and perichoresis. Together, these reflections and conceptual movements will be the starting point of change for relationships. The spirit behind this thesis is exploration, discovery, and rediscovery of ideas in relationships and theology to help change our world.

## Chapter 1 – IC Spectrum and Perichoresis

In this section, an overview of the IC spectrum and perichoresis will help structure the focus of this thesis. A general understanding of the relationship between individualism and collectivism will highlight the limitations and reveal the potential opportunity, or necessity, to include the idea of a “relational center” (RC). In presenting a general overview of the IC spectrum, the RC, and the theological concept of perichoresis, it will focus on the literature survey of direct and indirect perichoretic works.

### Individualism and Collectivism

The IC spectrum is a popular theoretical concept in many disciplines and everyday engagements. It is typically a singular linear scale that distinguishes between the individual and the collective. This spectrum can represent different forms, from black and white polarization to a spectrum with more positions between the two ends. For example, a straightforward account of the IC spectrum makes binary observations between the individualistic West versus the collectivist East. As applicational complexity increases, the spectrum can increase its complexity to convey more information and sub-categories along the spectrum. An “...analysis of individualism and collectivism in 20 countries demonstrated that within-country variation exists even in markedly homogeneous student samples. Individuals endorsed different combinations of individualist and collectivist dimensions.”<sup>1</sup> The IC spectrum is a flexible concept that can change depending on the application or nuance of the user.

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<sup>1</sup> Eva G. T Green, Jean-Claude Deschamps, and Dario Páez, *Variation of Individualism and Collectivism Within and Between 20 Countries: A Typological Analysis*,” (Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 36 (3), 2005), 335.

In the accelerating change of modern times, the IC spectrum appears more as an analogical concept. It varies in understanding and complexity depending on its use, but it serves as a simple and reductionist framework across disciplines and everyday life. This framework has been used, in part at least, to "...describe, explain, and predict differences in attitudes, values, behaviours, cognition, communication, attribution, socialization, and self-concepts."<sup>2</sup> To be more specific, individualism can primarily focus around beliefs and ideas, while collectivism is primarily about values and duties, making these dimensions seem more like perpendicular factors rather than opposites.<sup>3</sup> Also, the continuing advancement of globalization, technology, communication and access to information is increasing the complexity of the modern world and revealing how insufficient, confusing, and limiting the current IC spectrum conceptual understanding can be. Whatever its metaphorical representation, the idea behind the IC spectrum is more an analogy to social relationships than a settled and static scientific fact. As challenge and opportunity tend to be two sides of the same coin, the pervasiveness and fluidity of the linear IC spectrum can be an excellent opportunity for positive evolution. The IC spectrum will be a starting point for simplicity as we explore more relational ideas and practices. As a next step, the exploration will start with adding the idea of a RC to the IC spectrum.

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<sup>2</sup> Green, *Variation of Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 321.

<sup>3</sup> Marilyn B. Brewer, and Ya-Ru Chen, *Where (Who) Are Collectives in Collectivism? Toward Conceptual Clarification of Individualism and Collectivism*, (Psychological Review 114 (1), 2007), p. 141.

## The “Relational Center”

Across disciplines using the IC spectrum, some works articulate the necessity of additional relational concepts and relational processes. In sociology, a “relational turn” from the individual is strengthened by exploring and conceptualizing the relational person and relational processes.<sup>4</sup> In communications studies, relationalism introduces a lens to explore beyond the dichotomous relational patterns of the IC spectrum.<sup>5</sup> Within cross-cultural communication, an argument for a tripartite model of individualism-relationalism-collectivism presents a more comprehensive and representatively accurate framework.<sup>6</sup> In psychological research on cultural differences, a conceptual clarification of the IC spectrum adds the idea of ‘relational collectives’ and the relational self as part of a new theoretical framework.<sup>7</sup> Relational concepts and processes are plausible additions to address the inherent insufficiency of the current IC spectrum. Relationalism is a plausible addition to this paper’s understanding of the IC spectrum. This

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<sup>4</sup> Sasha Roseneil, and Kaisa Ketokivi, *Relational Persons and Relational Processes: Developing the Notion of Relationality for the Sociology of Personal Life*, (Sociology (Oxford) 50 (1), 2016), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> R. S. Zaharna, *Beyond the Individualism-Collectivism Divide to Relationalism: Explicating Cultural Assumptions in the Concept of “Relationships,”* (Communication Theory, 26(2), 2016), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Georgette Wang, and Zhong-Bo Liu, *What Collective? Collectivism and Relationalism from a Chinese Perspective*, (Chinese Journal of Communication 3 (1), 2010), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Brewer, *Where (Who) Are Collectives*, p. 1.

addition will be phrased as the RC to play off the language of the pervasive linear understanding of the IC spectrum.<sup>8</sup>

Plausibly adding a RC to the IC spectrum increases its complexity. Many questions make any practical use hard to articulate. Is this relational concept indeed something that is between individualism and collectivism? Are relational approaches inner traits of the IC spectrum? Does only relationalism exist, and the IC spectrum is just an illusion? How does relationalism change the meaning of the IC spectrum and their interaction with each other? There can be more questions, but it becomes clear that the unknown answers quickly become overwhelming. A negative or positive conclusion cannot be automatically applied, but a RC's potential opportunities and challenges are unknown. Due to the unknown implications of its addition, a posture of exploration into the unknown concept could prove valuable. To aid in exploration, the theological concept of perichoresis can serve as a productive starting point.

### Theological Concept of Perichoresis

The theological concept of perichoresis is a rich relational concept that expresses centuries of deep reflection. This part shows an overview of the history and progression of

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<sup>8</sup> The IC spectrum in this linear understanding is to represent where the location of meaning, truth, and values originate from a singular conceptual location. So, this means that for a person if they are on the individualistic side of the spectrum then values originate from the singular point of the individual. If a person is on the collectivist side of the spectrum, then values originate from the singular point of the collective. Adding the RC to this IC spectrum then places the origin of values within the singular point of relationships. As will be seen throughout the thesis, the fundamentals between the RC and each end of the IC are different but still integrated. This play off of the linear understanding is to use analogy to help conceptualize all three singular points of meaning and values.



perichoresis with its unifying and relational characteristics. Second, a generalized understanding of perichoresis will help engage works that use perichoresis to varying degrees. Together, this will form a working knowledge of the concept used in conducting the literature survey.

### History and Progression of Perichoresis

Perichoresis has its modern theological understanding from early church history. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century, two great Cappadocian theologians, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, used the ideas, language, and concepts that perichoresis expresses in their work, though not as the formal theology of perichoresis.<sup>9</sup> It was in the 7<sup>th</sup> century that the formal theological concept of perichoresis was used explicitly and reached its full relevancy and affirmation in the late patristics.<sup>10</sup> During this time, the theology of perichoresis applied to separate theologies in distinct ways. One application was to the two natures of Christ.<sup>11</sup> Also, the concept of perichoresis was applied explicitly to trinitarian theology.<sup>12</sup> Stamatović clarifies a fundamental difference in the applications of perichoresis:

In addition, there is a difference between the Christological and Trinitarian perichoresis. In the Christological one, perichoresis expresses the unity of different natures in one and the same person, and in the Trinitarian one it expresses the unity of different persons/hypostases in one and the same nature. That

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<sup>9</sup> Slobodan Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, (*Open Theology* 2 (1), 2016), p. 319.

<sup>10</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, p. 319.

<sup>11</sup> Graham Buxton, *The Trinity, Creation and Pastoral Ministry: Imaging the Perichoretic God*, (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Buxton, *The Trinity, Creation and Pastoral Ministry*, p. 129.

is: in the Christological perichoresis the “two what’s” are united “in one who”, while in the Trinitarian the “three who’s in one what.””<sup>13</sup>

This observation of the different uses of perichoresis highlights the concept’s fundamental trait of unity while demonstrating its fluidity in application and progression. The two contested questions that perichoresis ultimately provided an alternative answer to during the patristic period have become the primary teaching in theology for modern times. These two questions were is Jesus God or man, and is God one or three Gods?<sup>14</sup> Though both types of perichoresis formed during the same era of church history, Trinitarian perichoresis is commonly referenced nowadays when considering the concept.<sup>15</sup>

The theological emergence and evolution of perichoresis during the patristic period are similar to what is occurring in contemporary times. For better or worse, the theology of perichoresis continues to evolve. Some authors expand the concept beyond the traditional Christological and Trinitarian perichoresis. James D. Gifford explores a believer’s union with Christ as a third type of perichoresis in his dissertation.<sup>16</sup> Based on the trinitarian perichoresis, David T. Williams explores the perichoretic Holy Spirit’s role/function in Creation as the one

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<sup>13</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, p. 321.

<sup>14</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, page 321

<sup>15</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, p. 318.

<sup>16</sup> James D. Gifford, *Union with Christ: A Third Type of Perichoresis*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010), p. 232.

generating and undergirding relationships.<sup>17</sup> These samples only scratch the surface of some of the contemporary developments. From a critic's view, Kevin J. Vanhoozer sees certain contemporary developments of the concept going too far by acting as a new form of orthodoxy, labelling the move as illegitimate. For example, he labels a portion of the belief as "kenotic-perichoretic relational theism," which moves beyond the perichoretic mystery of God's nature to articulating how his nature must be.<sup>18</sup> The use of perichoresis to address challenging questions and generate alternative answers in our time parallels the context of the early church fathers during the patristic period. This evidence highlights continuing theological development of perichoresis and its ongoing discussion and debate. In this observation, contemporary times are in step with the fathers of the patristic period. One distinct difference between these periods is the scope of diverse applications in recent times.

There has been a significant increase in the diverse spectrum of applications during contemporary times for the concept of perichoresis. Like the Cambrian Explosion of life within earth's early history, the advancement of our modern understanding of our physical and social world has opened entire conceptual areas to explore and contrast with the concept of perichoresis. Some articles articulate the perichoretic nature of light<sup>19</sup> and the perichoretic

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<sup>17</sup> David T. Williams, *The Spirit in Creation*, (*Scottish Journal of Theology* 67 (1), 2014), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 150.

relation between the quantum field and the divine nature.<sup>20</sup> Articles use the concept of perichoresis to coin the term ‘perichoretic self’ within psychology.<sup>21</sup> Also, the social sciences conceptually integrate perichoresis and community development.<sup>22</sup> The evidence sampled above reveals the tentative applicability of perichoresis beyond its traditional theological use. The history and progression of perichoresis show it as a relational concept with applicational fluidity.

### Understanding Perichoresis

The concept of Perichoresis is complex, but this section will lay it out in its most generalized terms. As seen through a brief look at its history and progression, the patristic authors provide an initial and sufficient theological understanding of perichoresis. Stamatović states the patristic understanding as:

Their perichoretic conception could be defined as a view by which two or more different entities create unity by entering into each other without blending or merging, but either of them remains what it is and, at the same time, participate in the others. Or more briefly: perichoresis or permeation is unity of the different, where the difference remains completely preserved despite the communication of one to the other.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> David Grandy, and Marc-Charles Ingerson, *The Perichoresis of Light*, (*Theology and Science* 10 (3), 2012), p.276.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest L. Simmons, *Quantum Perichoresis: Quantum Field Theory and the Trinity*, (*Theology and Science* 4 (2), 2006), p. 148.

<sup>21</sup> Emily F. Peters, *Perichoretic Self: A Kleinian-Trinitarian Exploration of Selfhood*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> John S. Klaasen, *Theology and development: Taking personal responsibility for community development*, (*Hervormde Teologiese Studies; Pretoria* Vol. 75, Iss. 2, 2019), p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, p. 321.

From this, we can highlight three fundamental understandings: 1) there are two or more different entities that 2) are unified without losing distinction while 3) each simultaneously participating in, or communicating with, the others. Each understanding describes a general pattern or trait of perichoresis primarily from a theoretical or conceptual understanding. These three understandings articulate two relational traits that produce one conceptual tension at the heart of perichoresis<sup>24</sup>. The relational traits of unification and difference, or particularity as understood later, are the core understandings and practice of perichoresis. The paradoxical understanding between unity and difference produces a single conceptual tension to hold both, at least as much as possible. As a theoretical or conceptual generalization of perichoresis, this allows for a greater scope of understanding and flexibility in the learning process. This simplicity of the concept is a good starting point to explore some of its applications and forms.

A generalized understanding of perichoresis requires the contextual details of its application to articulate what it is contributing to the situation accurately. The concept can have a literal meaning of permeation between entities in the physical reality. In philosophy and theology, it can serve more as a physical symbol or metaphorical expression between entities of social or spiritual realities.<sup>25</sup> Each reality can apply perichoresis but is fundamentally different

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<sup>24</sup> This 3-2-1 is also a useful memory trick to help get to the core understanding of perichoresis. This is coined from the research and reflection of this section. 3 points, 2 traits, and 1 tension.

<sup>25</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, p. 321.

from their respective realities and applications<sup>26</sup>. The concept of perichoresis is also a useful construct between each level of reality<sup>27</sup>, which each level could also be phrased as physical, human, and divine realities.<sup>28</sup> When applied holistically, perichoresis qualifies realities at all levels of reality.<sup>29</sup> It is helpful to understand perichoresis primarily as a dynamic relational process between all possible applications. It is a tool, lens, or analogy that helps understand and explore what it is applied.

