

A THEOLOGICAL TRILOGY OF RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING

BY DRS PETER & GENEVIEVE MILNES

PART II: Dancing with Phantoms or Dancing with Life?

Human encounter with the “Eternal Thou”¹ is an antidote for human alienation. Even though we were created in the “image of God”² or *imago trinitatis* as tripartite beings – body, soul and spirit – the fall has resulted in an internal intrapsychic conflict and an external rupture between humans. God has provided a way for reconciliation³ with God, within ourselves and with others. In this second part of the relational trilogy, we explore a model of reconciliation that is found in the *perichoresis* (divine dance) of the Trinity and contrast this with Gunther Anders’⁴ remarkably prescient description of the modern “world as phantom and as matrix”. In making this comparison, we find a stark difference between two relational models – the dance with life or the dance with phantoms. In so doing, Christian counsellors are provided with a theological basis to assist alienated clients to restore their spiritual, social and intrapersonal relationships.

THE DIVINE DANCE OF LIFE - PERICHORESIS

Perichoresis (Gr. περιχώρησις) consisting of peri (“around”) and chorein (“choreography”) implies space, movement and connection. Some theologians have compared this to a “divine dance” where the Trinity is depicted as three persons in a dance and becoming united in a single activity while maintaining their distinctive personas⁵. The mystery of the Trinity is an extra-biblical concept not fully defined in scripture which has been a basic element of mainstream Christian answer to the age-old mystery of unity and diversity in life on earth⁶. At the very beginning of the Church age there were many attempts to reconcile all three persons of the Trinity with one and one in three. Like all metaphors of the Trinity, perichoresis is only one aid to understanding it. Perichoresis has been a helpful, long-lasting model that points to the reconciliation of human interaction and a resolution of intrapsychic conflict. Gregory of Nazianzus (AD. 329-390) first used perichoresis. It was more fully explored by John of Damascus (AD. 676–749) who described perichoresis as the “connection” and “interpenetration” of the three persons of the Trinity and suggested that it assisted our understanding of reconciliation with God, with others and within ourselves⁷. More recently, the concept has been reinvigorated by scholars such as Moltmann and Kruger⁸ who application of the *imago trinitatis* provides

a relational model. The contemporary *Communio* theological school⁹ applies the reciprocal dynamism between God and God’s creatures in liturgical action of sacrament, the celebration of the sacred mysteries in Eucharistic communion, the hermeneutic of continuity, and apostolic unity.

The *perichoresis* relationship within describes the intimate fellowship between the Father and the Son and becomes a model for humanity. Jesus prayed “*That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us*”¹⁰. St Bernard of Clairvaux (12th Century) provided a beautiful analogy of divine intimacy in his description of the Holy Spirit as the kiss of God and love of the Father and the Son through an act of their unified will¹¹.

*If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.” — St. Bernard of Clairvaux*¹²

Together, they breathe forth the Holy Spirit who becomes the Counsellor – Jesus says, “*When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.*”¹³ A modern description of the *perichoretic* divine inter-relationship and dance is found in *The Shack*¹⁴. While there are some who find shortcomings in this analogy to the Trinity, it does emphasize the fact that God is Life¹⁵ and in Christ we have new life and become new creations – the old is gone and the new is here¹⁶. When God indwells the believer, the mystery of the Trinity reveals the way in which space can be reconciled with intimacy and then combined in life. Humans were born to be in community but when sin entered the world, we have been driven us apart. *Perichoresis* provides humanity with a model of reconciliation that allows for both intimacy and space, together with movement and grace.

*My original constitution as a person has already been given to me by God and received by me, and as my response to God’s gift to me of myself ... (has) been given to me by other creatures and received by me in and as my response to their gift to me.*¹⁷

1 Buber, Martin (1923/1996) *I and Thou*. (Trans. Ronald Gregor Smith), T&T Clark, Edinburgh.

2 Genesis 1:26.

3 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2.

