

# **DOCTRINE OF TRINITARIAN PERICHORETIC UNITY: STANDARD FOR THE UNITY OF THE CATHOLIC SEMINARIAN AND SEMINARY FORMATION**

Julius IJEKEYE, PhD

## **Introduction**

The Catholic Church in Nigeria can pride herself for remarkable record of success in many areas of service to humanity and the people of Nigeria. The presence of the Catholic Church in Nigeria has different start point in different parts of the country, but all of them dating back to so many years ago. The years past saw the Catholic Church struggling to establish itself not only in different parts of the country, but also to establish itself in the minds of the Nigerian people, through bringing the authentic message of Christ's goodness to the people.

The goodness of the message of Christ's has brought a lot of positive change s in the Nigerian society, and equally in individual Nigerian people. Some of these people felt the goodness of Christ brought by the Catholic Church through attending Catholic schools, Churches, hospitals, programmes, etc. or even by people merely associating with Catholics in one way of the other. Being aware of all these, the Catholic Church on her part is conscious of the fact that the sacred Priesthood is at the foundation of the life and activities of the Church, so she safe guards, cares and nurtures it constantly.

One of the ways that the Catholic Church has concern for the priestly institution is through the seminary system, which is the process of forming personnel for the priestly office. The seminary applies formation techniques in the preparatory process of candidates for the

sacred priesthood of Christ. The seminarians are supposed to unite themselves fully with the seminary formation they get, so that they turn out as well balanced human beings, good Christians and proper servants of the Sacraments of Christ and the Church. But rather sadly, the unity of the seminarian to the seminary formation he gets is sometimes called to question; thereby suggesting the seminarian's lack of understanding or shortsightedness of the unity that should and must exist between seminary formation and himself. It is in this regard therefore that this paper presents the Trinitarian perichoretic unity as the standard for the unity that should and must exist between the Catholic seminarian and seminary formation.

### **What is Trinitarian Perichoresis (περιχωρησις)?**

The Holy Trinity stands as the mystery of all mysteries because it is the mystery of the three divine Persons in One Godhead. It is the mystery that expresses the one essence of God and three Persons in God. Theologians differ on the sources for the knowledge of the Trinity but commonly agree that some insight to the Trinity can be gained from the Sacred Scriptures (Bible). There have been explanations adduced for the Being of the Trinity: three Persons in One God, and to the being of the three Persons of the Trinity. One of the explanations to the being of the three Persons of the Trinity is Perichoresis, which is a principal focal point of this paper.

The understanding of the doctrine of Trinitarian Perichoresis rests on the fact of the establishment that in the three Persons of the Trinity are: the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. The surest authority for establishing this fact is the Bible, for it gives an indication to God the Father as the creator of light and darkness (Is. 45:6-7). Jn: 8:58 gives the indication that God the Son (Jesus) pre-existed before Abraham, who stands in here for humanity and indeed the world. While Acts. 5:3-4 presents the Holy Spirit as God to Whom were directed the lies of Ananias and his wife Sapphira. With the understanding of the three Persons of the Trinity being equally God, then one can now start talking of the perichoretic nature of God.

In this light, Douglas Kelly defines the perichoretic nature of God as: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in here in one another and coexist, entirely, and perfectly in one another, so that where one is, the others are, and what one is involved in doing, the others are also involved in doing"<sup>1</sup>. Despite this seeming inseparableness of the three Persons of the Trinity from their actions, it will be wrong to assume or conclude that the Persons of the Trinity do not have their individual specific actions. The Scripture even lays claim to the fact that the Persons of the Trinity have their specific actions, as can be seen in Gen. 1:1-2: "In the

beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” And then 1Pt.1:1-2: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied”.

The distinctness of the Persons of the Trinity is very important because throughout the course of redemptive history, the three Persons in the Godhead occupy distinct roles. But even though the roles are distinct, yet there is synergistic action of the three Persons, which John Frame portrays thus: “The concurrence of the three Persons of the Trinity in all they do is a profound indication of their unity. There is no conflict in the Trinity. The three Persons are perfectly agreed on what they should do and how their plan should be executed. They support one another, assist one another and promote one another's purposes”.<sup>2</sup> The perfection of the agreement that exists among the Persons of the Trinity cancels out any form contrariety of action on the part of the Persons of the Trinity. Should there be any sign of contrariety of action of the Persons of the Trinity then the doctrine of the perfect unity of Persons of the Trinity cannot hold; thereby implying the non-existence of the Trinity and a falsification of the Sacred Scriptures. The perichoretic nature of the Godhead does not deny the distinctness of the Persons of the Trinity but at the same time does not compromise the perfect unity of the Persons of the Trinity.

