

Circumincission as Invitation to  
Participation in Divine Life

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The term “circumincession” (in Greek, “perichoresis”) refers to two different yet equally fundamental theological concepts: that of the mutual indwelling and interrelationality of the Three Divine Persons of the one God, and that of the perfect unity of the Divine and human natures within the incarnate God-man, Jesus Christ. Historically, the term has been used to defend orthodoxy against ancient heresies such as Arianism, Nestorianism, Sabellianism, and Monophysitism.<sup>1</sup> Familiarity with the meaning of circumincession is thus indispensable in understanding the development of the Catholic theological tradition. Moreover, and more importantly, the entire Catholic spiritual life consists of the believer’s experience of perichoresis as a lived reality.

Circumincession presents the Trinity as a dynamic and “unceasing circulation of life” within which “each Divine Person is irresistibly drawn, by the very constitution of His being, to the other two.”<sup>2</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of this unceasing circulation of life as “an eternal exchange of love” between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (CCC, 221). The very nature of divinity can therefore be understood as a radical expression of self-giving love. In order that God might express His love not only within the Godhead but in external fashion, He deigned to create the universe. His plan from the beginning was to raise humanity to Himself by drawing them to participate in His own divine life.<sup>3</sup> To this end the eternal Son of God took our human nature to Himself so that He might provide us a means by which to “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

The Incarnation of the Word allowed the inner perichoresis of the Trinity to physically manifest. This divine condescension was necessary to fulfill God’s plan. By joining divine life to

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<sup>1</sup> Kaiser, “Perichoresis, Christological,” 122-123.

<sup>2</sup> Bermejo, “Circumincession,” 742.

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen gentium*, 2.

human flesh, God made it possible for us to appropriate His nature to our own. To accomplish this seemingly impossible task, we must only accept His invitation.

“Take, eat; this is my body” (Matthew 26:26) — with these words Jesus invites each of us to enter into the circumincessional life of the Trinity. Indeed, to eat His flesh and drink His blood is the only way for us to have divine life within us (John 6:53). For it is only in the Eucharist that “both Trinitarian and Incarnational perichoresis” are made accessible to us in such a way that we may participate in them and thereby experience the “eternal encounter” with God in which our deepest desires are fulfilled.<sup>4</sup>

Circumincession is found at the very heart of the Gospel. It describes not only the majestic inner life of the Trinity, but also how we are granted access to that life by the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. It reveals that God is Love, that in Jesus Christ Love became man, and that by receiving the Eucharist man can become Love. Without an understanding of these truths, Christian theology is unintelligible. Yet we will not ultimately be judged on how we understood these truths, but on how we lived them.

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<sup>4</sup> Kaiser, 123.

## Bibliography

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