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CONTENTS:

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Theological Basis of Communion
An Introduction to the Reformed World

Aruna Gnanadason

"Called to communion, committed to justice" was the rallying call when in 2010, Reformed Churches from around the world gathered together in a General Council at Grand Rapids, USA, to forge greater unity and common purpose for the sake of justice and peace in the world. Following this, the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches reiterated its commitment to communion in its strategic plan (2011-2016). Building communion was identified as its overarching priority with all other priorities being linked to it. It was further stated that "there can be no communion without justice and no justice without communion. Any separation between the call to communion and the commitment to justice would ignore the basis of koinonia. And so we affirm the gifts of unity in Christ through full communion where all of our churches recognize each other's baptism, invite one another to the table, and affirm the integrity of one another's ministry."[1]

The WCRC understands *koinonia* as Jesus Christ revealed and made visible in our lives when we share the bread and wine at Christ's table. In the body and blood of Christ "all kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged."[2]

In 2017, the Reformed churches will once again gather together at a General Council, in Leipzig, Germany, under the theme, Living God Renew and Transform Us. The churches acknowledge that there are sometimes threats to communion hat can be overcome if we commit to renewal and transformation in the power of the living God. At this 2017 General Council, the churches will rededicate themselves to strengthening the communion they are given in Christ.

This issue of the Reformed World focusses on the theological and biblical basis of communion. Four articles by theologians from different parts of the world delve into the potential of communion to nurture unity and to build community; but also, the controversies it has sometimes raised, as well as the challenges it poses if we are to be faithful to Christ's prayer for Christian unity. ("That they may all be one" John 17.21).

Gerald Hobbs in his article on **Communion in the Reformation Context**, explores different understandings and ways in which Communion was named in the reformation period. He begins by exploring texts from the Bible and the

1 WCRC Strategic Plan, 2011-2016 6.1.2. Communion.

2 Lima text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, World Council of Churches.

various translations and interpretations of the word in different places and versions. For example, "*communio*" was the choice of early Latin translators of the New Testament for the Greek koinonia even before the fourth century." Hobbs holds that along with the many translations of the word there has also been disagreement among the Reformers as to whether koinonia can be linked with the Eucharist. To some koinonia is linked syntactically to the breaking of the bread—it has Eucharistic connotations. Luther, for instance, held that baptism, the gospels, and the sacraments are the external signs of the existence of the church in the world.

Reformers tended towards a communion language to define the Church rather than its institutional structures. The sharing in fellowship was at the core of their understanding of the Eucharist/communion. To them mutuality of physical support amongst the members and the sharing of possessions and care for those in need was emphasised. Calvin, for instance, writes in his Institutes of Christian Religion that koinonia/communion calls for "mutual association, alms and other duties of brotherly (*sic*.) fellowship." The focus is on the social consequences of participation in the sacramental mystery.

A Biblical Perspective on Communion and Covenant is the title of the article by Royce Victor. In the first part of his article he explores the biblical basis for Communion. He traces the links between the Passover meal, Communion as koinonia, and the Eucharist. He concludes this section by saying that Passover is a remembrance of the liberation of the people in the past. The new Passover celebration, the Communion, invites the churches to continue to participate in God's works for liberation of the oppressed and marginalized in the present and to accompany them into a new era of peace, justice, and harmony.

The Eucharist is a sign of the new Covenant that God makes with his people. The biblical understanding of communion from a covenantal perspective includes God's promise to be with the people always; Christ in the sacraments symbolising the covenant God made with the world; and that each time we partake of the sacraments we remember God's Covenant and our obligations to the God of justice. The communion in the Eucharist symbolizes the eschatological hope that we will be with God in the fullness of time.

In her article on **The Wider Ecumenical Perspectives on *Koinonia***, Mary Tanner traces how discussion on *koinonia* have developed in ecumenical relationships as churches seek communion with each other. The concept of *koinonia* is rooted in the scriptures and is present in the theology of all churches, and, therefore, we are in constant ecumenical dialogue and conversation with other churches to strengthen

our own communion. It impels us to engage in God's mission for the world. Koinonia is not just a theological concept; it is what we enjoy in shared life—in prayer together, in accompanying each other, in remembering and celebrating the communion we already have. While communion creates the space for our personal and relational lives, structures will enable the communion to be strengthened.

Tanner stresses that *koinonia*/communion does not imply uniformity, it entails diversity, in theology and in traditions. When communion is threatened by divisions, we come together in discernment for a way forward. The quality of our communion with each other is demonstrated in our common actions for justice and peace in the world. Signs of communion hinge on effective common witness and service to humanity. Unity is fundamental to Christian obedience. Tanner writes that while *koinonia* is never equated with "Church" in the New Testament, it does mirror New Testament images of the Church as the body of Christ, the household of God, the holy nation. The emphasis is on relationships among the members of the communion as well as on their relationship with Christ the Head of the body.

Elizabeth Welch in her paper on **The Trinitarian Grounding of Communion** affirms that the three persons of the Trinity model the way we live out Communion. "Communion arises out of our shared life in the triune God," she writes. Her article compares the writings of John Owen, a seventeenth century Reformed theologian, and John Zizioulas, a Greek Orthodox theologian of today—both of whom have written on the Trinitarian understanding of Communion. For both, the fundamental nature of relationality between the three persons in the Trinity and between God and humanity are the core of communion. Their thinking has influenced the commitment to ecumenical relationships between the churches.