The perfect unity of being of the Persons of the Trinity is tied to the undivided essence of God. In this regard, Kelly notes: “The whole undivided essence of God belongs equally to each of the three persons. That is, the divine essence is not “divided” among the three persons, but is wholly with all its perfection in each one of the persons so that they have a numerical unity of essence or being. And yet, they are still three conscious persons, not just one being”.<sup>3</sup> The essence of God strengthens the understanding that the persons of the Trinity somehow mutually interpenetrate one another, yet without confusion of substance or commingling of natures; meaning by this that there are three Persons in the Godhead but not three gods.

As a way of an important digression, is to state that the doctrine of perichoretic unity is used to explain the hypostatic union in the incarnation. This goes to explain that in Christ there are not two entities in one body, but two natures held together in perfect union in one Person<sup>4</sup>. This doctrine was first used by St. Gregory of Nazianzus in the

fourth century AD, in his *Epistle 101* and elsewhere, and was subsequently deployed in the work of Maximus the Confessor, even though the doctrine of Perichoresis first began in the Sacred Scripture; specifically in John 17. Both Gregory and Maximus used the term Perichoresis to refer to the hypostatic union alone.

In the *Epistle 101*, Gregory expressed that perichoretic unity could be found in both the natures and names of Christ: '[j]ust as the natures are mixed, so also the names pass reciprocally into each other by the principle of this coalescence.<sup>5</sup>' To explain this, Gregory said that "Christ dwelleth in your hearts" is not saying that the physical, visible man Yeshua is in the saints. Rather, it is that invisible, non-corporeal subsistence (i.e. Spirit) of God and Christ which dwells in saints. The name "heavenly man," likewise, is accurate because it is appropriate to combine the names because of the true union (*duofuseon*) in Yeshua (the hypostasis)<sup>6</sup>. Care must be taken when discussing the hypostatic union of Christ so that 'nature-perichoresis' is not confused with *communicatio idiomatum*. Oliver D. Crisp clarifies this thus:

The doctrine of the communication of attributes has to do with how apparently contradictory properties can be predicated of the one person of Christ, whilst holding the two natures together in the hypostatic union without confusing or conflating them for instance, the apparently contradictory character of Christ's declaration, in John 8:58, 'before Abraham was born, I am'. The doctrine of nature-perichoresis has to do with how the two natures are united in the hypostatic union. It does not give a complete explanation of how the two natures are united, but it goes some way to explaining how it is that they are united together.<sup>7</sup>

Nature-perichoresis cannot claim to give a complete explanation of how the two natures in Christ because of the recognition of the fact that it is touching on a mystery. But a bit of understanding can be got for nature-perichoresis in the statement of Crisp:

I take it that nature-perichoresis involves an asymmetrical relation between the two natures of Christ. The divine nature of Christ interpenetrates his human nature without confusion and without being mingled with it. But the human nature of Christ does not interpenetrate the divine nature in any way. Moreover, this interpenetration of the human nature by the divine nature of Christ does not involve the transfer of properties from the divine to

The human nature. The two natures remain distinct, but united, rather like the oxygen and haemoglobin in oxygenated red blood cells in the human body are chemically distinct, but fused together to make oxyhaemoglobin in order to deliver oxygen to the body efficiently. This nature-perichoresis could be understood as a special case of the divine interpenetration of the created order on certain views of divine providence. Just as the divine nature might be said to interpenetrate the whole of creation, sustaining it and upholding it at each moment of its continued existence, so also the divine nature of Christ interpenetrates the human nature of Christ, upholding and sustaining it at each moment of its existence. This seems to mean the difference between these two instances of divine interpenetration is one of degree, rather than kind.<sup>8</sup>

The reference to divine interpenetration with regard to degree allows theologians to talk of divine interpenetration of human nature. But if this is the case, why then the need for the incarnation event since God would have just increased the intensity of the degree of penetration on one special human being, and simply used that person to save humanity? To think like this is to fall into the heresy of adoptionism. The incarnation event was one that necessarily needed the hypostatic union of two natures: very God and very man; and the natures not commingled or conflated but the divine interpenetrating the human without the human interpenetrating the divine. And the human nature not opposed or constituted in any way to prevent the divine interpenetration.

In the case of the divine and human nature, it is the divine that penetrates the human, and not the other way round. But what then happens in the case of the Persons of the Trinity? Here we come back from the important digression made earlier to focus again on the Trinity; this then brings us to consider the issue of 'person - perichoresis'.

It is important to have the historical information of how it was that in the mid-seventh century AD, John of Damascus applied perichoresis to the doctrine of the Trinity in his treatise *De fide orthodoxa*.<sup>9</sup> In the process he introduced the notion of interpenetration into the discussion of the doctrine. The notion of interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity has led to the development of social theories of the Trinity, which can roughly be said to be theories that explain the person-perichoresis by

deemphasizing the oneness of the Trinity, and emphasizing the threeness of the Persons of the Trinity sharing a single divine essence, in which they participate perichoretically. This must not lead one to a wrong belief that social Trinity theorists, like Jürgen Moltmann, have a monopoly on this version of perichoresis.