4 Anders, Gunther (1956). *The World as Phantom and as Matrix*. *Dissent* 3(1):14-24.

5 Kruger, C.Baxter (2005) *The Great Dance: The Christian Vision Revisited*. Regent College Publishing, Vancouver; Keller, Tim (2008) *The Reason for God*. Dutton Penguin, New York. (Alternative Latin word – “circumcession” *circum*, “around” and *incedere* “to go, to step, approach”) (Kenneth Baker, Kenneth (1983) *Fundamentals of Catholicism: God, Trinity, Creation, Christ*, Mary Ignatius Press, New York:108). Some Calvinist scholars question the use of this metaphor as “unbiblical” (e.g Bidwell, Kevin (2013) “Losing the Dance”. In Campbell, Iain & Schweitzer, William *Engaging with Keller: Thinking Through the Theology of an Influential Evangelical*. Evangelical Press, Darlington: Chapter 3).

6 Schaeffer, Francis A. (1985) *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer Vol. 1*. Crossway, Westchester, Illinois: 288-289

7 Prestige, G.Leonard (1964) *God in Patristic Thought* SPCK: London:290ff; Bettenson, Henry (1976). *The Early Christian Fathers* OUP:UK:286; Brown, Colin (1967) *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* Tyndale, London:74.

8 Prestige, G.Leonard (1964) *God in Patristic Thought* SPCK: London:291.

9 The *Communio* school includes Hans Urs von Balthasar, Henri de Lubac and Joseph Ratzinger.

10 John 17-21.

11 McDonald, Thomas L. “Hosting the Conversation on Faith”. *Patheos.com*.

12 St Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 8, Sermons on the Song of Songs. www.pathsoflove.com/bernard/songofsongs/contents.html.

13 John 15:26.

14 Young, W.Paul (2007) *The Shack: Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity*. Windblown Media, Newbury Park CA.

15 To simply say that “God is Life” is to run the risk of Pantheism. God is more than life itself – including creator, redeemer and comforter.

16 2 Corinthians 5:17.

17 Schindler, David L. (2008). *The Embodied Person as a Gift and the Cultural Task in America*. *Communio* 35 (Fall) online pdf reprint

Counsellors would be familiar with the Transactional Analysis (TA) model of Parent (Caring) Adult (Thinking) Child (Feeling). These ego states need to be reconciled with each other in *perichoretic* cooperation and collaboration that allows the individual to enter the dance of life. The intrapsychic conflict can result in a person being trapped in their past feelings (Child) to which a critical or absent Parent is unable to respond. Reconciliation of the ego states mean that the Adult's thinking processes new information of the here and now while conflict between an estranged Critical Parent and an Adapted Child is resolved. Reconciliation means that Child is able to bring all of the internal hurts and feelings to the internal Parent who exercises executive function in taking care of the Child. While Christian Counsellors may use other therapeutic models than TA, we are all given a ministry to reconcile¹⁸ intrapsychic conflict. This liberates our clients and replaces dancing with the phantoms of sin and death with the dance of life.

THE PHANTOM DANCE

The modern world has brought the "far-away" right into our homes and we do not lament it. As country dwellers, we know well how the "Tyranny of Distance"¹⁹ has shaped Australia's history. We have welcomed the broadband network and SAT phones to our town. However, we are aware that this has come at a cost. Sixty years ago Gunther Anders observed that the radio set and the telescreen were replacing "the massive table in the centre of the living room that served as a gathering point of the family" with a "negative family table where the family was transformed into a miniature audience"²⁰. Information technology was able to bring the outside world right into the living room so that, for example, programs on polar bears make them familiar, newsreaders can be perceived as friends, and dramas of unknown families become matters of concern. Anders described it this way:

When that which is remote becomes familiar, that which is familiar becomes remote. When the phantom becomes real, reality becomes a phantom. The home tends to become a container, its function to be reduced to containing a video screen for the outside world. The realm of the phantoms is victorious over the realm of the home, without even the chance of a contest between the two; it triumphs the moment the television set enters the home: it comes, it is seen, it conquers²¹.

Conversations with intimates around the kitchen table have been trumped by neatly commodified and packaged "remote phantom realities".