As such, it is not restricted to being a closed and settled concept but should be treated with care and caution when moving beyond its conventional understanding. One way to use it cautiously is to use perichoresis as a conceptual aid and not use it to accomplish an agenda.<sup>30</sup> If used in this manner, one will likely see what they want due to its fluid nature, a caution this thesis must take seriously. Another caution is to use it at an analytical level and move beyond its

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<sup>26</sup> For example, the physical realities possess entities which are components of nature that could say are perichoretic. Light is both a particle and a wave. The human reality gives rise to the church, or least attempts. The divine is then the Trinity. Each reality relates in a perichoretic way but the actuality of the relation in each example is fundamentally different in relational process and final outcome.

<sup>27</sup> Between realities would mean from physical to human/social and human to divine. Some speculative examples of this could be human consciousness and the theology of the believer's union with Christ. Human consciousness has all the physical components of the brain "relating perichoretically" to give rise to our consciousness. The unity of the brain yet also distinguishing its parts as separated is difficult. The believer's union with Christ is a relationship of unity but still possesses particularity or difference. The human spirit eventually connected with the divine. Both are rough examples of perichoresis working between realities.

<sup>28</sup> Buxton, *The Trinity Creation and Pastoral Ministry*, p. 283.

<sup>29</sup> Ioanna Sahinidou, *Hope for the Suffering Ecosystems of Our Planet: the Contextualization of Christological Perichoresis for the Ecological Crisis*, (New York: Peter Lang Edition, 2014), p. 162.

<sup>30</sup> Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, p. 160.

descriptive ability.<sup>31</sup> If used as an analytical proof in one application, it could result in confusion and complication in another. Due to the fluidity of the perichoretic concept, it can range from simple analogy to being theological support, a theology, or a lens by which to view any aspect of reality. To equate all perichoretic concepts to a single understanding or assume all applications are created equal would be perichoretic malpractice. The difference between perichoretic applications is determined by the application's details and the context in which it is applied. These points are crucial to sustaining a critical, beneficial, and holistic understanding of the concept.

There are two valuable observations to help understand the concept of perichoresis. First, it is implicit that an abstract boundary forms around all entities involved in the perichoresis, marking what is in and what is not. Within this boundary, there is a singular relational dynamic between all entities that is both unifying and distinguishing. The conceptual tension within the boundary is that all entities are both unified-as-one and develop an even greater distinction. Each entity is distinct within this unity, but it is from within this unity that each distinction is derived.<sup>32</sup> This tension will not be resolved here or ever. The helpful observation is forming a boundary and articulating what is included in wrestling and what is not. If something outside is required, perhaps the parameters need to be expanded. This helpful boundary observation can bring focus and clarity to a perichoretic application. Second, the concept of perichoresis has an

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<sup>31</sup> Giulio Maspero, and Robert Józef Wozniak, *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology : Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology*, (London: T & T Clark, 2012), p. 182.

<sup>32</sup> Najīb ‘Awad, “Persons in Relation : an Essay on the Trinity and Ontology,” (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), p. 29.

operational flow of understanding. Perichoresis within Trinitarian theology, for example, is more suited for aiding our understanding of how the three can be one instead of how the one is the three.<sup>33</sup> Since perichoresis is a singular relational dynamic, the mystery of perichoresis is in the resultant perichoretic unity.

To start with entities in perichoretic relation is a journey toward a mystery that can be taken as far as possible. If one aims to start with the mystery of the unity to determine insight into the perichoretic entities that make it up, then that is more of a challenge because of the initial mystery. These two observations of boundary and operational flow can provide an initial starting point when considering perichoresis.

## Summary

This section showed how the theological concept of perichoresis is potentially a valuable lens to explore the RC of the IC spectrum. As pervasive as the linear IC spectrum understanding is, its limitations in many applications become evident and reveal an opportunity for positive evolution that can include the addition of a form of relationalism. Developing the idea of an RC would yield conceptual space and direction for positive evolution and exploration. Explore with the theological concept of perichoresis is a viable framework and starting point in exploring the relational center. The history, progression, and generalized aspects of perichoresis show its unique relational dynamics. More specifically, it focuses on unity and differentiation together in

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<sup>33</sup> Stamatović, *The Meaning of Perichoresis*, p. 304.



a relationship. Exploring the RC of the IC spectrum with the perichoretic concept should yield positive insights from the literature survey.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Survey

In this section, the exploration takes the form of a literature survey. A broad selection of works will be selected based on their use of the IC spectrum and direct or indirect use of perichoresis. Selecting works based on their use of the IC spectrum will remain open, only requiring that the work's problem or solution interact with it. Selecting works based on their use of perichoresis will be more intentional and structured. Any selected works will fall into two overarching categories of direct or indirect use of perichoresis. The difference between these two categories is the explicit reference to perichoresis, its concepts, or its characteristics. Indirect use of perichoresis can be challenging to identify, but it would describe concepts, practices and characteristics that are conceptually close to perichoresis but do not articulate it in perichoretic language and understandings. Direct use and references of perichoresis are not challenging to identify and thus can be sorted into two sub-categories of comprehensive and partial use. This means there will be works that directly use perichoresis comprehensively, works that directly use it partially, and works that indirectly use the concept of perichoresis. These three categories will provide a spectrum of works covering much of the conceptual space between the IC spectrum and the concept of perichoresis.

The survey of each work will follow a similar structure, highlighting three aspects. First, there will be a general overview of the selected work. The overview will highlight the author's purpose, methods, and conclusions. Second, a section will focus on the work's use and understanding of the IC spectrum. The final section will consider the selected work's direct or indirect use of perichoresis. This approach allows for comparisons and contrasts between surveyed works for later reflections.

## Direct Works

This section contains works that directly use the theological concept of perichoresis. First is a sub-section dedicated to works that comprehensively use perichoresis. This means that perichoresis serves or supports most of their work. Second, the following sub-section includes works that partially use perichoresis, meaning it serves a minor role in their work.

## Comprehensive Application

This sub-section contains work where perichoresis serves a significant role. At this point, one work is surveyed below, but more works fit the selection criteria. Other potential works are referenced in the Appendix.

### *Gunton – Modernity and Open Transcendentals - Overview*

In Colin E. Gunton's book "The One, The Three and the Many," there is a comprehensive engagement of the theological concept of perichoresis. In its use, it helps address the main challenge of modernity to our society and to explore potential avenues of solutions. This overview will briefly examine Gunton's understanding of modernity's impact on society and his contribution toward a solution through the idea of open transcendentals. Its formulation primarily originates from the concept of perichoresis deriving from Trinitarian theology.

The foundational issue that Gunton addresses are specific declines within modern society.<sup>34</sup> Declines are primarily due to modernity's impact on society, having promised a culture of rational and self-reliant individuals but producing an anxious and conformist society.<sup>35</sup> Gunton expands on the dogmas and practices of the modern world in order to highlight that modernity's deficiencies have theological roots<sup>36</sup> in an inadequate theology of creation and a displacement of God.<sup>37</sup> These "...distinctive failures of our era derive from its failure of due relatedness to God, the one, the focus of the unity of all things."<sup>38</sup> This failure can also be expressed as a problem of displacement from the other, resulting in escaping from or ruling over the other.<sup>39</sup> Overall, this "...modern disengagement has engendered alienation, and that a renewed thinking and expression of how we belong in the world, of human habitation of reality, is an urgent requirement."<sup>40</sup>

Gunton's contribution to a solution is the argument for open transcendentals. The heart of this argument is to provide a "...dynamic of ideas and of the operation of the active mind in its interaction with reality of such a kind that the process of thought is furthered, rather than

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<sup>34</sup> Any reference to "modern" society, culture or time is meaning the general state of society of our time. The current state of interactions between living generations and trajectory of society. The trajectory being one of more concern for the future rather than hope.

<sup>35</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many : God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 129.

<sup>38</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 71.

<sup>40</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 14.

possibilities being foreclosed.”<sup>41</sup> In contrast with modernity which served as a foundational way of thinking, Gunton seeks a more non-foundationalist, or fallibilist, foundation.<sup>42</sup> While modernity focuses on particularity, Gunton seeks a reasoned approach to the truth where particularity and universality have their place.<sup>43</sup> Open transcendentals are the central concept Gunton uses to guide his contribution toward a solution:

An open transcendental is a notion, in some way basic to the human thinking process, which empowers a continuing and in principle unfinished exploration of the universal marks of being. The quest is indeed a universal one, to find concepts which do succeed in some way or other in representing or echoing the universal marks of being. But it is also to find concepts whose value will be found not primarily in their clarity and certainty, but in their suggestiveness and potentiality for being deepened and enriched, during the continuing process of thought, from a wide range of sources in human life and culture.<sup>44</sup>

Transcendentals introduce a relational dynamic that is unfathomable and infinitely suggestive, very similar to the strengths and problems that come with the use of analogy.<sup>45</sup> Open transcendentals open up an exponential way of thinking instead of step-by-step linear reflection. Gunton suggests the three open transcendentals of relationality, perichoresis and substantiality.<sup>46</sup>

In light of this thesis, Gunton’s work overlaps and contributes to exploring the RC. Gunton provides a straightforward move from individualism toward a RC by critiquing modernity in favour of more relational dynamics. Gunton also comments on a collective

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<sup>41</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 142-3.

<sup>42</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 134.

<sup>43</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 142-3.

<sup>45</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 154.

<sup>46</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 229 – 30.

approach but not in the same proportion. Through the use of open transcendentals, there is extensive use of perichoresis.

### *IC Spectrum*

Gunton's critique of modernity is the overarching argument which overlaps with a move from individualism toward a RC. Gunton's understanding of modernity as a modern disengagement leading to alienation is more clearly articulated through his breakdown of individualism's impact. Conceptually, individualism has a genuine and powerful concern for the particular but, in practice, achieves the opposite.<sup>47</sup> The modern individualistic concept values freedom for the individual but establishes it by separation from other people rather than distinguishing them from each other in relation.<sup>48</sup> Collectivist conception does recognize relationality but believes it is something that can be imposed, thus making both powerful understandings non-relational.<sup>49</sup> Both conceptualizations have a limited understanding of freedom. For Gunton, freedom is in a relational context as it is exercised and received as a function of unecessitated reciprocity.<sup>50</sup> If true, then freedom is an important function of relationality, as it is an essential understanding within perichoresis.

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<sup>47</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 64.

<sup>49</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 64.

<sup>50</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 64.

The move along the IC spectrum from individualism to a more RC is paralleled through Gunton's work's relational concepts and processes. He highlights the "...affirmation of the belief that people and things are what they distinctively are by virtue of their relations to other people and things."<sup>51</sup> This belief fits well within a RC since it moves beyond individualism and falls short of collectivism while still having conceptual connections to both. Much of Gunton's work finds its conceptuality within perichoretic concepts. As it is taught that we are created in the image of God, we could in some way be perichoretic beings.<sup>52</sup> Gunton's work overcomes the simplistic idea of moving from individualism to a RC and comprehensively articulates it within his argument of perichoresis being an open transcendental.

### *Perichoresis*

In Gunton's work, the extensive use of perichoresis provides a framework for much of his proposal and arguments. A rich engagement of his understanding, articulation, and application of perichoresis can contribute to this survey. The understanding of perichoresis primarily aligns with patristics and trinitarian theology. Articulating perichoresis in light of this understanding allows for a broader engagement. Perichoresis is also applied as an analogy that allows Gunton's work to effectively hold theological concepts in tension while acknowledging everyday relational processes and practices. This comprehensive approach presents an all-encompassing concept to explore relational dynamics in general and suggestive terms.

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<sup>51</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 169.

Gunton's perichoretic understanding derives from Trinitarian theology, specifically in how the patristics had come to understand the nature of God. His understanding is that everything is perichoretic in the world as it is an order of dynamically related things, contributing to everything else's being and enabling unique distinctiveness.<sup>53</sup> His understanding is a "...dynamic dialectic between the oneness and the threeness of God of such a kind that the two are both given equal weight in processes of thought."<sup>54</sup> Applying it to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit would suggest that "...the three are bound up in each other so that one is not one without the other two."<sup>55</sup> "The three do not merely coinhere, but dynamically constitute one another's being."<sup>56</sup> For Gunton, "perichoresis implies an ordered but free inter-relational self-formation: God is not simply shapeless, a negatively conceived monad, but eternal interpersonal life."<sup>57</sup> This understanding of the perichoretic nature of God can lead to an economic<sup>58</sup> trinity, which Gunton references to articulate his understanding for later applications.

Gunton's understanding of perichoresis allows for nuanced articulation. The benefit of this approach is the increased potential for new understanding and broader application. This

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<sup>53</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 166.

<sup>54</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 149-50.

<sup>55</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 153.

<sup>56</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 164.

<sup>57</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 164.