St. Augustine had a version of person-perichoresis that differentiated the Persons of the Trinity by relational properties alone, and this study will adopt that model. For the Persons of the Trinity, there are distinguishing properties that can only be associated with one Person alone (called *Proprietates* in scholastic theology), like Fatherhood, Sonship and (passive) Spiration.

Also a property like 'origin-lessness' belongs only to the Father as the 'source' of the Trinity. There are then properties that can belong to only two persons of the Trinity, such as the active spiration of the Spirit by the Father and the Son, or, perhaps, the decree of the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son.<sup>10</sup> St. Anselm would add that these properties are relational and cannot be in opposition to themselves<sup>11</sup>; and Ludwig Ott will sum it up by stating it to be a Trinitarian law: *In God all is one where there is no opposition of relations.*<sup>12</sup>

The application of this mode of person-perichoresis reveals the need for a more in-depth consideration for declarations on the Persons of the Trinity, such as that of Council of Florence in AD 1441: "Because of this unity the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Ghost, The Son is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Ghost is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son"<sup>13</sup>. The danger here is how to maintain the properties particular to only one Person or two Persons alone in the Trinity. Also, such declaration gives room for an interpretation like: "The persons of the Trinity interpenetrate one another such that all the properties of each person of the Trinity are shared together in the essence of the Godhead".<sup>14</sup> Can this kind of interpretation be what the Council of Florence meant in its declaration on the Persons of the Trinity?

If it is taken that the declaration of the Council of Florence is interpreted to mean that the properties of each Person of the Trinity are shared together in the essence of the Godhead, then it will negate the fact that there are properties that belong only to one Person or only to two Persons of the Trinity. For instance, the property of being an "underived being" belongs only to God the Father, and cannot be shared by the Son and the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the property of "actively spirating the Holy Spirit" is a property shared only by God the Father and God the Son. A property like being a Person of the Trinity is

necessarily shared by the three Persons of the Trinity; and that is true of the Godhead. This means that there are some properties which are necessary to the Godhead, but which are not shared by all the persons of the Godhead. Should one persist in interpreting the declaration of the Council of Florence as meaning that all the properties of the Persons of Trinity are shared together in the essence of the Godhead, then it will mean that one is in "...a contra diction: God cannot be both triune *and* subsist in three persons who share *all the same* properties as each other. The reason being that this falls foul of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles".<sup>15</sup> The contradiction will lie in the fact that if it is taken that the three Persons of the Trinity share all the same properties as each other then it means that the three Persons will be identical now and at every time, "since, by virtue of the necessity of identity, if a thing is identical with another thing at one time, it must be identical with that thing at every other time at which it exists".<sup>16</sup> In this regard then it cannot be said that there are three Persons in one God because there will not be properties individuating the Persons of the Trinity, thereby meaning there can be no distinct Persons of the Trinity; which would then automatically mean a negation of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. But by virtue of haecceity or 'thisness' one may want to individuate the Persons of the Trinity rather than by properties. On this basis, it can be said that even if two individuals share the same properties, they can still be individuated on the ground that they are 'this' individual rather than 'that' individual. But, it could be argued that it is not the case that the divine persons are individuated solely on the basis of thisness, because God has properties that are metaphysically necessary and which are peculiar to only one person of the Trinity. In which case, for the second person of the Trinity to be instantiated, that person must have certain properties like 'being the Son'. Since it is metaphysically necessary that the second person of the Trinity have this property, and since it is impossible for the second person of the Trinity to fail to exist, the second person of the Trinity must have this property, and this property, and others, serve to individuate the second person from the other persons of the Trinity<sup>17</sup>. Since, from the fore going, interpreting the declarations of the Council of Florence to mean that all the properties of each person of the Trinity are shared together in the essence of the Godhead amount to a wrong conclusion, can it then be said that the Council was wrong in its declaration? Possibly the Council's declaration may be better interpreted in such a way that the relation involved in person-perichoresis applies equally to each of the divine Persons of the Trinity, while at the same time safe-guarding those properties that are either shared only by one Person or two Persons of the Trinity. In this regard, Crisp offers a commonsensical interpretation to the declaration of the Council of Florence, and this study is in agreement to that interpretation: The persons of the Trinity share all

their properties in a common divine essence apart from those properties that serve to individuate one of the persons of the Trinity, or express a relation between only two persons of the Trinity<sup>18</sup>.