When the real world speaks to us, we are not able to speak to it, we are deprived of speech. Anders describes the breaking of

intimate relations in the following passage:

The pairs of loves sauntering along the shores of the Hudson, the Thames or the Danube with a portable radio do not talk to each other but listen to a third person – the public usually anonymous, voice of the program which they walk like a dog, or, more accurately which walks them like a pair of dogs. Since they are an audience in miniature which follows the voice of the broadcast, they take their walk not alone, but in the company of a third person. Intimate conversation is eliminated in advance; and whatever intimate contacts take place between the lovers are introduced and even stimulated not by them, but by that third party – the husky or crowing voice of the program which (for is that not the very meaning of "program") tells both lovers what and how to feel or do ... they do not entertain each other ... the voice gives them that support which they, in their ignorance of what they can do with themselves, cannot give to each other.²²

Although we may live in an alienated world, the phantom world that is presented to us appears ever more real so that it seems to exist for us. It is as though they are our own and like ourselves.

Anders points out that "what comes to us as an image is only half present and half-absent – it is phantom-like and we become phantoms." Anders prophesied that this would cause humans to lose their ability to speak to each other. In a population-based study (n=329) involving the interaction between infants and their caregivers, Dmitri Christakis²³ found that audible television decreased adult words, infant vocalizations, and conversational turns²⁴. On average, each hour of television exposure decreased the number of adult words spoken to the child from a typical 941 to just over 100. Adult words were almost completely eliminated when the television was audible to the child. Christakis *et al* suggested that this may explain increasing attentional and cognitive delays. Adult language development is a critical component of brain development in early childhood:

Television is not only a poor caregiver substitute, but it actually reduces the number of sounds and words babies hear, vocalize and therefore learn. We are increasingly technologizing infancy which may prove harmful to the next generation of adults²⁵.

Anders' prescient view seems to be confirmed in the contemporary world and could be even more alienating than he envisaged. Personal computers and smartphones have enabled

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:18.

¹⁹ Blainey, Geoffrey (1966) *The Tyranny of Distance: How Distance Shaped Australia's History*. Sun Books Melbourne.

²⁰ Anders, Gunther (1956). *The World as Phantom and as Matrix*. *Dissent* 3(1):17.

²¹ Anders, Gunther (1956). *The World as Phantom and as Matrix*. *Dissent* 3(1):16.

²² Anders, Gunther (1956). *The World as Phantom and as Matrix*. *Dissent* 3(1):18

²³ Christaki, Dmitri; Gilkerson, J; Richards, J.A.; Zimmerman, F.J.; Garrison, M.M.; Xu, D.; Gray S; Yapanel, U. (2009) Audible television and decreased adult words, infant vocalizations, and conversational turns: a population-based study. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine* : 554-8.

²⁴ When a child vocalizes and an adult responds within five seconds.

²⁵ Christaki, Dmitri; Gilkerson, J; Richards, J.A.; Zimmerman, F.J.; Garrison, M.M.; Xu, D.; Gray S; Yapanel, U. (2009) Audible television and decreased adult words, infant vocalizations, and conversational turns: a population-based study. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine* : 554-8.

us to draw even further away from the communal experience of television in the family lounge room. Smartphones can be used on a daily basis as organizers, communicators, entertainers, navigators, readers, emailers, researchers and even flashlights and compasses. But we are becoming increasingly isolated. The “remote” is now omnipresent and the “familiar” appears to be retreating. We struggle to retain community with others. Social media Apps cannot substitute the “near” community. The intrusion of the telescreens turns us into a kind of Peeping Tom ruling over a phantom world.

Technology collapses distance and time without bringing “nearness”²⁶. A broadcast event is no longer attached to time and space. It becomes a spectacle where the differences between being and appearance are abolished. The reality and the image become the same as humans enframe, transform, manipulate aspects of nature into resources²⁷. In fact, the reproduced event becomes more important than the original event and the real event becomes a “mere master matrix”²⁸. The commodified event does not rely on a gathering – it is no longer necessary to drown a person in a mass:

*No method of depersonalizing man, of depriving him of his human powers, is more effective than one which seems to preserve the freedom of a person and the rights of individuality*²⁹.

We are transformed into passive dependents living in a “debased philistinized world” where pseudo-familiarity is a key to our alienation. The phantoms who enter our homes may appear to be “bosom friends” but they replace our transfixed companions sitting right next to us.