<sup>58</sup> This understanding of an economic Trinity includes relations, actions, and desires that involve more than just the perichoretic relations of the Triune persons within the Divine nature. An economic Trinity could include elements of creation, salvation and ongoing perfection. The important idea is that the economic Trinity includes more than just the perichoretic relation of the Trinity.



articulation of perichoresis is an analogy, analogical thought.<sup>59</sup> As such, it gives flexibility and generality to perichoretic applications of relations within creation. Perichoresis articulates well the oneness of things as a unity of plural instead of a unitary approach.<sup>60</sup> Articulating perichoresis within a community promotes unity while resisting homogeneity if adequately understood.<sup>61</sup> Each particularity in the community becomes the fruit of mutual constitutiveness, resulting in a more significant perichoretic relation of life.<sup>62</sup> If perichoresis dissolves particulars, it is no longer perichoresis but becomes an unrelational homogeneity.<sup>63</sup> This articulation of perichoresis within a community is within the personal realm, Gunton describes. There are three realms: the personal world, the material world, and the realm of knowledge.<sup>64</sup> Each realm is not mutually exclusive but possesses enough distinction to apply perichoresis within itself or in integration with other realms of application. It is essential to highlight this within Gunton's use of perichoresis because it helps clarify his work and expand the scope of perichoretic application. It is applying perichoresis within the realm of knowledge to which we now turn.

In Gunton's application of perichoresis as an analogy, two standalone conceptual tools are worth highlighting. The first is the pragmatic thought of conceptual perichoresis, applying perichoretic relations strictly to thoughts and concepts. For example, in traditionalism, there is a

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<sup>59</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 164.

<sup>60</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 212.

<sup>61</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 172.

<sup>62</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 170.

<sup>63</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 186.

<sup>64</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 168.

conversation placing one section of time, the past, against another, the present. Gunton suggestively introduces the idea of a perichoresis of times which introduces a potentially dynamic interrelation between the past, present, and future.<sup>65</sup> Each era finds its fullness in relation to the other eras of time. This particular conceptual perichoresis is not explored, but the creative potential of conceptual perichoresis is a plausible starting point. Another example of conceptual perichoresis could be applied to physical health by suggesting a positive interrelation between sleep, nutrition, and exercise. Conceptual perichoresis can be a simple practice to generate new seeds of thought or fresh takes on exhausted ideas. A second conceptual tool worth highlighting from Gunton's argument is the idea of a symbol representing the perichoresis of many things from our perspective in the world. One potent example of a symbol of perichoresis in our time is the motor car, or an internal combustion engine, that shapes our relations with each other and the world:

It is a thing of beauty and the cause of ugliness and squalor. That it involves at least in part a misshaping of relatedness is evident from the facts, on the one hand, that the threat of injury and the defense of the honour of both driver and vehicle are the source of the disruption of human relatedness, involving both verbal and physical abuse; and, on the other, that the institution shapes our urban society - through town planning, noise, changed patterns of mobility, the decay of public transport - and our relation with the universe as a whole. It is often seen as the source of freedom, but like other technology it also determines large aspects of social and personal being.<sup>66</sup>

The idea of a symbol is a powerful conceptual tool. Other potential symbols could be the personal computer, smartphone or internet. Other growing symbols could be virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence, or Climate Change. These perichoretic conceptual tools serve well, but Gunton's open transcendentals form the core of his argument.

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<sup>65</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 172.

<sup>66</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 178.

Throughout Gunton's work, the concept of perichoresis has been the core guiding framework for his theological contribution, specifically as an open transcendental in two ways. First, as an open transcendental, it analogically helps understand a perichoretic relationship between God and Creation. "It is the relatedness of everything to God, realized in the free offering of things to him, that is the basis for a universal and open transcendental."<sup>67</sup> Using both the human and divine natures of Christ in the context of the whole Trinity, a distinct conception of the unity of things is presented.<sup>68</sup> In Christ that is a distinct unity within the Trinity, within Creation, and between them. This perichoresis both articulates a oneness without derogating from any plurality.<sup>69</sup> This leads to the second theological contribution of two other connected open transcendentals: An articulation of how particularity develops within a perichoretic unity. Substantiality, the second open transcendental, is the celebrating and perfecting process of particularity by relating it, through space and time, to their source, God.<sup>70</sup> Pneumatology contributes significantly to understanding the second open transcendental within the perichoretic dynamics as the Spirit is involved in the Trinity, Christ and creation. The third open transcendental is relationality, the inner dynamics of substantiality and perichoresis. Relationality as an open transcendental provides unique insight and incorporates the other two open transcendentals. "All things are what they are by being particulars constituted by many and

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<sup>67</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 228.

<sup>68</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 229-30.

<sup>69</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 229-30.

<sup>70</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 212.

various forms of relation.”<sup>71</sup> The dynamics of relationality provide the means for perichoretic unity while being the source for particularity within it. The interaction of the open transcendentals provides the beginning of a process and journey of unity and diversity. As Gunton puts it, for us specifically, “being is diversity within unity.”<sup>72</sup> Gunton finishes his work by stating:

It is thus to supply that without which the true focus of unity and coherence is lost and with it the rooting of all that we are and shall be in the personal being of God, that is to say, in the love which creates and redeems freely, giving to the world a perichoretic reality which in different ways reflects within the structures of the temporal and spatial the perichoresis which is God in eternity. It is not therefore *something* which holds things together, but *someone*: the one through whom, in the unity of the Father and the Spirit, all things have their being.<sup>73</sup>

#### Partial Application

In this sub-section are all the selected works that partially use the concept of perichoresis. There are two selected works at this point, but more potential works are mentioned in the Appendix.

#### *Klaasen – Theology and Community Development - Overview*

This section will highlight two articles written by John S. Klaasen that conceptually contribute to the idea of community development using perichoresis. The articles are chronologically years apart but present a unique opportunity to track the use of perichoresis in community development through two separate but progressionally related applications. First,

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<sup>71</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 229.

<sup>72</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 213.

<sup>73</sup> Gunton, *The One, The Three and the Many*, p. 179.

perichoresis conceptually contributes to a holistic understanding of community development. Also, perichoresis partly helps articulate the role of personal responsibility within community development. Together, perichoresis can conceptually contribute to multiple areas of community development. Both articles stand on their own but together can produce some valuable insights.

In “The Interplay between Theology and Development,” John Klaasen engages holistically with community development. This first article contributes to the discussion of how the church interacts with culture by engaging crucially with the much-debated studies of theology and development.<sup>74</sup> Expanding the development idea reveals differences that the article uses to present its argument. The approach to development from a relational theological approach is broader and more holistic than economic or social ideas of development.<sup>75</sup> Economic development can reduce the idea of community development to a minimal number of measurable variables versus trying to encapsulate the whole dynamic of a person. One prevalent case is first and third-world countries summarizing a country's economics with their GDP. In the article, Klaasen expands on this exploration of these two widely used economic and social definitions of development and points out their commonalities and weaknesses. Klaasen then expands on how a theology of relationship can contribute to the idea of community development.

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<sup>74</sup> John S. Klaasen, *The Interplay Between Theology and Development: How Theology Can Be Related to Development in Post-Modern Society*, (Missionalia 41 (2), 2014), p. 183-4.

<sup>75</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 192.

In “Theology and Development: Taking Personal Responsibility for Community Development,” John Klaasen engages with the conceptual framework of community development from the theological perspective. In this article, Klaasen articulates three divergent markers of transformational community development as “creative tensions” and can serve as variables within a Christian anthropological perspective of personhood. This is done through dealing with the aspect of personal responsibility within community development by taking “...cognizance of the divergence of being and doing, individual and community, and receiver and giver, which is found in personhood.”<sup>76</sup> The article attempts to use the theology of personhood and personal responsibility to shift the understanding of development “...from giver-receiver to a more inclusive participatory community development paradigm.”<sup>77</sup> As a conceptual and theological contribution, this article articulates a helpful and holistic framework for the ongoing evolution of community development.

### *IC Spectrum*

Applying the IC spectrum to the first article helps expand the unique understanding of personhood and development. As the article explores development and personhood through the theology of relationality, it places personhood at the center of development.<sup>78</sup> By placing it within development, John Klaasen states its implications:

A theology of relationality embeds personhood in the creative tension between particular and universal or the individual and communal. This notion of personhood does not deny the distinction of the individuals,

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<sup>76</sup> John S. Klaasen, *Theology and development: Taking personal responsibility for community development*, (Hervormde Teologiese Studies; Pretoria Vol. 75, Iss. 2, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> Klaasen, *Theology and development*, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 185.

but it places the distinctiveness in the continuous process of development. Personhood is not individualism or societal because it is always in relation with other person(s). Personhood as process is always eschatological and develops to its full potential in relation to past, present and future.<sup>79</sup>

This understanding does not place personhood exclusively on either end of the IC spectrum and defines it as a holistic, open, and dynamic process. If personhood is placed on either end, the notions of personhood lack a voluntary sense of agency when a reciprocal, dynamic process is evident.<sup>80</sup> Placing personhood in relation to another person aligns with the idea of the RC more than either end of the IC spectrum.

In his second article, there is more focus on what personal responsibility means within its conceptual and theological contribution to community development. When considering an IC spectrum, it is worth highlighting again that it is one of the three divergent phenomena within personhood and development. The interaction with the IC spectrum is a creative tension and must be addressed. If personal responsibility is not placed exclusively at either end, but within the article's relational dynamic, then personal responsibility would belong between persons instead of within the group or self. Klaasen concludes the article by identifying that these three divergent creative tensions are markers toward transforming community development from a Christian anthropological perspective.<sup>81</sup> The concept of perichoresis plays a fundamental role in these articles.

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<sup>79</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 188.

<sup>80</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 188.

<sup>81</sup> Klaasen, *Theology and development*, p. 6.

## Perichoresis

The concept of perichoresis provides support for the theological approach in both articles. The theological foundation is based on Trinitarian ontology, in which perichoresis is a primary concept. Historical authorities such as the Cappadocian Fathers and John of Damascus were referenced for their insight into the Trinity's perichoretic relation. The most potent use of perichoresis within the article supported the "...theological foundation for development as personhood."<sup>82</sup> Understanding the placement of personhood at the heart of development is the foundation for any theological contribution to community development. Perichoresis is needed to provide both articles' theological articulation and conceptualization.

The concept of perichoresis within the first article is also used to start forming an alternative understanding of social development. Perichoresis provides a universal understanding of relationality where "...it is not only personhood and the church that is rooted in Trinitarian ontology, but the rest of "reality" forms part of the greater narrative of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."<sup>83</sup> This understanding allows the theological contribution to apply to all societies in general. Two claims are articulated from this understanding in which perichoresis plays a role. One is that perichoresis affirms the status of persons as agents in their development.<sup>84</sup> Second, that perichoresis implies a dynamic process that does not deny particularity nor treat it as

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<sup>82</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 185.

<sup>83</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 190.

<sup>84</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 191.



absolute.<sup>85</sup> These are the direct impacts that perichoresis had on personhood within the article. In short, perichoresis provides the understanding that each person is an agent within the universally dynamic development process. This relational dynamic that perichoresis describes is the conceptual contribution to community development.

In the second article, the concept of perichoresis provides some basis for the theological understanding of personal responsibility. Similar to the first article, perichoresis is used to support the idea of a person's essential relationality. In "...the formulation of God as Trinity, persons are all relations but 'possess stories, actions and speech which make them agents' with responsiveness."<sup>86</sup> Perichoresis also articulates a unique relational dynamic. "The kind of relationship perichoresis implies is not a one-way or dominant relationship...rather it is rooted in a dialogical kind of relationship."<sup>87</sup> Relationality, through a theological and perichoretic lens, places personal responsibility within the essential, reciprocal, dynamic process of interaction. Through this use of perichoresis, personal responsibility is a valuable concept when addressing the creative tensions highlighted in the article. Personal responsibility is a critical understanding and practice for the positive transformation of communities.

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<sup>85</sup> Klaasen, *The Interplay*, p. 192.

<sup>86</sup> Klaasen, *Theology and development*, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Klaasen, *Theology and development*, p. 6.

*Kim – Self-Affirming Collectivism - Overview*

In this article, the author coins the idea of ‘Self-Affirming Collectivism’ to help improve the challenges and tensions that Korean American Christian Women experience. This identity emerges from the unique intersection and interaction of cultural, gender, religious and ethnic identities. The core concern is for Korean American women who live in the tensions of both individualist and collectivist orientations.<sup>88</sup> Transitioning orientations, in general, is difficult for all but can be more difficult if negative stereotypes are applied. Gender, racial, and religious identities all contain negative stereotypes, and for those transitioning orientations, it can highlight unique pressures and challenges. Korean American Christian Women face unique pressures and challenges, leading to the author coining the idea of self-affirming collectivism:

I propose a new concept of “self-affirming collectivism” for the global, eclectic, multicultural, and intercultural context of the twenty-first century. “Self-affirming collectivism” acknowledges and promotes the true value and worth of each person as imago Dei—that is, as possessing a unique and distinctive individual identity that finds expression within a community in which one is deeply embedded. In a self-affirming collectivist society, both the individual and the group would carry equal significance, and distinct persons could come together to form one community that functions as one organism or entity.<sup>89</sup>

The central premise of the idea is to positively correlate the happiness and well-being of each person with others within the collective entity in which they are a part.<sup>90</sup> This premise aligns naturally with the greatest commandment of loving God and loving neighbour. Kim explores the application of this concept within cultural and religious groups to see its potential impact within

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<sup>88</sup> Simone Sunghae Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism: Implications for Women*, (Pastoral Psychology 58 (5-6), 2009), p. 564.