The interpretation above suggests that the interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity is rather limited than complete. Person perichoresis should not be interpreted to mean that the interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity is a complete take-over of one Person over another Person or Persons of the Trinity. The limited interpenetration of the Persons of the Trinity goes to preserve the individuation of the Persons of the Trinity, without which their individuation will be jeopardized. Applying this model of interpretation to the declaration of the Council of Florence, Crisp said: ...our formulation of perichoresis is only compatible with the Council's decree if the phrase 'wholly in x' is understood to mean something like, 'wholly in x, yet exclusive of individuating properties and properties shared between only two persons of the Trinity'. This is rather an awkward way of reading the decree. But something like this is required in order to preserve the requirement of relational properties that individuate the persons of the Trinity<sup>19</sup>.

To undermine the individuating properties of the Persons of the Trinity is as good as denying that there are three Persons in one Godhead. The consequences of such a denial would be the denial also of Christ and his Priesthood. But this cannot be the case, since God the Son can be and is individuated as such, and his individuating properties cannot be confused with those of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit; while they all share the common essence of God.

### **Perichoretic Unity and the Priesthood of Christ**

The Catholic Church is widely known with her Catholic priests. But some people may ask why the need of having Catholic priest where it is the case that Christ's work on the Cross eliminated the need for priests and sacrifices? The Protestant, especially during the Reformation period, would claim that the priesthood of all believers testifies against a separate priestly class; always with a claim that if Catholic knew their bible well then they should have known this. There could be a further claim that priests are not even used in the New Testament to designate shepherd of local Churches or parishes, rather they are designated as presbyters. So why then the Catholic priesthood? How are Catholics to respond to this?

The starting point to responding to this will be from the Old Testament, putting the perichoretic unity of the Persons of the Trinity in full focus. Christ would never counter the will of the Father, rather

he will always accomplish that will. It was the will of God to establish a universal priesthood for His people, Israel. So after Israel's exit from Egypt, God announced that Israel would be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.<sup>20</sup> But God still allowed within this arrangement that there will be a priestly class; for this is seen when Moses ascended to receive the Law but was told by God to come up with Aaron but not to let the priests come up with them (This was before the formation of the Levitical priesthood).<sup>21</sup> This gives the indication that two groups exited under the universal priesthood of the Israelites: a common priesthood of the people and a ministerial priesthood; and this would later be transferred to the universal priesthood of the New Testament Church. But Israel forfeited the universal priesthood when they abandon God for the worship of the golden calf.<sup>22</sup> Moses showed this forfeiture when after he descended from receiving the Law and saw the golden calf, he cried out “Who is on the Lord's side?” and the Levites were the ones who rallied round him, so he ordered them to slay the idolaters, and about three thousand were slain.<sup>23</sup> Though the Levitical priesthood could now vividly be seen, yet it had divisions within it. The duty of offering sacrifice was left only to Aaron and his lineage, while other liturgical duties: music, singing, door-keeping, caring for the apparatus for worship and the tabernacle were for other Levitical clans.<sup>24</sup>

Aaron and his lineage, apart from teaching the Law,<sup>25</sup> had the main duties of offering sacrifices on behalf of the people, making atonement for their sins, and heard confessions of sins from the people: “When a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed and he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord for the sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sins.”<sup>26</sup> Aaron and his lineage were spiritual fathers to the people. For instance, Micah asks a Levite “to be a father and a priest to me”.<sup>27</sup> Later this Levite gets a better deal when a band of Danites ask him to leave Micah to serve their tribe as a father and a priest to them.<sup>28</sup> From the foregoing, one perceives that God initially established a universal priesthood for the nation of Israel which included common and ministerial roles. But after they forfeited it, it was transferred to the Levites; these two roles remained intact. In the New Testament the universal priesthood is transferred to the new Israel, the Church. St. Peter highlights this transference when he uses the expression for the universal priesthood of Israel in Exodus to address the Church (the new Israel): “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people”. The priesthood taken from Israel, given to the tribe of Levi is now awarded to New Testament believers. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* shows support for this thus: On entering the People of God through faith and baptism one

receives a share in this people's unique priestly vocation: Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men has made this new people a kingdom of priests to God, the Father. The baptized by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood<sup>29</sup>. The priesthood of the New Testament is the Priesthood of Christ, by which the new Israel is born. Just like in the Old Testament, in the priesthood of Christ are two roles: the universal priesthood of all believers through baptism, and through Holy Orders men are appointed to a ministerial priesthood. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* buttresses this point: The ministerial or hierarchical priesthood of bishops and priests and the common priesthood of all the faithful participate each in its own proper way in the one priesthood of Christ. While being ordered one to another they differ essentially. In what sense? While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope and charity, a life according to the Spirit, the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood.<sup>30</sup>

Christ's priesthood therefore is not to abolish the Old Testament priesthood; rather it perfects and transforms it. This is in accord with what Christ meant when he said, “Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”.<sup>32</sup>

