

Perichoresis is a Greek term used to describe the Relationship at the center of all things: The dynamic union of the three Persons of the Trinity. Alister McGrath writes that it "allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of a 'community of being,' in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them" (McGrath, 2001, p. 325). Gunton states, "It would appear to follow that in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic mutual reciprocity, interpenetration and inter-animation" (Gunton, 1993, p.163).

The word itself comes from two Greek words: *peri*, which means "around," and *chorein*, which means "to give way" or "to make room" (the noun *Chora* means "space"). So perichoresis, roughly translated, means to make space around. More specifically, it refers to the way in which someone or something makes space around itself for others. Some scholars picture this as a sort of choreographed **dance** (Moltmann, 1993) in which each member goes out of their way to extend self to another while reciprocally making room for the other, setting self aside to host the other in a mutually indwelling relationship. An approximation of this indwelling concept can be seen in the indwelling of the Spirit in the life of a believer.

By **interpenetration**, we mean "the free pouring of one person's essence into another" and by **inter-animation** "the enlivening effect that renders another who he would not be without interpenetration"(Larry Crabb, School of Spiritual Direction Handbook). To understand inter-animation, think who the Son is that He would not be were He not loved by the Father, i.e., had He never experienced the Father being "in" Him. Maybe we get just a faint hint of this in a good, enduring marriage, or a really good relationship with a parent or child, or friend or pastor, spiritual director or counselor, if we think how different we would be if we'd never met or been loved by that person, and they never had us in their life... In some very profound way that person is **in** you now. You have **internalized** them and this has animated or brought **life** to and changed you. And if we named this life or animation or energy in you that is your response to being entered and loved, we'd use words like amazement and thankfulness, profound gratitude and love. In 1John 4:19 it says "we love because He first loved us." But in the Trinity, this inter-penetrating and inter-animating...this love fest...has always been going on...it's who God is! And every good human interaction originates from and is a faint approximation of perichoretic (Trinitarian) relating.

Existence is relational, and love is the essence of relationality. Thus, God is love, each person surrendering himself in love to the others (R. Letham, 2004)

In Summary, then, Perichoresis is the ongoing, eternal, synchronized relational movement of the three Persons of the Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are intentionally open to the others and directed towards each other in a love which is total and infinite. Each person holds on to nothing for Himself, they are always givers – extending to one another in self-sacrificial, other-focused, unconditional love. They do receive from one another, but by hosting or making room for one another, not by taking or consuming. The direction of the relational energy remains outward or other-focused. Thus, God is love, each person surrendering Himself in love to the others. **Father, Son and Holy Spirit are so relationally linked in love, so "together", that "They" are One.**