<sup>89</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 575.

<sup>90</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 575.

the article. Concerning this thesis, there are many references to the IC spectrum and a brief mention of perichoresis.

### *IC Spectrum*

In this article, the positive potential of the IC spectrum is demonstrated in three ways. First, the IC spectrum provides the core conceptual structure for the article. Second, it is a lens to interpret scripture. Third, she articulates her solution using the IC spectrum. Together, these provide a valuable bridge between understanding the IC spectrum and perichoresis.

The IC spectrum provides the core conceptual framework of the article. Primarily focusing on Korean American Christian Women, the IC spectrum unpacks and explores the challenges and pressures they experience. The article structures self-affirmation at each end of the IC spectrum and lays out an analysis of each end. Starting as a general IC comparison, each identity of culture, gender and faith are added. The complexity and potential adverse outcomes increase with each addition. As a solution emerges, a form of middle option starts to form. The solution's specific form is unclear, but the essence of each end of the IC spectrum remains intact, resembling a hybrid or synthesis approach. This movement toward a combination of each end is because of society's "...proclivity towards both individualism and collectivism, although to varying degrees."<sup>91</sup> The new concept proposal fits the "global, eclectic, multicultural, and intercultural context of the twenty-first century."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 565.

<sup>92</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 575.

The IC spectrum is also applied as a lens to see its potential presence in the Old and New Testaments. Overall, individualism and collectivism do not appear in the Bible as understood in modern times. The concepts are present in both testaments but appear interwoven, with little conflict between them.<sup>93</sup> The relationship between individualism and collectivism appears to be more fluid and less dichotomous, as shown in the biblical depictions of the nature of God, the creation of humans, and God's dealings with creation.<sup>94</sup> For example, the Bible depicts God's Self in individual and collectivist terms while also depicting the creation of humans as distinct individuals.<sup>95</sup> Viewing the Bible through an IC spectrum understanding reveals that scripture does not reveal itself exclusively at either end nor giving priority to either individualism or collectivism. Instead, there appears to be a priority given to a dynamic between the two, allowing both to speak through the witness of scripture. Scripture as a whole is present, in parts, across the whole IC spectrum, including the plausible RC.

The IC spectrum is also a source of the language in the article for articulating steps toward understanding the RC. The article presents an example of articulating the RC or perichoresis using only language and concepts found within the IC spectrum. Articulating these concepts in IC spectrum terms is essential in bridging conceptual gaps. When each end of the spectrum is understood to be mutually exclusive, positively portraying the dichotomizing nature

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<sup>93</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 571.

<sup>94</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 572.

<sup>95</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 571.

of the IC spectrum is a challenge. Some form of simultaneous combination needs to be articulated. “In a self-affirming collectivist society, both the individual and the group would carry equal significance, and distinct persons could come together to form one community that functions as one organism or entity.”<sup>96</sup> A critical stance she is taking on the IC spectrum is not the dichotomous understanding, but one is a dynamic application of both. Though there is a conceptual dichotomy, there does not need to be a dichotomy in its application or practice. An individual can bounce between the two ideas or form a fluid interaction between both understandings. Though this thesis pursues a third relational understanding and articulation, it is still vital and valuable to articulate relational ideas and practices using only the IC spectrum's language and concepts. This article is an excellent example of the IC spectrum's applicational fluidity, but it still references perichoresis as justification for pursuing a RC or middle road option of the IC spectrum.

### *Perichoresis*

In this article, the concept of perichoresis is referred to and not directly explored in any significant depth. “The concept of perichoresis, which denotes cyclical movement, recurrence, reciprocity, and interpenetration, is important in attempting to understand the Trinity.”<sup>97</sup> This reference starts the cascade of conclusions leading to her coinage and articulation of self-affirming collectivism. Perichoresis helps understand the Trinity, God's nature, and desires in IC spectrum terms. From here, the IC spectrum's articulation can be applied to the creation of

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<sup>96</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 575.

<sup>97</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 571.

humans, the Incarnation, the relationship with Israel, and the Church.<sup>98</sup> This article indirectly articulates perichoretic ideas in the IC spectrum language. Whether intentional or not, it is worth highlighting again that this article is valuable because it serves as a conceptual bridge from IC spectrum ideas to the perichoretic concept. The theology of perichoresis is rarely directly referenced but plays as an implicit lynchpin idea to the whole article.

### Indirect Application

In this section are the works that indirectly use the concept of perichoresis. What is meant by this are works that contain language, practices, and concepts that are very similar to what the concept of perichoresis articulates. Much of this is unintentional within the work but can be a powerful tool for connecting existing practices and concepts with perichoresis. It can serve as a bridging practice between the idealized comprehensive use of perichoresis and everyday relational experiences devoid of explicit reference to it. At this point, one work fits this approach, and more potential works are mentioned in the Appendix.

Kenneth J. Gergen – Relational Beings - Overview

Kenneth J. Gergen's book *Relational Beings: Beyond Self and Community* attempts to argue, articulate, and cast a vision for understanding ourselves as relational beings. The overarching framework and movement of the book are from an individualist, traditional understanding of his proposal. This attempt integrates levels of arguments and sampled evidence

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<sup>98</sup> Kim, *Individualism and Collectivism*, p. 571.

from everyday engagements, professional settings, and religious traditions throughout the book. This book aligns with this thesis, engaging with a relational move from the IC spectrum and exploring indirect perichoretic traits within the proposal of a relational being.

Gergen's primary desire is to see a move from individualism to an alternative relational understanding. Gergen identifies individualism as a tradition of "bounded being" while presenting an alternative understanding of a relational being to articulate this relational move from individualism.<sup>99</sup> Metaphorically, this relational move seeks to recognize a world that is not within persons but originates from within their relationships.<sup>100</sup> Gergen hopes that as the priority of relationship takes precedence over that of a bounded being, society will be in a position to transform tradition, the tradition of bounded being.<sup>101</sup> These ideas will be explored more deeply in the following section and this book covers an essential piece to the overall understanding of the RC of the IC spectrum.

Gergen's articulation of a relational being and relational priority are indirect perichoretic dynamics and concepts. To start, he makes a direct reference to perichoresis as aligning with other traditions and relational beliefs:

Most important for the present, this sense of the sacred is equated with relational unity. Such conclusion was suggested in the earlier discussion of ecology, process philosophy, and Buddhism. In each case, proponents linked visions of a relational whole with a spiritual presence. The sacred does not dwell within singular or bounded entities as such – with some "more blessed" than other – but within a condition of

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<sup>99</sup> Kenneth J. Gergen, *Relational Being [electronic Resource] : Beyond Self and Community*, (Oxford ;: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 27-8.

ultimate relatedness...In the Christian tradition this sense of fundamental relationship is closely associated with the concept of perichoresis, or the holy Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Rather than viewing these as entities split from each other, each partakes of the other. God is essentially three in one, one in three.<sup>102</sup>

This does not mean his articulation of a relational being is perichoretic but that his understanding is both aware of the perichoretic concepts and their similarities are enough to warrant attention here. It would be fair to state that Gergen's relational being proposal parallels perichoresis conceptually in critical ways. From this acknowledgment, a later section will highlight the most indirect perichoretic traits and practices from his relational being concept.

### *IC Spectrum*

In the move toward relational being, there are two unique points to highlight that can help better understand the RC. The first is Gergen's understanding of the tradition of bounded being, individualism. The second is the priority and contrast of placing relationship over bounded self. Both of these highlights add to a deeper understanding of the RC.

Understanding individualism as a bounded being means believing that within oneself is the source and sufficiency of everything of meaning. This belief is one of many that influence the culture and tradition of bounded being. The "...tradition of bounded being carries far beyond the daily experience of self and others. It is also realized in our ways of life and the structures of

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<sup>102</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 391.



our institutions-schools, businesses, and democracy itself.”<sup>103</sup> In teaching the student, it is assumed that one has the capacity to learn. In businesses and democracy, the values and meaning are derived from the minds of individuals. Gergen does not wish to destroy or abolish the traditional views of self in these institutions and traditions, but to highlight them as collectively constructed concepts is to acknowledge then they can be changed or adapted to alternative views.<sup>104</sup> From these individual and traditional understandings of bounded being, Gergen highlights their impact on everyday relationships.

For Gergen, it is crucial to understand the priority of importance in a relationship. For relationships, where the priority is placed can significantly impact its quality and potential. If the bounded self is society's natural and fundamental atom, then relationships can be seen as secondary or artificial.<sup>105</sup> This highlighted observation is intuitively understood and experienced within everyday culture. When relationships are secondary and used in service of the bounded self, it raises the risk of adverse relationships and limits their positive potential. If relationships are secondary, they will be sought out primarily when they are required for personal use or satisfaction, even giving committed relationships a subtle mark of insufficiency.<sup>106</sup> If relationships are prioritized, this will align with Gergen’s proposal of a relational being instead of the bounded self. This does not automatically rid everything attributed to the bounded understanding but would require adaption and modification. In a sense, the result could be a

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<sup>103</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 20.

<sup>104</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. xvi.

<sup>105</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p.17.

<sup>106</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p.17.

more profound and more significant potential for one's self. There is much to explore, and it is a valuable source for exploring the RC.

### Indirect Perichoresis

Three indirect perichoretic traits can be highlighted in Gergen's work. They are the ideas of co-action, multi-being, and bonding. None of these belong to the theology of perichoresis but serve as helpful examples to relational thinking.

An indirect perichoretic concept within Gergen's proposal of relational being is the process of co-action, or coordinated action. Within a relational understanding and priority, everything of value finds its origin and sustainability within relationships. Rational thought, intentions, experience, memory, and creativity are not in the mind and separated from the world but are embodied actions within relationships.<sup>107</sup> For a relational being, the process of co-action is essential and drives the process of establishing anything real, true, valuable, or good.<sup>108</sup> For the bounded being, the process of co-action is inescapable but not essential. This is because to act intelligibly is to participate in a relationship, resulting in the idea that any meaningful action is co-action.<sup>109</sup> So the process of co-action is indirectly perichoretic because it parallels the essential nature of a perichoretic relational dynamic. While the process of co-action is a potent

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<sup>107</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 94.

<sup>108</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 39

idea, moving from a bounded being to a relational being would be a fundamental first step within perichoretic relation. A perichoresis would have many other qualities integrated with the process of co-action.

Another indirect perichoretic concept is Gergen's understanding of a multi-being. As relationships are the priority for a relational being, each relationship is unique and essential:

In the tradition of bounded being, the person was isolated; reason functioned most perfectly in a social vacuum. In contrast, the multi-being is socially embedded, fully engaged in the flow of relationship. For the bounded being, coherence and integration are virtues; the well-ordered mind is a signal of maturity. For the multi-being, coherence and integration may be valued, but only within particular relationships. Celebrated are the myriad potentials for effective co-action across a broad and disparate field of relationships.<sup>110</sup>

As a relational being, there are multiple sources of influence and participation across the field of relationships. The idea of a multi-being is more of an honest acknowledgement of the relational complexity than a simplifying concept. Existence in a relationship gives rise to enormous potentials, streams of co-action, and trajectories of relationships.<sup>111</sup> Thinking of oneself as a multi-being within a relational understanding sets the stage for discerning how to navigate the complex web of relationships and potentials. So, multi-being is an indirect perichoretic concept as it also parallels the consideration of multiple relationships within a perichoresis. Again, a fundamental difference is in the quality of a relationship, which Gergen highlights within the indirect perichoretic concept of bonding.

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<sup>110</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 137.

<sup>111</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 133.

Another indirect perichoretic concept is bonding as a relational being. For Gergen, bonding would be the goal and later development within the process of co-action. To move towards bonding, a first step "...is the co-creation of shared realities, and the comfort, reliability, and trust that accompany them."<sup>112</sup> The idea of co-creation is a deeper application of co-action as both concepts have much overlap. As co-action within a relationship creates meaning, knowledge, and value for the relational beings involved, the idea of bonding helps guide these co-actions into the formation of a shared reality that originates and grows from the relationship. In a single relationship, the idea of bonding is more straightforward, but involving many relationships with a single relational being is where the concept of a multi-being helps navigate the bonding process. Limited by our natural capacities, as a multi-being, certain relationships take priority of investment of time and energy. A parent within a family is an ideal example. Depending on the context, a parent may prioritize two or more relationships within a deeply bonded shared reality, particularly between child and partner. As there is a spectrum of family contexts in the modern world, Gergen adds one additional step to the bonding process.

Another essential step for bonding goes beyond its conceptual identification. Building local realities and recognizing them as "ours" is important, but the critical ingredient of enchantment must be added.<sup>113</sup> An injection of value or a sense of transcendent importance must be added by means found in their co-creation process.<sup>114</sup> This enchantment is essentially an open

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<sup>112</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 175.

<sup>113</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 179.

<sup>114</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 179.

form of motivation ranging from a simple desire to transcendent beliefs but originating from the relationship of a relational being. With this understanding and goal, bonded relationships are somewhere near the center of what it means to live a meaningful life while also being the source of enormous agony.<sup>115</sup> Relationships that bring great joy can also be the source of great pain. Depending on the enchantment, the process of bonding can lead to an expanded bounded entity, moving to a “us” now separated from “them” or an understanding of “my group” vs “our” group.<sup>116</sup> This understanding of bonding parallels more with the concept of perichoresis in the unifying process. It is indirectly perichoretic because it is from the relational dynamic that meaning, truth, and value originate. Gergen’s idea of bonding stops at the relationship, though as positive as that can be, perichoresis continues to drive deeper conceptually.