One can perceive some form of perichoresis in the fact that the priesthood of Christ appears to be a continuation of the priesthood of the Old Testament, having same features of being a universal priesthood of the people of God and also being a ministerial priesthood. Yet the two forms of priesthood have their individuating characteristics while ultimately sharing the same source: one Godhead. Also, the perichoretic character can be seen, especially in the priesthood of Christ, through the ministerial priesthood being at the service of the universal priesthood of Christ entered into through the sacrament of baptism. But the ministerial priesthood depends on the universal priesthood for the provision of candidates for the ministerial priesthood, and as the doorway to the ministerial priesthood. Though the ministerial priesthood makes available the sacrament of baptism by which people enter the universal priesthood of Christ, yet the same sacrament for the doorway to the universal priesthood of Christ is the doorway for the ministerial priesthood of Christ. It can then be inferred that both classes of the priesthood of Christ interpenetrate themselves but are neither confused nor conflated; though they both belong to the priesthood of Christ, yet they still retain their individuating properties.

### **Perichoretic Unity and vocation to the priesthood**

It is important to understand that every Catholic has a vocation, which goes to mean that “every Catholic participates in the reality of 'vocation' in three distinct but related senses”.<sup>33</sup> The first is the common Christian vocation beginning with baptism, and is principally about loving and serving God and neighbour and helping to carry on the mission of the Church. The second is referred to as a “state in life” or a way of being Christian: priesthood, religious life, marriage, etc. The third is the personal vocation of each person, which takes shape in the unique combination of talents, personal characteristics, relationships and life circumstances including both our common Christian vocation and our state in life that point to the special role God wants us to play in his redemptive plan.<sup>34</sup> Summarizing how vocation is generally to be understood, Pope Francis said: A vocation is a fruit that ripens in a well cultivated field of mutual love that becomes mutual service, in the context of an authentic ecclesial life. No vocation is born of itself or lives for itself. A vocation flows from the heart of God and blossoms in the good soil of faithful people, in the experience of fraternal love. Did not Jesus say: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn.13:35)?<sup>35</sup> Most times, when people, especially Catholics, talk of vocation it is in reference to a “state of life”, mostly priesthood and religious life. Since we have seen what vocation is generally, let us now narrow it down to vocation to the priesthood, which applies in our context.

Vocation to the priesthood is not far removed from the characteristics of other forms of vocation. In the vocation to the priesthood is the common Christian vocation beginning with baptism; it is a “state in life”, and involves the personal vocation of that individual person characterized by combination of talents, personal characteristics, relationships and life circumstance. Of great importance is that all these must be operational in an environment and atmosphere of mutual love and service; and that environment is the Church. Love is a gift to a person and not a natural characteristic; and that is why the Catholic priesthood is principally a call to receive a unique form of love from God and to share it out in loving service to the children of God within the ecclesial family. The vocation to the priesthood is therefore born of God and directed to His own family: the Church. The perichoretic unity in the vocation to the priesthood, and indeed the priestly vocation, lie in these words of Jesus: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit”.<sup>36</sup> Here lies the priestly vocation within the vocation of Christ. The Lord Jesus situates the priestly vocation within his own vocation of being the redeemer. While Christ interpenetrates the priestly office of priests as a

continuation of his salvific work on earth, they in turn cannot object or obstruct that interpenetration while exercising the priestly office and cannot interpenetrate into the divine nature of Christ. That is why the priestly vocation is a holy one, and so the vocation to the priesthood is equally a holy process of entering into the priestly vocation. And just as the life of Christ was consecrated to the authentic proclamation of the loving will of his Father, so too the life of priests are consecrated, in the name of Jesus Christ, to the same proclamation. Behold then the perichoretic unity of the vocation within the vocation of Christ to which Catholic seminarians seek through the vocation to the priesthood. The vocation to the priesthood is therefore a preliminary step into the priestly vocation which is within the vocation of Christ, but the vocation to the priesthood is itself not outside the vocation of Christ. This points to the mysterious nature of the vocation to the priesthood.

### **Perichoretic Unity and Seminary formation**

In considering the phrase “seminary formation”, one may see it from a perichoretic point of view. Perichoresis is derived from two Greek words: *peri*, which means “around”, and *chorein*, which means “to give way” or “to make room”. Some theologians have interpreted this as a dance of God. So placing seminary formation in a perichoretic context, it may be said to be “to give way around”, or the “dance with”, and in the words of Clark Pinnock: “the metaphor suggests moving around, making room, relating to one another without losing identity ... At the heart of this ontology [Trinity] is the mutuality and reciprocity among the Persons... a circle of loving relationships”.<sup>37</sup> Seminary formation can then summarily be interpreted as a progress of relating characteristics and persons in mutuality and reciprocity, without compromising individuality.