The retreat of the familiar may help us explain the power of pornography. Computerized pornography brings remote phantoms right into our familiar and intimate spaces. Anders described a far less pernicious description back in 1956:

*When a girl announcer appears on the screen, she speaks to me in a tone of complete frankness, as though I were her bosom friend. (That she is also the bosom friends of all men is again only a marginal realization)*³⁰

Modern technology allows a man³¹ to feel as though he is in contact with others in spite of his loneliness. What is more, he can become “omnipotent” in the control of his relationships. With a click of a mouse he can remove or summon just about

anything instantaneously – choose a partner of his own choosing, an image that measures up to his needs – the shape, features, characteristics, situation, personality as well as the type of encounter. This phantom from far away can be right there – a “bosom friend”. If he tires of this phantom, another phantom event is a mere mouse click away.

Pornographic scripts dwell on sexual engagements of parties who have just met, who are not attached or committed to each other and who will part shortly - never to meet again.³² This may lead to false impressions about real relationships with others³³. Annoying things can be removed by a click of a mouse. Sexual gratification becomes removed from emotional attachment, kindness and caring since continuing relationships incur responsibilities, curtailments and costs. Some scholars³⁴ have suggested that “pornography addiction” should be a new inclusion in the DSM-V. Psychotherapists have reported that chronic pornography viewing by adult men can lead to emotional estrangement from their partners even though they may really desire emotional intimacy³⁵. The dance with phantoms substitutes for the work of engaging with reality and dancing with life. Instead of having to endure the inconvenience of relationships, computer technology allows us to think that we can bring a phantom near to fill our emotional void.

DANCING WITH PHANTOMS OR DANCING WITH LIFE?

Modern technology has increased social disengagement, reduced social interaction, and diminished individual capacity for social integration and mutual encounter. Dancing with phantoms is a social sickness that may apply to us all. The divine *perichoretic* dance of life challenges us to assess our own way of life and be more alert to the forces that increase our social isolation. Unless we are conscious of it, we risk an everlasting dance with the phantoms of personal desire instead of ministry, fantasized consciousness where the “far becomes near and the near becomes far”, alienation that clouds our perception of reality, and estrangement and disengagement from our communities. As such, we become unable to help our clients to dance with phantoms in place of dancing with life. The *perichoretic* image that God has placed within us encourages us to reconcile ourselves with God, with each other and within ourselves. *Perichoresis* reminds us as counsellors of our need to connect relationally with others in the here-and-now in a way that still allows space that

26 Heidegger, Martin. (1955) “Discourse on Thinking.” In *Martin Heidegger Philosophical and Political Writings*, edited by Manfred Stassen. The German Library Continuum, London:94.

27 Heidegger, Martin (1949) “The Question Concerning Technology” in *Martin Heidegger Philosophical and Political Writings*, edited by Manfred Stassen. The German Library Continuum, London: 280-285.

28 Anders, Gunther (1956). The World as Phantom and as Matrix. *Dissent* 3(1):16.

29 Anders, Gunther (1956). The World as Phantom and as Matrix. *Dissent* 3(1):16.

30 Anders, Gunther (1956). The World as Phantom and as Matrix. *Dissent* 3(1):22

31 This may apply to females as well. However, pornography is more often a “male issue”.

32 Zilmann, Dolf. (1986) “Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography. Report of the Surgeon General’s Workshop on Pornography and Public Health. National Institutes of Health:16-17

33 In making this assertion we are not suggesting that every time a person views pornography that this estrangement is occurring with his partner. However, we are claiming that the impact of internet pornography enables this substitutionary and addictive behaviour and increases the possibility of estrangement from partners.

34 Parashar, Varma (2007) Behaviour and substance Addictions: Is the World Ready for a New Category in the DSM-V? *CNS Spectrums*, 12, 257-259; Weir (2014) Is Pornography Addictive? *APA Monitor*, Vol.45 (4)

35 Cuthbertson, Richard (2015) Internet porn ‘rewiring’ young brains. *CBC News* 2 January 2015.

frees our clients to move. In the “consulting room dance” we may encounter clients trapped into spaces where time and distance have collapsed and intimacy has been lost. Our reflection of the *perichoretic* God towards our clients should demonstrate the way intimacy, space and movement can be reconciled and they are able to enter the dance of life.

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