All three indirect perichoretic traits constructively build on each other into a helpful process and understanding. Overall, Gergen’s work does not directly contribute to the theological concept of perichoresis, but it effectively bridges practical understandings from our side within everyday life. These three indirect perichoretic traits would help explore the RC center and see how perichoresis can help stir a more profound image of the potential of a relational being.

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<sup>115</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 183.

<sup>116</sup> Gergen, *Relational Beings*, p. 184.

## Chapter 3 – Reflections + Conceptual Movements

This chapter will consist of a series of reflections on the surveyed works to determine how to accomplish the paper's aim, moving past the limitations of the IC spectrum to discover its unknown potential. Since chapter one, there has been the language of exploring the RC within the IC spectrum. The purpose of the RC was to form a conceptual middle ground between perichoresis and the IC spectrum. The research from chapter one supported the plausible and pragmatic addition of the RC to the IC spectrum, and its addition helped identify suitable works. In chapter two, each of the surveyed works proposed an argument that demonstrated a solution that moved from the IC spectrum to a RC in this simple fashion. Within each solution, perichoresis was applied and served as a piece of support in their argument, to varying degrees. This section will have a series of reflections based on the surveyed works, starting with the concept of perichoresis and then conceptually moving through the RC to the IC spectrum. Once complete, the final portion of this chapter will generate a conceptual movement in five stages, from the IC spectrum to interacting with the concept of perichoresis.

### Reflections

These reflections will focus on the three topics of perichoresis, the RC, and the IC spectrum from the surveyed works. All the reflections in this chapter aim to connect, build, and add to the whole as the reflections form. There will be reflections that start with the concept of perichoresis, then move into the next RC topic and finish up with the IC spectrum. Metaphorically, this movement is from the center of a target, through each concentric ring to the outside rim. In this manner, the concept of perichoresis remains at the core of all the reflections.

## Reflections on Perichoresis

This section contains three general reflections on the use of perichoresis from the surveyed works. These reflections are on the concept's use and not direct reflections on the concept itself. The use of perichoresis is central to these reflections because it is the standard conceptual and theological connection between the surveyed works. Each work tries to solve a different problem and uses the concept of perichoresis in its solution. These reflections explore the general traits of perichoresis that make its use desirable. These reflections are not exhaustive nor comprehensive but seek to be the initial thoughts that can lead to deeper insights and further reflections.

### *Source of Creativity and Inquiry*

One of the most vital reflections on perichoresis across the surveyed works was as a source of creativity and inquiry. These two words describe the process found in these works using perichoresis. Each author expressed a desire that their work would positively contribute to their audience or goal. Even within the indirect perichoretic understanding, authors still demonstrate a similar desire. Why is this similarity present? The dynamic that perichoresis attempts to describe may require a specific intuition, intention or understanding to bring it into existence or conception. Seeing how perichoresis is a relational concept at its deepest level, what would be especially needed are beings of like mind. Those who discover their curiosity aligning with the concept of perichoresis can find a wealth of deep knowledge and experience. This reflection aims to highlight the idea that the concept of perichoresis can be a source of creativity and inquiry.

Within each surveyed work, there was an element of creativity and inquiry in its use of perichoresis. Gunton's use of perichoresis was comprehensive and led to his articulation of open transcendentals, of which perichoresis was one of them. Whoever possesses extensive knowledge of perichoresis within its theological sense could find his articulation of perichoresis as an open transcendental to be a source of creativity and inquiry. Gunton outlines many creative applications of perichoresis that generate questions and further inquiry. For example, Gunton is open to the idea that humans could be perichoretic beings, or at least desire to be, and his articulation of conceptual perichoresis inspires creative connections and dynamics between common ideas. The most influential element to perichoresis as an open transcendental is the permission to think beyond its traditional understanding and application. Klaasen aimed to contribute to the idea of community development using perichoresis. Perichoresis can help lead to a more holistic approach and resolve creative tensions by introducing the idea of a new middle way for transformational community development. Kim references perichoresis as foundational support to several pragmatically novel concepts. It helped generate the idea of self-affirming collectivism and a new initiative of viewing scripture through the IC spectrum or forming RC language from IC spectrum characteristics. Gergen's indirect reference to perichoretic characteristics offered unique insights by paralleled conceptual proximity to perichoresis. To see similar outcomes arise from two different ideas can provide a good opportunity as dialogue partners. The surveyed works are only a sample of the breadth and depth of the full potential of perichoresis as a source of creativity and inquiry.



A final reflection on perichoresis as a source of creativity and inquiry is the reminder that the concept was the result of creativity itself. The idea took hundreds of years of early church history to evolve and develop into the standard concept understood today. In contemporary theology, the concept of perichoresis has been rediscovered. Much like uncovering an ancient road that has been grown over by vegetation, certain theologians and groups are expressing the rich concepts and positive implications of perichoresis once again. To anyone discovering the concept for the first time, it can be like finding a lost coin of great worth. It is a profound concept that attempts to articulate the essential nature of core doctrines such as the Trinity and the natures of Christ. These have implications that cascade down across a broad spectrum of theological applications. This will be briefly unpacked in the following reflection, but these ideas of perichoresis being a source of creativity and inquiry are essential.

#### *A Perichoretic God*

As the concept of perichoresis attempts to articulate the nature of God's being, this is a crucial reflection to highlight some straightforward implications of believing in a "perichoretic God." This reflection aims to provide some simple guiding thoughts and not to be comprehensive or make undeniable claims. This reflection stresses the idea that if God is perichoretic, God is to be understood as being a certain way and not others. Understanding God as being a certain way can then influence how one understands their world. All the surveyed authors that used perichoresis demonstrated this to varying degrees. For example, understanding the nature of God's being to be relational, each work makes specific inferences about reality (Gunton), social development (Klassen), and personal identity in community (Kim). If God was not believed to be perichoretic in nature, these surveyed conclusions would be articulated

differently, if at all. Simply put, a belief about the nature of God is something foundational to every other theological belief. To say that belief is in a perichoretic God is foundational to everything else, regardless of one's level of understanding in perichoresis. The goal of this reflection is not to make the exclusive claim that God is perichoretic but to stress the act of claiming God is perichoretic, is something foundational and sets the trajectory for one's understanding of their world.

The trajectory this sets is one of perichoretic pathways towards theological implications that ebb and flow from the nature of God and in His relation to creation. Reflecting on this idea is like putting on goggles that see the world through a different aspect. As new ideas and questions arise, it can lead down many reasonable and cautious pathways in exploring the implications of a perichoretic God. For simplicity, when viewed theologically and limited to connecting selected fundamental doctrines in a holistic and perichoretic way, one can see these perichoretic pathways through many critical theologies. Much of this thought aligns and shares common ground with Gunton's work, but in a more simplified outline and reflection.

The idea of perichoretic pathways can be used to apply the relational dynamics of the Trinity to a relation with all of creation. Simply put, the God who is perichoretic in Himself relates perichoretically with creation. It is against this understanding that all other theologies play a more internal role. First, the theology of creation sets the stage by beginning this perichoretic relationship with the material realm. This relation with all of creation is continual, as in the general witness of scripture speaks of a new creation in the eschatological future. Next, the

theology of the 'imago dei,' humans created in the image of God, is connected to the theology of creation. Here, humanity begins to exhibit complex relations within this imago dei theology. Humans are created from the dirt and possess some form of stewarding authority and responsibility over creation, thus connecting us with the theology of creation which is a continual act of the Trinity. There is a relation among humans reflecting the Trinity resulting from the idea of all humans being created in the image of God. There is also a direct relationship with the Trinity itself shown through the general narrative of scripture describing God's continuing interaction with humankind. This narrative finds its most climactic rise as the theology of the incarnation of Christ starts to develop. This theology is about the person of Christ but it also overlaps and integrates with all three generalized relations humans possess to the Trinity, creation, and each other, deepening their significance. The incarnation articulates the person of Christ having both human and divine natures perichoretically united, allowing the claim that Jesus is both a human and the second member of the Trinity. To add to the mystery of the incarnation is the work of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, present in creation history, is the Spirit of Christ, and present in the eschatological future of creation. Another theme among all these relations is ecclesial theology which is the church. Ecclesial theology is having relations among humans, the person of Christ, and the entirety of the Trinity. In concluding this idea of perichoretic pathways, the future hope of the new heavens and the new earth may take on a more relational process bringing it all together. A future where all these relations between theologies find their conclusion together.

The goal of this theological snapshot is not to bring perfect clarity but to show an example of the earlier reflection that claiming a perichoretic God can influence one's understanding of the

world, a theological one in this example.<sup>117</sup> It would not be a far jump to integrate any modern-day disciplines into this idea, for example, asking how the science of the physical world relates to the theology of creation. Much contemporary work explores such connections, for better or worse. If one can imagine the idea of perichoretic pathways, then the concept of perichoresis can be a navigating or bridging concept between ideas.

### *Bridging Concept*

In this reflection on perichoresis from the surveyed works, the idea emerges that it can serve as a bridging concept. This desire was partially intentional within the planning of the literature survey and was demonstrated by the highlights of the surveyed works. As laid out earlier, the literature survey passingly focused on the idea of the RC in the IC spectrum but actively varied the degree of perichoretic use across the works. Four results are produced that metaphorically land close together on the common ground of relationality. Three of the works were directly connected through the concept of perichoresis, while the final work is conceptually close but is not directly connected in the same manner. These results show that perichoresis is a bridging concept in two distinct ways.

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<sup>117</sup> To take this theological snapshot even further, this large perichoretic pathway of God relating in a perichoretic manner with creation leads to many connected and smaller pathways. This way of thinking can contribute to theistic evolution well. This is a process that explores how God could have acted in a way that aligns with general science interpretation of the natural world. A perichoretic pathway may help deepen this view by adding relational characteristics and perichoretic understandings of how God may have related with the process that brought humanity into being. In which God continues to relate. This approach could contribute to the intra-mundane or creaturely realities that exist and may have been around before humankind.

The first way is through any concept's direct connection to the concept of perichoresis. The first three works have many similarities simply due to their use of perichoresis to varying degrees. For example, the three works that directly used perichoresis all referred to the quality of interaction between people. Gunton took a theological approach to perichoresis, trying to articulate what that interaction theologically means. Klaasen used perichoresis to try and provide a sense of holistic community development and personal responsibility within it. Kim referenced perichoresis to support the idea of individuals and collectives working together mutually. The concept of perichoresis bridges these ideas by its very concept.

A second way perichoresis is a bridging concept is more indirect. This can be seen by the fact that the concept of perichoresis is more accurately understood as the limit of our articulation and understanding of something that is beyond our comprehension and capacity. Like trying to use colours to articulate a colour we have never seen or experienced, perichoresis is a relational articulation of a dynamic we do not genuinely understand but know must exist. This is how the final work is indirectly bridged with the concept of perichoresis. Gergen attempts to communicate this unknown relational dynamic that perichoresis attempts to articulate. Both try to articulate something that happens within the relational occurrence, something we experience but almost impossible to conceptualize. So, the idea of perichoresis can act as a bridging concept by engaging in dialogue with other works that attempt to articulate similar ideas, dynamics, and values.

Reflecting on perichoresis as a bridging concept can help make connections that have not been noticed before. It bridges many theologies but also contains the potential of discovering existing connections or forming new ones entirely. As a bridging concept among the surveyed works, it could allow for movement and dialogue between the works. For example, if someone is unfamiliar with perichoresis but shares a passion for Gergen's work, the idea of perichoresis would bridge their understanding into the theological understanding, and vice versa. If someone only acknowledges the idea of perichoresis, both Gergen and Gunton articulate areas of thought that are very expansive. This reflection is not a claim that perichoresis connects everything and answers every question. It introduces the concept of perichoresis as a way of thinking, giving eyes to see the world in a way one may not have seen before. Also, it can help one recognize the interactions in life that have not been enjoyed because one has been unaware or unable to see them.

#### Reflections on Perichoresis and the RC

This section contains three reflections on the conceptual relation between perichoresis and the RC in the surveyed works. So far in the paper, the RC is a plausible addition to the IC spectrum and possesses similarities with the concept of perichoresis. Within the surveyed works, there are different RC aspects that are referred to. These reflections focus on exploring the connection between perichoresis and the RC across the surveyed works.

*Perichoresis as Relational Process*

This reflection will focus on stating the importance of understanding perichoresis as a unique relational dynamic. What is seen across the survey is perichoresis being understood more as a process, dynamic, or something ongoing versus a state of being, a product or a destination. Like a road trip, the journey is more important than the destination; perichoresis is more of a relational process than a form of product or outcome. Gunton is clear on this by using perichoresis as an open transcendental, a tool for opening a continual process of thought versus presenting it as something that brings complete clarity and confirmation. Klaasen used perichoresis to support the desire for transformational community development. Kim references perichoresis to support self-affirming collectivism which is an interaction between individuals and communities. All direct works demonstrate perichoresis as supporting an ongoing process versus an identifiable product or outcome. Also, the heart of Gergen's work on relational being has this process-based orientation in forming relationships through co-action. To articulate perichoresis as a relational dynamic is an essential distinction versus a static label or passive identity. For example, many couples can be passively labeled as married, but the quality of each marriage will depend on the relational dynamic between them. To understand perichoresis is to describe a process of how something, or someone, operates and why.