One major characteristic of seminary formation is that it must always involve team work. This is rooted in the Trinitarian action of creation: “Let us make man in our image ...”<sup>38</sup> Even if there is only one seminarian in the formation process, he must need at least one formator to form him; wherein a team is constituted by both of them for the “creation” of a new creature who will be “another Christ”. The seminary formation process constitutes the great dynamics of placing the seminarian, with his consent, in the perichoretic unity of the divine Persons of the Trinity, because the seminarian seeks Christ’s ministerial priesthood, while not confusing or conflating the individuality and individuating properties of the seminarian.

This process of seminary formation is highly important in order to satisfy the goal of seminary formation which is in conformity with the

goal of God for the redemption of the world: a new humanity and a new cosmos; the summing up of all things in Christ.<sup>39</sup> Seminary formation is the placing of seminarians in the perichoretic unity of the divine Trinity because Interpersonal relatedness belongs to the very being of God. Therefore there can be no salvation for human beings except in relatedness. No one can be made whole except by being restored to the wholeness of that being-in-relatedness for which God made us and the world and which is the image of that being-in-relatedness which is the being of God himself. A glimpse of this is given to us in the consecration prayer (John 17) where Jesus prays that those who believe may be made part of the very unity of the divine being, united by that which binds the Father and the Son, which is nothing other than the glory of God.<sup>40</sup>

Interpersonal relatedness and interpersonal relationship in seminary formation cannot be over emphasized, because by it the seminarian is adequately equipped to relate with God and also relate well with human beings, for whom they are being trained to become shepherds of their souls. Pope Paul VI underscored the importance of interpersonal relatedness and relationship in seminary formation, when in stating the importance of setting up major seminaries, he said: Major seminaries are necessary for priestly formation. Here the entire training of the students should be oriented to the formation of true shepherds of souls after the model of our Lord Jesus Christ, teacher, priest and shepherd. They are therefore to be prepared for the ministry of the word: that they might understand ever more perfectly the revealed word of God; that, meditating on it they might possess it more firmly, and that they might express it in words and in example; for the ministry of worship and of sanctification: that through their prayers and their carrying out of the sacred liturgical celebrations they might perfect the work of salvation through the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments; for the ministry of the parish: that they might know how to make Christ present to men, Him who did not “come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many ” (Mark 10:45; cf. John 13:12-17), and that, having become the servants of all, they might win over all the more (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19).<sup>41</sup> The Pope put relatedness with Christ and relationship with the Church and her members at the heart of setting up a seminary, because if this is not the case then it would be contradicting the priestly life itself. Of this priestly life, Pope John Paul II notes in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: The priest's fundamental relationship is to Jesus Christ, head and shepherd. Indeed, the priest participates in a specific and authoritative way in the “consecration/anointing” and in the “mission” of Christ (cf. Lk. 4:18-19). But intimately linked to this relationship is the priest's relationship with the Church. It is not a question of “relations” which are merely juxtaposed, but rather of ones which are interiorly united in a kind of

mutual immanence. The priest's relation to the Church is inscribed in the very relation which the priest has to Christ, such that the “sacramental representation” to Christ serves as the basis and inspiration for the relation of the priest to the Church<sup>42</sup>.

There is a perichoretic sense here, in that the priest inheres in the Church and the Church in the priest, and they both are in Christ and Christ in them; all in a mutual relationship that does not compromise their individuality and identity. So the heart of seminary formation cannot be anything less than these. It is in this regard that the seminarian must live out the four pillars of the formation to the priesthood: spiritual, human, intellectual and pastoral formation and these also must exhibit the perichoretic character of each interpenetrating and enriching themselves while not compromising or confusing their essence and importance in the process. For this reason, the seminary formation will be grossly inadequate if one or any of the four pillars of seminary formation is excluded or over emphasized over the others; because it will inhibit seminarians from being “adequately trained, namely, with a conscious and free response of adherence and involvement of their whole person with Jesus Christ, who calls them to intimacy of life with him and to share in his mission of salvation”.<sup>43</sup>

### **Catholic Seminarian and Seminary formation**

From the human formation that a Catholic seminarian receives as part of the seminary formation, he ought to understand that the first thing about being human is that he is a relational being. The relational nature of the human being is because “God created man in the image of Himself, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them”.<sup>44</sup> This is an indication of the perichoretic nature of the human being, which points to the fact that at the very core and center of the human being is the nature of self-giving. So to live a life devoid of self-giving is to live a life that contradicts the human nature. The existence of a seminarian can be interpreted in the words of Douglas J. Hall as, “...being means being-with; existence is co-existence. Reality is not to be glimpsed through the examination of individual entities or abstract universals but in the between-ness of all that is”.<sup>45</sup>