When applying perichoresis to certain theologies, it can describe the how and why of the theology. When Trinitarian theology articulates God's perichoretic nature, it is a relational dynamic that is active, ongoing, and alive. It is not just a simple fact to articulate the information that God's nature breaks math by saying 3-in-1. When articulating Christological perichoresis, it highlights the active relational dynamic and communication between human nature and the

divine nature within the person of Christ. It is not simply stating the fact that Christ had two parallel natures. To claim perichoresis is to describe an active and relational dynamic process.

### *Perichoresis versus Relationality*

In this section, we will unpack the similarities and differences between perichoresis and relationality. In the earlier reflections, there have been references to these two ideas being similar, but as the reflections move out from the concept of perichoresis, some unacknowledged differences emerge. This will be demonstrated by the works of Gunton and Gergen where the similarities between perichoresis and relationality lie within the same general relational processes, but the purpose behind the active relational dynamics is where the differences emerge.

The relational dynamics behind perichoresis and relationality are similar, as shown in the works of Gunton and Gergen. Gunton labels perichoresis and relationality both as open transcendentals, highlighting their similarity in how they are used and understood. The three open transcendentals yield insights exclusively on their own and by engaging with the other two. For Gunton, relationality as an open transcendental provides the means behind how perichoresis operates. Gergen's presentation of a relational being operates within relationality. It is only through co-action within a relationship that anything of value or intelligent meaning emerges. For perichoresis and relationality, the relational dynamics operate in the same arena of thought but are distinct. This could be described as saying that all forms of perichoresis are relational but not all relations are perichoretic. It is within the purpose behind any relational dynamic where the difference occurs.



The purpose behind any relational dynamic is the primary reason perichoresis differs from relationality. In Gunton's work, there is a reason why perichoresis and relationality are different open transcendentals. For perichoresis to occur, a unique relational dynamic must occur before the purposes of perichoresis can be achieved. Through the use of Christian theology of the Trinity and Christology, Gunton can articulate perichoresis essentially as a more nuanced relationality: a relationality that is positive, mutual, reciprocal, and ideally unified to an infinite degree; a relational unity so perfect it is as if a separate essence emerges from the relationship itself, without the parts disappearing or being consumed. This is reflective of the language of perichoresis within the theology containing it. Gergen reflects this approach but from another angle. His work presents relationality from a more neutral aspect, acknowledging similar relational dynamics to that of perichoresis but without explicitly considering it. He unpacks everyday relationships with potential positive, negative, and neutral outcomes. Though possessing the desire to foster positive outcomes, Gergen explains the need for a sense of "enchantment" behind the dynamics of such positive relationships, whatever that enchantment needs to be. For example, a sports team needs the desire to win, a marriage with the concept of love. Understanding the difference between perichoresis and relationality brings greater clarity to each concept.

Some helpful insights emerge by reflecting on the similarities and differences between perichoresis and relationality. First, this deepens the earlier reflections on perichoresis. As a source of creativity and inquiry, perichoresis would require a specific form of relationality. This can help imagine partial forms of perichoretic relationality by understanding them as positive

forms of relationality that approach or move in the direction of a perichoresis, though they fall short. As a bridging concept, perichoresis offers more insight and connections when correlated with the broader concept of relationality. For perichoresis, it is a positive dynamic relationality that integrates unity and particularity. Other forms of relationality possess specific characteristics and result in neutral or negative outcomes or purposes. Examples of neutral forms of relationality could occur in the material world, where the natural laws of physics and thermodynamics are what they are. Examples of negative relationalities could be dominance requiring characteristics such as power and control.

Simply put, perichoresis can plausibly be considered a nuanced and unique form of relationality, among many others. It is better to say plausibly because of its theological nature, and it would be beneficial to leave the conceptual door open to mystery. The mystery is the true nature of perfect unity and particularity within a perichoretic relation. In the next section, the reflection will explore the perichoretic characteristics required to begin articulating its nuanced form of relationality.

### *Perichoretic Unity and Particularity*

This reflection will holistically explore two primary characteristics of perichoresis, unity and particularity. The idea of moving from a general, or neutral, relationality towards an idealized perichoretic relationality offers a spectrum of insights when focusing on these two characteristics. The following reflections will be exploratory and aim to align these reflections with the future addition of the IC spectrum.

The two characteristics essential to perichoresis are unity and particularity. What is unique to perichoresis is the idea that both ideally exist together and lead to two important observations. The first is to uphold the presence and importance of both. The second is to uphold the idea that the quality of each one is directly a result of their interaction. For Gunton and Gergen, both characteristics applied both observations in their work. Both authors express one's particularity as being relationally derived from the relationships in which they participate and both authors express unity as a description of the relationships present. Gunton mainly described unity from an idealized theological perichoresis. Gergen articulated unity within relationships as shared realities, a beautiful image. If relationships are described as shared realities, it provides a helpful metaphor for upholding the values of the perichoretic characteristics of particularity and unity.

As perichoresis seeks to uphold characteristics of particularity and unity, exploring what may result if one characteristic is valued over the other is worthwhile. In this continued reflection, each characteristic will be valued more than the other, and we will explore the implications. First, if either characteristic is not in its idealized perichoretic state, it shifts from perichoresis into a form of relationality. The works of Klaasen and Kim were examples of relationality where each characteristic was valued directly in a perichoretic understanding but with different weightings on each. In a simple analogical view, Klaasen valued unity over particularity, but the dynamic he explored was how a person's particularity could help bring greater unity. Kim's self-affirming collectivism valued both perichoretic characteristics but placed particularity over unity. The dynamic in this work was exploring how the group's unity can enable healthier particularity of persons. Both works could be forms of relationality but with

different contexts, goals, and values. It is worth noting that both Klaasen and Kim's different weightings of unity and particularity still result in a positive relationality in the direction of perichoresis. A positive relationality, even if it falls short of perichoretic unity, is still desperately needed in modern relationality.

One final step in the reflection of perichoretic unity and particularity is to explore the implications if one is radically valued to eradicating the other. If each can be radically valued by itself, then this sets up two very different paths to explore. The first path is where particularity is radically valued with no value for unity. This arrangement would mean that the person's particularity is all that matters, with no value placed on the idea of the groups, relationships of shared realities. This does not mean these do not exist, but they do not need to matter. This developing idea is starting to resemble Gunton's issue with modernity and Gergen's with individualism or the idea of bounded being. If the other path of radical unity starts to be explored, it will demonstrate a value for a group, relationships, or a singular (not shared) reality. This does not mean that particularities, or persons, do not exist but that the characteristic is not valued. As unity becomes radicalized, this could be in a positive, negative, or neutral form. Gunton's work referred to these types of unity as a unitary approach or unrelational homogeneity. Gergen refers to this path as a belief in collectivism where it could impose relationships. This radical unity could take many forms but mainly emerges as the value of particularity is eradicated. The dynamic between the characteristic vanishes as well. When the exploration of both paths is considered, it begins to represent the IC spectrum where the extremes of each end parallel the radicalized paths of particularity and unity. This completes the

section of reflections on perichoresis and the RC and gives a foundational to move into reflections on perichoresis, the RC, and the IC spectrum.

#### Reflections on Perichoresis, the RC, and the IC Spectrum

In this section, two reflections continue to build and now include the IC spectrum found within the surveyed works. These final reflections explore the RC's final connection to the IC spectrum. This is an essential connection because it demonstrates potential contributions to the IC spectrum and its potential to include the RC. These reflections are not to be contributions to understanding the traditional IC spectrum but reflections on how it can connect with other ideas and move conceptually beyond its traditional unclear use. Very similar to perichoresis, the purpose of these reflections is not to explore the ideas within each concept but to explore the undiscovered insights and ideas between them. These two final reflections conclude the explorative process before moving on to articulating conceptual movements.

#### *Two-to-one Conceptualization*

At the beginning of the thesis, the IC spectrum could be understood as a simple dichotomy between two ways of thought. The general understanding of the spectrum was individualism versus collectivism but was limited, and limiting, in its application. Across disciplines, some works try to advance the IC spectrum positively. Kim's work is the best example of surveyed works that contributed something positive exclusively using concepts and language of the IC spectrum. By coining the idea of self-affirming collectivism, she essentially attempted a unique combination of each idea or crafted an experience of constantly bouncing

between the two. The primary goal of this reflection is to help conceptualize a shift in thinking from combining two opposing concepts to expressing a new singular concept in two different ways.

The addition of the RC to the IC spectrum and its exploration with perichoresis has provided the necessary conceptual ground to present such a shift. The first step is understanding the RC as an addition to the IC spectrum. The RC gives space on the spectrum for relationships and conceptually brings the missing gaps between the two opposing viewpoints into reality. The missing gaps that all individuals engage in relationships, and all collectives are connected by them. Also, by its addition, it permits considering relationality apart from the other two ends. Second, exploring the RC with the concept of perichoresis helped understand how both opposing ideas could connect within and through the RC. The reflection on perichoresis and relationality demonstrated how the perichoretic characteristics of unity and particularity could lead to similar conceptualizations of each end of the IC spectrum. What has been realized are distinct ways of conceptualizing the RC. One is from the IC spectrum by combining two ideas, and a second way from conceptualizing the RC from the perichoretic concept in the earlier reflection. This common conceptual alignment through the RC allows for a shift from thinking in IC spectrum terms to thinking relationally. This lays the ground for shifting from fundamentally starting with individualism and collectivism to starting solely with relationality. The shift is also a move from creating a singular thing from two opposing ideas to expressing a singular idea two different ways.

The primary aim of this reflection is to present a fundamental shift from thinking from two opposing concepts to one, a two-to-one shift. This shift in thinking looks at the same area of thought but from another aspect. It is not the aim to replace the IC spectrum with this shift nor claim it is wrong or inferior but to expand the holistic potential and discover new insights. Being aware of both concepts is beneficial and reflection on their potential dynamic could be fruitful for making both more impactful.

### *Relational Characteristics and Qualities*

This reflection highlights the potential need to reinterpret essential relational characteristics and qualities depending on which conceptualization is used. Being immersed at either end of the IC spectrum conceptualization differs from the RC's conceptualization. The idea of everyday relational qualities<sup>118</sup> such as love, freedom, or power will look different considering which conceptualization is used. For example, if love is only understood through a radically individualistic lens, then one possesses a limited understanding of love determined by the individual. This touches on many of Gunton and Gergen's criticisms regarding modernity or bounded beings. The same effect can happen for a radical collectivist understanding. When considering the example of love through relationality, the understanding and practice is determined by the relationships of those involved. Love is real in both conceptualizations but is different in how it comes into being understood. This difference in the outcome of thought is

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<sup>118</sup> Love, power, and freedom were chosen as examples for relational qualities because they exist at different aspectual levels and are integrated, almost perichoretically. Freedom and power are ideas that can be more easily seen and measured in everyday context while the idea of love is a higher descriptor that can contain many variables, such as freedom and power, and is highly dependent on how it is defined. One powerful example of these relational qualities is within the parent-child relationship. The power difference is evident, but freedom is determined by the roles and responsibilities. When this relationship is labelled as loving, the powers and freedoms within the relationship become more complex but also larger in their potential. A final note is that if no relation is present, then these qualities would cease to exist as each requires interaction between multiple entities.

because relationality is more of a process or dynamic, while the outcome of thought from the IC spectrum can be more passive or static. The difference each conceptualization produces can be shown by understanding the context.

Considering context can bring insight into how each conceptualization can impact relational qualities. If a simple contextual template is used, it can help get to the core difference. As an example of collective understanding, if there is group A that performs action C as a loving action and group B that performs action D as a loving action, then there are two separate collective groups defining two separate understandings and actions of love. If groups A and B were to start interacting, there is the potential for each group to consider the other group's action unloving, though both consider their own to be loving. These understandings of love through each group are more static and lead to disagreements between groups on how love is to be understood and practiced. If love is understood through the conceptualization of relationality, then it is in the relational process or dynamic behind the action of a group that leads to the understanding of love. In this case, action C of group A and action D of group B can both potentially be loving actions depending on the relational process behind the action. This simplified contextual template demonstrates the fundamental difference in how a relational quality can be understood depending on the conceptualization used. What also starts to reveal itself is the interaction of each conceptualization. This can be demonstrated by considering whether the context is open or closed.



The interaction between each conceptualization can be positively demonstrated by contrasting the interactions within an open and closed context. A closed context would refer to any scenario requiring a specific outcome, as most contexts in everyday life require. This could be any task, identity, or activity where the outcome is defined. A relational quality in a closed context can be easily determined by an individual or a collective and then can find greater expression through the supporting process of relationality. For example, a student requires the outcome of a completed thesis and determines that help in this would be very loving, so their family demonstrates love through their relationships with them in fulfilling that outcome. Next, an open context would be any scenario that does not require a specific outcome. These could be contexts that span a long time or where the future is not fully known. A relational quality in an open context would find its most practical expression through the process of relationality. For example, if a family desires to be hospitable to their community, the relational quality would be understood within the family's relationships with the community. A spectrum of desired potential outcomes from the relational process can emerge to inspire or guide the process of relationality to achieve it more effectively. This reveals a dynamic between the conceptualizations that can take place to strengthen everyday relational qualities.