The reality of a seminarian is that he is a “being -with” the seminary formation, and his existence is co-existence with the seminary formation; meaning by this that the seminarian must always be conscious of the elements of seminary formation, which he must deduce and align with while co-existing with other people. This goes to explain why the seminary formation that the seminarian receives is not limited to the period when the seminarian is within the seminary

compound or those moments when he is in relation with co-seminarians or co-existing with them. The seminary formation is far more than these for the seminarian because just as the seminary formation has some form of perichoretic nature, so also its relation to the seminarian bears a form of perichoretic characteristic: the seminary formation interpenetrates the seminarian, while at the same time the seminarian must not obstruct or reject this interpenetration of the seminary formation in him; they both co-exist in the seminarian while each retains its individuating properties, just like in the hypostatic union of Christ, wherein the human and divine nature co-existed in the person of Jesus Christ, with the divine nature interpenetrating the human nature and expressed itself by it, and the human nature not obstructing or rejecting the interpenetration of the divine nature in any way.

In this regard then, reality for the seminarian is judged on the basis of “between-ness”, that is, the relationship or better still, to use a perichoretic language, the interpenetration between the seminarian and the seminary formation he is receiving. The examination of a seminarian is not on individual entities but on the interplay or “dance -in-and-out” of these entities with seminary formation. The higher the degree of the interplay or interpenetration of the entities with seminary formation the more positive will be the judgment, but the lower the degree of the interplay or interpenetration of the entities with seminary formation the less positive will be the judgment. Making this judgment on the seminarian is not the prerogative of the formators alone but other seminarians and the individual seminarians are all involved in making this judgment. And that is why an individual seminarian can know through his action(s), either in the seminary compound or outside the seminary compound, either with seminarians or with non-seminarians, either with males or female, young or old, that he has or has not broken the perichoretic unity that characterizes the between-ness of his being a seminarian and the seminary formation.

Importantly, once there is a breach in the perichoretic unity of the seminarian and seminary formation, the seminarian ceases to be a seminarian until the perichoretic unity is re-established.

It goes to mean that being a seminarian is not a continuum but can be fragmented by rupturing the perichoretic unity of seminary training. This also goes to show the imperfect nature of the perichoretic unity that operates on human level, as against the perfect perichoretic unity of the Persons of the Trinity. But just as the Trinity cannot exist without the perichoretic unity, so too a seminarian cannot remain a seminarian

once there is a rejection of the seminary formation. And the seminarian will still cease to be even if he only accepts one or some aspects of the seminary formation while rejecting others. He does not need to be told by any authority that he has stopped being a seminarian, he knows it himself that he has stopped being a seminarian until he re-establishes the perichoretic unity of the Catholic seminarian and seminary formation.

### **Conclusion**

One of the characterizing phenomena of being in the seminary is that seminarians receive seminary formation as they journey to the ministerial priesthood of Christ. The risk that may occur on this journey to the ministerial priesthood of Christ is for seminarians or a seminarian to view the seminary formation as just one of those things that will come the way of the seminarian while on formation in the seminary, and like some other experiences that the seminarian will have, the seminary formation will be done away with once the seminarian finishes the 'Deacon class' and is ordained or the seminarian does not even get to the 'Deacon class' but leaves the seminary for one reason or the other.

The reaction of seminarians or a seminarian to seminary formation will be better guided if the seminarian understands the perichoretic unity at play in the priesthood of Christ, the vocation to the priesthood, the seminary formation, the relationship of the seminarian to seminary formation, and the seminary formation and post-seminary life. The reaction of seminarians or a seminarian will be further enhanced if he tries to put the Trinitarian perichoresis at the center of his seminary formation, knowing that Christ's priesthood which he seeks cannot be dissociated from the perichoretic unity of the three Persons of the Trinity and still remain Christ's priesthood.

Therefore, in the Trinitarian perichoretic unity, the Catholic seminarian must find the standard, and indeed the perfect standard, for the unity between himself and seminary formation, and also find the standard for relating and living out the seminary formation. With this standard, the seminarian will not see his seminarian formation as a fragmentation of his life into little bits of cube-like existence but will rather see his seminary formation as a wholistic form of existence, which is rooted in his call before the seminary formation, present in his life in the seminary, and will continue in his post-seminary life.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Kelly, Systematic Theology Course study guide, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> John Frame, "The Doctrine of God", in John Frame (ed.), *A Theology of Lordship*, Vol. 2, (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002), pp. 694-695.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Kelly, *ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>4</sup> Let it not be confused that discussing the doctrine of Perichoresis means explaining in complete terms the doctrine of three Persons in the Trinity or the doctrine of the hypostatic union. These are mysteries, meaning by this that these notions are beyond the ken of human beings or beyond the limits of human reason. Analysis of Perichoresis is a process of trying to make clear something of the ontology of the hypostatic union and the Trinity, which by so doing is a touch upon things mysterious.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory, *Epistle 101*, in *PG 37.181C*, cited in Randall Otto, 'The Use and Abuse of Perichoresis in Recent Theology' in *SJT 54* (2001):368.