In the end, two points should be made about relational qualities. One is that they can be interpreted differently depending on the conceptualization being used. Second, the dynamic between both conceptualizations can lead to more meaningful and positive relational qualities.

## Conceptual Movements

In this section, all the research of the literature survey and its reflections will be used to articulate a conceptual movement from the traditional IC spectrum to one interacting with perichoresis. This conceptual movement will start from the IC spectrum and gradually move towards the concept of perichoresis step by step. This movement will form a 5-stage adaptation to the linear understanding of the IC spectrum.

### IC spectrum Towards Perichoresis

To formulate a movement from the IC spectrum to one that integrates the concept of perichoresis, this section will lay out the potential contributions in five stages of an evolving IC spectrum. To begin, this is feasible due to the two characteristics of the IC spectrum in its traditional use, its open stance to interpretation and its natural trajectory towards relational thinking, as explored in chapter two. Reflections on the concept of perichoresis and relationality demonstrate that a sufficient conceptual movement is plausible. These reflections set up the framework for exploring a five-stage adaption of the IC spectrum towards perichoretic relationality.

### *Zeroth Stage – Modern Relationality*

In this section, before entering the first stage, there need to be some comments made on the general state of modern relationality to clarify the beginning of the five stages. The first comment is that attributing a complete understanding of the IC spectrum as a pervasive belief is simple and generous. There will be many who are simply unaware or live by some partial

understanding of the IC spectrum. A second comment is the increasing amount of change in modern time. There could be a chance that some have a deeper understanding of relationality than IC spectrum characteristics. The scope of relational mediums, access to information, instant communication, and globalized economies may allow one to be so connected beyond any other time in history that they do not fit in the described IC spectrum understanding. These comments about modern relationality show that before any adaptations by perichoresis, the IC spectrum is a wild form of the stage leading into the first adaptations. This would describe the IC spectrum in a negative light possessing dichotomist and polarizing understandings. This dichotomization could be because of the comments above and the general state of modern relationality.

#### *First stage – Perspective*

The first stage of adaptations to the IC spectrum mainly results in a positive shift of perspective about the spectrum. This is a change of understanding, not any change to its fundamentals. They are separated with no priority placed on relationality or dynamic interaction between them. When starting to apply perichoretic contributions, one essential shift in perspective occurs within the understanding of the central divide between both ends. There is a shift in thinking from opposing, denying, or neglecting to acknowledging and respecting the equal viability of the other end. The central divide remains, and one does not need to interact, but this shift in perspective is essential. This contribution is possible because perichoresis considers both unity and particularity to be of importance. This one shift in perspective is also supported by the research on the difference between being radically oriented and being relationally aware. Both ends can benefit from this reminder of the reality that relationships are present in both worldviews and are the medium through which they interact. Both would remain within the

traditional views but represent a different trajectory of values. To avoid radical posturing and pursue one positive towards the present relationships is more holistically positive. The critical change and adaption for stage one is a change in perspective of the IC spectrum, which allows it to remain what it is but start to align with perichoretic understanding.

Another unique contribution to this stage from the research would be the new awareness and acknowledgment of these adaptations. Much like an older generation that has lived through a monumental amount of technological change deciding to remain in their original ways, those that achieve stage one may choose to remain in stage one. The research may present a five-stage progression, but one does not need to move along with it. Accepting the change in perspective and respect for later stages is still a holistically positive choice.

### *Second Stage – Dynamic*

The second stage builds off stage one and adapts it by removing the central barrier between individualism and collectivism in stage one. This simple metaphorical adaption has real implications for each end of the spectrum and what it opens the concept up to. First, removing the central division allows for the simple understanding that a dynamic is now between both ends. This starts to expand the stage one understanding to a more open posture allowing both ends to remain present but dynamically interact. This represents the initial research in chapter two and the spectrum's original trajectory across disciplines without considering perichoresis. Kim's work also represents this stage two form well by demonstrating the value of this dynamic and how it could work. The dynamic is also demonstrated by Klaasen through his articulations of

creative tensions, which resolve the tension between the individual and the collective was one of them. Second, this change also sets the stage for the subsequent adaptation. Though possessing no official RC, the openness to the dynamic between both is fundamental to the RC and the concept of perichoresis, but stage two still limits itself to IC spectrum terms. Perichoretic characteristics such as particularity and unity can positively contribute to dynamic understanding. Relational qualities from the reflection like love and freedom can also be understood in this form as these qualities are already expressed in stage one but will deepen within the dynamic between individualism and collectivism this stage offers.

A unique observation must also be highlighted as this stage begins to transition into stage three. As this stage ends, the exclusive use of IC spectrum language and concepts do as well. This exclusivity could be labeled as “conventional” for stages one and two.

### *Third Stage – Relationality*

The third stage continues to build by adding the idea of the RC as a third central position within the stage two IC spectrum. This fundamentally alters the understanding of the conventional stages of the IC spectrum by explicitly adding the concept of relationality. Once added, it alters the understanding of both ends and the dynamic of how they interact now being through the RC. This arrangement allows for the two-to-one conceptualization reflection turning both ends into two distinct expressions of the RC, instead of possessing their own self-sufficient understandings. This shift is different from the conventional understandings of stages one and two and can be labelled as the start of a “post-conventional” way of thinking about the IC

spectrum. It is not that one ceases to think in terms of the individual or collective and starts thinking exclusively through relationality, but that one adds relationality to their understanding of IC spectrum. With the three positions now on the spectrum, it could be labelled as the new Individualism-Relationalism-Collectivism (IRC) spectrum. In everyday experience, there are individuals and collectives, but both are the outcome or initial context for the process of relationality. To think post-conventionally in stage three is in the form of the IRC spectrum.

The new IRC spectrum uses the reflections of perichoresis and relationality to guide its understanding and application. At stage three, there is a general relationality with no explicit understanding or application of perichoresis. This is possible because the difference between Gunton and Gergen's work demonstrated this, the direct and indirect use of perichoresis. If perichoresis were to be applied in this stage, it would be indirect. This understanding would still allow for the perichoretic characteristics of unity and particularity to apply to general relationality and the IRC spectrum. In the center, unity and particularity would be present and valued equally. As one moves toward individualism, particularity becomes more valued than unity. It is vice versa on the collectivism side, and both ends are radical expressions of particularity or unity with the relational process.

#### *Fourth Stage – Perichoretic Relationality*

In this fourth stage, the concept of perichoresis starts to be directly applied to the IRC spectrum and referenced for what the continued adaptations aim to achieve. At this point, the conceptual movement toward perichoresis is starting to enter the more speculative and

mysterious territory, so the metaphors may start to become more imaginative than practical. If a perichoretic relationality is still an inspirational thought, then any analogical attempt to understand it might yield some insights. The primary understanding of this stage is more in the movement beyond stage three as it approaches a perichoretic relationality.

This metaphor of the IRC spectrum approaching a perichoretic relationality would be similar to the process of bending a steel rod into a circle and fusing the ends. This image highlights three valuable insights into what may be drawn from a perichoretic relationality. First, if a group aims for perichoretic relationality, then all three positions of the IRC spectrum should interact as a singular relational dynamic. This is represented by the bending motion that changes the line spectrum into the shape of a circle. Considering the individual, relationality, and collective in a singular interaction can serve as an aspirational concept for any group. Kim's work shows this concept by combining individualism and collectivism into a singular dynamic but falls short of stage four articulation. The second useful insight in the metaphor is of the completed circle and fused ends. The IRC spectrum's image as a circle helps represent the singular relational dynamic that occurs in perichoresis. Also, as a fused circle, there is no applicable difference between the original center of the IRC and the fused ends but there can be a conceptual distinction. If perichoresis has perfect unity and particularity within its relational process (Center of the IRC), the fusing of radical ends of individualism and collectivism would possess the same characteristics but in the form of an outcome as opposed to a process. Simply put, looking at any action or process of a perichoretic relationality through an individual, collective or relationality lens would yield the same result. This is similar to understanding any act of the Trinity in scripture, where it expresses that any act by a member of the Trinity is an act

of the entire perichoretic relation. The third helpful insight may help clarify the second. If one were to observe a perichoretic unity from outside, this IRC ring might be how it is understood. One would observe a singular relational dynamic it would not matter if one considers the relational process, individualistic, or collectivist outcome. The understanding is the same. There would be, as Gunton understood, perichoresis as a unity of the plural. There would be unity, particularity, and relationality.

#### *Fifth Stage – Metaphoric shift*

When considering the IRC spectrum, it is simply an analogy to societal relational interactions, and there is a case for conceptualizing this dynamic as an alternative metaphor, in this case, a puzzle. This is the final conclusive thought because, as valuable as the adaptations are to the IC spectrum, this alternative metaphor reminds us that these relational dynamics are open to interpretation and different perceptions. This alternative metaphor, this paper would argue, serves as a more powerful symbol for the relational dynamics of the IRC spectrum. A puzzle represents an individual as each piece, the collective as the image of the puzzle, and the relationality as how the pieces connect. When putting a puzzle together, each puzzle piece is an individual part of the collective image. Each piece contributes to the whole, while the whole gives a larger purpose to each piece. When considering relationality, it is how the individual pieces connect to make the whole. Each piece connects differently to another, and each whole has a different configuration of relationships though the image may be identical to another puzzle. Some puzzles have thousands of tiny pieces, and some are simpler with larger pieces.



There are many ways to put a puzzle together. Some fit pieces by a trial-and-error fitting process, and some look at the images of the whole and contrast the pieces. Another way of putting the puzzle together is upside down with no regard for the image. By looking at the shape and outline of the pieces, one can assemble the puzzle. Once complete and flipped over, then the image reveals itself. The best approach to putting a puzzle together is to consider the picture's full image and see how each piece's image and shape connects to fit the puzzle together. This metaphor is filled with deeper insights, but this is sufficient to demonstrate the strength of alternative metaphors for the intent of this thesis.

## Conclusion

As this paper draws to a close, this concluding section will summarize and highlight the most substantial contributions. The first series of conclusions will regard the primary goal of the thesis, moving past the limitations of the IC spectrum and discovering its unknown potential. The second series of conclusions will highlight opportunities in theology.

### Moving Past the IC Spectrum Limitations

The most vital contribution of the research and reflections to the goal of this thesis has been the five-stage adaptations to the IC spectrum. Holistically, the idea behind forming a conceptual movement between the traditional IC spectrum and perichoresis provided the guiding framework for each stage. This is important because it kept each stage conceptually aligned and consistently moving towards the complexity of perichoresis. Along its progression, three distinct contributions stand out: the conventional spectrum, the post-conventional spectrum, and the idea of a singular relational dynamic.

The conventional spectrum from the five-stage adaptations is the most practical contribution of the research and reflections. Connecting stages one and two into a single concept gives structure and edification to the traditional IC spectrum and provides a way forward conceptually by using consistent IC spectrum language and characteristics. Stage one of conventional thinking welcomes individualists and collectivists onto the same spectrum and honours the differences with the central barrier, which falls short, but aligns with perichoretic thought. Progression to stage two in conventional thinking moves towards establishing a working

dynamic between the ends by eliminating the barrier, thus indirectly introducing relational thinking and moving away from radicalizing individualism or collectivism. Giving conventional thinking this breadth of scope and holistically positive understanding can work against and correct many negative societal dynamics that occur daily. Conventional thinking includes individualism “and” collectivism instead of claiming its “versus” nature, than society will need to wrestle with respecting another equally viable view instead of polarizing and demeaning it. This version of conventional thinking moves the current state of relationality towards an interacting and integrating dynamic and away from the polarization and radicalization that happens so quickly in our times.

Post-conventional spectrum thinking is another distinct contribution from the research and reflections. This is articulated as a move from conventional thinking to stages three and beyond. Practically speaking, stage three is the most pragmatic stage in post-conventional thinking. Later stages enter the speculative and imaginative zone. The powerful idea behind post-conventional thinking is that it is a conceptual point of intersection for many of the ideas and reflections in this thesis. This stage provides great social versatility and creative opportunity as it borders with dynamic conventional thinking, possesses general relationality, and borders the beginning of direct perichoretic thought. One is socially versatile as they can relate with conventional thinkers and add a layer of understanding to social interactions due to their acceptance of general relationality. There is also a creative opportunity because general relationality and perichoresis are ideas of a process, active, or dynamic orientation. With many changes in modern society, this post-conventional thinking can help navigate challenges more

effectively and leverage opportunities that may not be obvious. The concepts of this stage help engage society and apply process-based thinking to quickly evolving everyday interactions.