<sup>6</sup> Brian T. Scalise, "Perichoresis in Gregory Nazianzen and Maximus the Confessor" in *Eleutheria 2:1* Winter (2012) 58-76.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, "Problems with Perichoresis", *Tyndale Bulletin 56.1* (2005) 119-140. Crisp made an elaborate explanation of *Communicatio Idiomatum*, stating that a weaker version of it would identify properties of the two natures in Christ but deny any transference of properties from one of the natures of Christ to the other, as can be seen in Pope Leo's Tome (see: T.H. Bindley, *The Ecumenical Documents of The Faith, Fourth Edition* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1950), p. 226. While the stronger version of *Communicatio Idiomatum* embraces the central insight of the weaker version and then adds that there is a real transference of properties between the two natures of Christ. This view is traditionally associated with Lutheran theology (see: Luther's *Works*, vol. 22: 491-2, cited in Dennis Ngien, 'Chalcedonian Christology and Beyond: Luther's Understanding of The Communicatio Idiomatum' in *Heythrop Journal 45* (2004):59. Ngien prefaces this citation with the following: 'Did Luther go beyond the traditional view, conceiving in the person of Christ the idea of a real communication of attributes between the two natures themselves? The answer is yes.').

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> See Joas Adiprasetya, *An Imaginative Glimpse: The Trinity and Multiple Religious Participations*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2013), p.108. "Pseudo-Cyril is the first theologian who applies the idea of perichoresis to the Trinity. Once used as a vital tool in explaining the interpenetration of Christ's two natures, perichoresis in Pseudo Cyril now refers to the mutual indwelling of the Triune persons. His main purpose is to counter the charge of tritheism directed to the Christian idea of the Trinity. Through such a notion he can emphasize the equality of the three hypostases in essence as well as their difference in

relation to their origin. The three hypostases, he argues, 'possess coherence in each other (...), though without confusion or division'. This affirmation of the perichoretic unity-in-difference is followed by his quoting and revising of Gregory's text from *Oration* 31.14 that strongly emphasizes both the oneness and threeness of God. After Pseudo-Cyril, Prestige argues, 'nothing of importance remained to be added to the Greek patristic definition of the Trinity'. Later, the text from Gregory embedded in Pseudo-Cyril's text is 'doubly embedded' in John of Damascus' *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.8".

<sup>10</sup> For more detailed account on the distinguishing properties or attributes of the Persons of the Trinity, see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, (Rockford, Illinois: Tan, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Anselm, "On the Procession of the Holy Spirit", §2 in *Anselm of Canterbury, The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and Gillian Evans (Oxford: University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> Oliver D, Crisp, "Problems with Perichoresis", *Tyndale Bulletin*, p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> *Op.cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Ex. 19:6. But it is to be noted that there were other kinds of priesthood outside the clan of Israel. For instance, Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High who offered sacrifices of bread and wine; and Moses's father-in-law Jethro was the priest of Midian as recorded in Exodus 2:16

<sup>21</sup> Ex. 19:24.

<sup>22</sup> Ex. 32:1-4.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ex. 32:26.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Numbers 4.

<sup>25</sup> Teaching the Law was a duty that was not strictly reserved to priests, even though Levites also taught the Law. For example in the time of Christ the Pharisees were the primary teachers of the Law. A Pharisee could be from any tribe. Additionally the Scribes, Sadducees and presumably the Essenes played a teaching role.

<sup>26</sup> Lev. 5:5-6

<sup>27</sup> Judges 17:10.

<sup>28</sup> Judges 18:19.

<sup>29</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), paragraph 784.

<sup>30</sup> CCC 1547.

<sup>31</sup> Some examples to illustrate this point include: The Passover is

transformed into the Eucharist and the transformation of circumcision into baptism.

<sup>32</sup> Mt. 5:17.

<sup>33</sup> Knights of Columbus, *Vocation Handbook*, (New Heaven, Connecticut: www.kofc.org/vocations), p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, World Day of Prayer for Vocations, May 11, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Jn. 15:16.

<sup>37</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Downer's Grove: IVP, 1996), p. 31. Addition is mine.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 1:26.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Eph. 1:10.

<sup>40</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1995), p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Optatam Totius: Decree on Priestly Training*, October 28, 1965, chp. 3:4.

<sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis: On Formation of Priests*, chp. 2:16.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., chp. 5:42.

<sup>44</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>45</sup> Douglas John Hall, "Confessing Christ in a Post-Christendom Context." Address to the 1999 Covenant Conference of the Presbyterian Network, Atlanta, Georgia. November 6, 1999, p. 4. David Fitch offered similar complaints in his book *The Great Giveaway* (Baker Books, 2005).