The final idea in moving past the IC spectrum limitations is the idea of a singular relational dynamic from the IRC spectrum adaption in stage four. This idea is important because it is a conceivable and intuitive concept for the next step, if there is one. Perichoresis is a mystery at its core and makes practically applying it or articulating it quite tricky, if not impossible. The relational dynamic of perichoresis is something that resonates with our being and stirs our deepest desire for what a relationship can be. The highlight of this idea is to pursue a singular relational dynamic that one could live in all relationships.<sup>119</sup> Like the great commandment to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself, one aims to act as much as possible within a singular relational dynamic. This point is one of aspiration and an attempt to articulate a core tension of perichoresis as a feasible or intelligible goal.

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<sup>119</sup> One example of perichoretic thinking could apply to the complex relational dynamics of anyone who possesses a partner, offspring, workplace, and neighborly relationships within their everyday experience. To hold in tension the unity of these relationships within a person and each relationship's particularity to produce a singular relational action is concretely complex but within the capacity of the imagination to imagine what such an accomplishment could feel like. A partial application of perichoretic thinking to the example could be holding the partner and parental roles within perichoretic tension. This would be striving to allow one's partner and parental relations to unify and hold particularity. Such questions as "how can being a better partner make me a better parent?" or "how can the perichoretic thinking of these relationships better the health of these relationships and those involved?". There are some negative examples from the IC spectrum that pit one relation against the other through radical individualism or absorb both relations into the radical collective identity of the family. Perichoretic thinking would wrestle with how to live-in-unity while honoring the particularity of each relationship through a single relational dynamic. Though perichoretic thinking would be experienced through one's individual perception, the action would be a co-action and conversation between all three (or more) parties involved. This fact alone of including the other persons in the wrestling is an important first step by itself.

## Theological Opportunity

From the research and reflections, there are two theological opportunities from the work of this thesis. The first opportunity is a theological contribution to contemporary wrestling within the IC spectrum. As stated in the zeroth stage, there is a lot of neglect, demeaning, polarization, and other negative interactions leading nowhere. Perichoresis, as presented in this paper, interacts with the five-stage process to highlight itself as a positive reference point. This aligns the steps to it from the everyday understandings of the IC spectrum. Perichoresis can directly contribute by providing a step-by-step path along the simultaneous application of its characteristics. No matter if a contemporary issue is arguing for social understanding over another, the church can authentically articulate their understanding of themselves as a child of God, the people of God, and in relationship with God as perichoretic characteristics allow. It allows the church to be what its society needs them to be in the moment and change as needed authentically.<sup>120</sup> Whether it is the church or society, both can accept and apply perichoretic characteristics and benefit from the relational dynamic.

Another theological opportunity is to continue using the creativity and inquiry that perichoresis fosters and explore other theological perichoretic pathways. Many contemporary theologians are exploring some of these pathways, and there is much potential to discover many

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<sup>120</sup> If the local church attempts to relate perichoretically with a surrounding community, it values unity while honouring each group's particularity. To start, this would be an active attempt to identify with, or within, the surrounding community. This proposes a posture that resists isolation from the community and any downplaying of what makes the faith community or surrounding community unique. This uniqueness is also derived from the perichoretic relation between the church and surrounding community. This understanding fosters an understanding towards serving the community while also being mindful of their own group identity in solidarity with their community. For example, if local churches perichoretically relate with other more recent minority communities, the relation would strive for solidarity but not as a dominant or subservient in relation but as unique participants in unity. This idealized understanding is not likely, but its trajectory will naturally lead towards more mutual and healthy relations between church and community.

more insights and new connections. This theological opportunity would have many entry points for those who have just discovered these ideas to scholars devoting their life's work to one path. This paper only explores a path to the IC spectrum, but other paths lead to new forms of perichoresis, new theological perspectives, and plenty of options for perichoretic works to be dialogue partners with other disciplines. Expanding the application of this paper's path has some exciting potential of seeing how perichoresis can be used directly within the monetary system and indirectly within social networks—examples are found in the Appendix.

### Concluding Remarks

In the end, the theological concept of perichoresis proved to be a powerful idea and analogy for exploring new connections insights in the idea of relationships within our modern world. Perichoresis served well in its direct and indirect uses among the surveyed works and helped identify truly already inspiring works. It contributed to the advancing the pervasive belief of the IC spectrum into the formation of conventional and post-conventional spectrums of thought. The concept of perichoresis also contrasted well with the idea of general relationality, allowing a fresh perspective of both concepts and the dynamic between the two. Perichoresis itself has also demonstrated to be a powerful analogy, a bridging concept, and a source of creativity and inquiry, especially within theology. Since learning of the concept in seminary and being deeply inspired by it, this thesis has explored my aims and desires for its potential. The ideas, reflections, and explorations of this work are not conclusive proofs but inspiring thoughts.

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## Appendix

### Additional Comprehensive Works – Gregory Scott Gorsuch

In his dissertation “Analogia Spiritus – “Eternity in our hearts”” Gregory Scott Gorsuch attempts to present an alternative relationality that challenges the conventional dual understanding of “subject-object.” Gorsuch uses perichoresis in a comprehensive way to articulate an alternative tripartite structure of relationality, “subject-relationship-subject.”<sup>121</sup> The essential meaning of this alternative is that “truth, meaning and 'being' are located neither 'out there' (realism), nor 'in here' (idealism), but always within the constituting third term of the immediate relational occurrence itself.”<sup>122</sup> The dissertation unpacks and explores the implications of this fundamental relational shift within the areas of person, community, and the Trinity. One of the potential conclusions of the paper is that if “...all humans are fundamentally constituted as such, this ultimately presents analogically the possibility of common ground between the Church and culture - the desire to relate perichoretically, love.”<sup>123</sup>

Gorsuch’s tripartite structure could contribute to the thesis in the following ways. First, when considering the IC spectrum, there is potential for deeper understanding and how the RC could be added. The central role within the tripartite structure could shift the essential

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<sup>121</sup> Gregory Scott Gorsuch, *Analogia Spiritus - ‘Eternity in Our Hearts’: Relational Dynamics and the Logic of Spirit: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry into the Tripartite Structure and Irreducible Dynamic of ‘Perichoresis’ in Person, Community and Trinity*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1999), p.ii.

<sup>122</sup> Gorsuch, *Analogia Spiritus*, p. iii.

<sup>123</sup> Gorsuch, *Analogia Spiritus*, p. iii.

understanding of the IC spectrum from two opposing thoughts on a spectrum to one central understanding of relationship. Second, this comprehensive work could contribute greatly to understanding how perichoresis could play a role in exploring relationality, or the RC in general. Analyzing perichoresis from the aspect of person, community, and Trinity in one work would be very promising. Finally, the work is interdisciplinary and refers to the works of Gunton and Gergen. If both direct and indirect works refer each other, then it could lead to even deeper and broader understandings.

#### Additional Partial Works

##### *Emily F. Peters – Perichoretic Self*

The dissertation “Perichoretic Self: A Trinitarian-Kleinian Exploration of Selfhood” by Emily F. Peters partially applies perichoresis in her exploration of the perichoretic self. This concept integrates “Kleinian psychoanalytic and Trinitarian theology concepts of selfhood into an integrated conceptual framework.”<sup>124</sup> Peters partially uses perichoresis to explore selfhood as a series of inter-relations within oneself. The hope was to provide insight into a self within the individual and community.<sup>125</sup> This partial work could provide unique insight into a fundamental aspect of oneself.

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<sup>124</sup> Emily F. Peters, *Perichoretic Self: A Kleinian-Trinitarian Exploration of Selfhood*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019), p. 2.

<sup>125</sup> Peters, *Perichoretic Self*, p. 2.

This work could contribute to the goals of this thesis by presenting another construct of the self. When considering the IC spectrum, this work could provide insight into how a person may experience or perceive the spectrum. If a person experiences an individualistic and collectivistic experience simultaneously, it would be beneficial to explore how a relationship between the ends of the IC spectrum plays out within one's experience. Considering how this article uses perichoresis could be an inspirational example of perichoretic creativity. To see how this work integrates perichoresis with psychoanalytic theory could open the imaginative door for many into oneself. Usually, perichoresis is applied to the Trinity, creation, and the other. To see if it can be applied within, is a concept worth exploring.

*Poštić – Support of Dialogism*

In “The “Other” and the “Other”: Christian Origins of Bakhtin’s Dialogism” Svetozar Poštić looks at Bakhtin’s idea of dialogism from a Christian aspect. Bakhtin’s theory stresses dialogue between generations, ideas, and interlocutors during a time in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when monologism and a hegemonic consciousness were dominant.<sup>126</sup> Poštić aims to explore this with a series of topics, which perichoresis is one of them. This exploration could yield connections between, and into, existing ideas.

Exploration and contrast between Bakhtin’s dialogism and perichoresis could produce insightful connections. For the IC spectrum, this article could contribute towards

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<sup>126</sup> Svetozar Poštić, *The ‘Other’ and the ‘Other’: Christian Origins of Bakhtin’s Dialogism*, (*Filolog (Banja Luka)*, no. 12, 2015), p. 109.

understanding the collectivist side as it focuses on more Eastern culture, history, and Orthodox theology. Understanding how perichoresis is contrasted with Bakhtin's Dialogism could produce connections between the two similar, but separate, ideas. This article's main contribution could be another example of how perichoresis can be a tool for taking a fresh look at older ideas.

#### *Wariboko – Money and Perichoresis*

In "Money and Relations: Toward a Triune Model of the Global Monetary System" Nimi Wariboko attempts to explore how the dynamics of perichoretic theology can aid in transforming the global monetary system. The dissertation hopes to use the theology of perichoresis to address the idea of money "...in its full social-relational and processual character, key ambiguities, certain key destructive tendencies, and structural tensions ("demonries") come to the fore, and require redress."<sup>127</sup> By contrasting the characteristics of perichoresis such as particularity, participation, relationality, and unity against the modern ambiguities of money would lead to an insightful reflection. Contrasting the idea of money and perichoresis would provide insight for the thesis of this paper in a more indirect way.

Regarding the aims of this thesis, exploring the idea in Wariboko's dissertation could be beneficial. Money is essential to how the world runs but many do not fully understand it

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<sup>127</sup> Nimi Wariboko, *Money and Relations: Toward a Triune Model of the Global Monetary System*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006), p. i.



beyond their everyday experience with it. Considering the IC spectrum and plausible RC, money has a presence and form of medium along the whole spectrum. Whether looking at individualism or collectivism in our modern world, the idea and practice of money could be connected in some way. Exploring the idea and practice of money with a plausible RC would be beneficial. Exploring how the theology of perichoresis could influence monetary systems in our modern world also be a refreshing endeavor.

#### Additional Indirect Works

##### *Christakis – Social Networks*

Nicholas A. Christakis has produced much work and research into the idea and phenomena of “social networks.” This is a third factor to the traditional IC spectrum divide. The book “Connected: How your friends’ friends’ friends affect everything you think feel and do” explores how social networks and our connective ties affect our overall experience and makes us uniquely human.<sup>128</sup> It is through the social networks that we are connected individuals, impacting the network as much as the network affects an individual. This work explores societal characteristics that aligns with the aims of this thesis.

The research and work on social networks could contribute strongly to the IC spectrum and indirect perichoretic characteristics. Social networks articulate a way of connecting that

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<sup>128</sup> N. A. Christakis & J. H. Fowler, *Connected : the surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives : how your friends’ friends’ friends affect everything you feel, think, and do*, ((1st Back Bay pbk. ed.). New York: Back Bay Books, 2011), p. 4.

aligns strongly with the idea of a RC. In this articulation it could lead to understanding individuals and groups from the starting point of relationships. When understanding any indirect perichoretic characteristics, it may help articulate another aspect of the unique unity that perichoresis describes. Christakis' work and research extends to diverse disciplines and reflecting on recent events through a social network lens, such as the pandemic.

*Steven Page – Self-in-Systems Theory (Dissertation)*

In his dissertation “Self-in-Systems: A Formal Theory of the Emergence of Postconventional Systemic Thinking as Object-self Is Found” Steven Page presents a new Self-in-Systems theory. This work's purpose is to address the complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by exploring the capacity for systemic thinking. More precisely, to explore terms of self and system relations rather than subject and object relations.<sup>129</sup> The result leading to a six stage Self-in-Systems theory that highlights three conventional stages and three postconventional stages, with the main difference being systemic thinking versus subject-object thinking. This new theory could yield indirect perichoretic characteristics for future work beyond this thesis.

Self-in-Systems theory could contribute to the understanding of the RC and indirect perichoretic concepts. The main contributor to potential insights would be the paper's exploration of systemic thinking in relation to perception and development of self. The IC spectrum as presented in this thesis would fall into the conventional way of thinking in the first three stages. Since his theory moves into a postconventional way of thinking, understanding the

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<sup>129</sup> Steven W. Page, *Self-in-Systems: A Formal Theory of the Emergence of Postconventional Systemic Thinking as Object-Self Is Found*, (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015), p. ii.

later stages could contribute to understanding the RC. In learning about potential indirect perichoretic concepts, systemic thinking in relation to perceptions of self could be promising.

The self within a perichoretic unity may conceptually parallel the idea of self-in-systems relation.

This work could serve as an additional indirect perichoretic source for future work.

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University of Western Ontario

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2005- 2009 B. Eng.

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2009 – 2010 M. Eng.

University of Western Ontario (Althouse)

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2012- 2013 B. Ed.

Tyndale University College and Seminary

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2014 – 2018 M. Div.