Welch points to how communion arises out of the personal relational identity of the Triune God. "Participation in this communion shapes the nature of what it means to be human, that is, to be a person in relationship, rather than an autonomous individual. Within this understanding of relationship, differences are honoured and are enriching. However, for this honouring and enrichment to happen, differences need to be held within the mutual relationality that is the participation in the Holy Trinity." She reminds the churches that a relational understanding of communion has mission consequences—it ensures that religion is not privatized, and that the communion speaks out courageously in a divided and hurting world. It emphasizes the mutuality of relationships, and of inclusion rather than exclusion. Communion is grounded in worship and has an eschatological dimension as the Spirit leads us into the future.

Communion: The Reformation Context

R.Gerald Hobbs

As context for the ecumenical engagement of Anglican and Reformed world communions (the International Reformed-Anglican Dialogue, or IRAD) around the term "communion," it will be helpful to clarify two areas where, historically, confusion existed, and then to survey the issues raised around the naming, understanding, and practice of Holy Communion, as the sacrament of the eucharist is termed in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* beginning in 1549[1]. First, there needs be an exploration of the use of the term "communion" in the New Testament scriptures. Another paper in this volume will treat this in detail[2]. Given the foundational commitment of all the magisterial reformers–Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, Archbishop Cranmer in particular–to the primacy of Scriptural authority for doctrine, in this paper I shall look first to the sixteenth century translation of a key selection of those New Testament passages.

We begin with a summary observation on the mediaeval Latin Bible. Twice in 1 Corinthians 10:16, *communio* was the choice of early Latin translators of the New Testament for the Greek *koinonia* even before the fourth century and the age of St. Jerome. It remained thus in the complex and drawn-out harmonization of Jerome and pre-existent translations that became the western church's Latin version (popularly if not altogether accurately termed the Vulgate[3]). On the other hand, *koinonia* in other key passages such as Acts 2:42 and Philippians 1:5 was rendered *communicatio*, while in 1 Corinthians 1:9 and Philippians 2:1, it appeared as societas. Acts 2:42 is worth noting in full, for unlike the sixteenth century translators, it combined communion/sharing and the breaking of bread: *perseverantes in doctrina apostolorum et communicatione fractionis panis et orationibus*, literally, "they were continuing in the apostles' teaching and *in the sharing of the breaking of bread* and in prayers" (my italic). It should be noted, moreover, that the revision of the traditional text as the official Vulgate of the Roman Catholic Church retained this reading. Thus a distinction of meaning in koinonia was being encouraged between a sharing in the eucharist meal (the 1 Corinthians 10 and probably the Acts 2), and a community of relationship, whether with God, the Son and the Spirit, or within the community.

1 In 1549: "The Supper of the Lorde and the Holy Communion, commonly called the Masse," and in the second version of 1552: "The Lordes Supper, or Holye Communion."

2 See Royce Victor's "Communion and Covenant," the second paper in this volume.

3 The term Vulgata is properly and officially correct only from the end of the sixteenth century, with the formal approval by Rome of the Sixto-Clementine corrected Latin text.

This complex range of meaning was variously managed in biblical translation of the Reformation era. I cannot of course cite all the Latin and vernacular translations of the era. What follows here must be seen as representative. When the Dutch humanist, Erasmus (1466?-1536) published for the first time the Greek of the New Testament in Basel in 1516 at the presses of Johannes Froben, he accompanied the Greek in a parallel column with a *Novum Instrumentum* , "new testament," which was the first completely new Latin translation in over one thousand years. The second half of this 1516 epochal work consisted moreover of *Annotations* that provided exegetical justification for Erasmus's new translation. Finally, in his preface to this edition, the *Paraclesis* ("Exhortation"), he called for new translations to be made into all the vernaculars of the known world, so that the text might be read and known as universally as possible: "kings may conceal their secrets, but Christ wishes his mysteries to be known as widely as possible." Others read this summons and took up the challenge. Within six years, the first of a plethora of new translations, vernacular renderings of the New Testament growing out of and directly dependent upon Erasmus's work, appeared with the 1522 September Testament of Martin Luther (1483-1546). The first edition of the English of William Tyndale (1494?-1536) would follow in 1526, the Swiss-German from the Zurich company of reformers, notably Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) and Leo Jud (1482-1542) in 1531, the French of Pierre Robert Olivétan (c1506-1538) in 1535, Dutch, Italian, Spanish followed, and so on.

Now on our word *communio* Erasmus bequeathed a complicated heritage. At Acts 2:42, he translated it as *communicatio*, agreeing with the Church traditional Latin, but he separated this from the *fractio panis*. So his translation read: "*in communicatione, et [in] fractione panis*" i.e., in fellowship *and* in the breaking of bread; and in his Annotation, he underlined his point: "there are four things in this verse: the teaching, the communion or fellowship ("*communio*"), the breaking of bread, and prayers." In other words, the first believers persevered in the "communication/*communio*", *and* in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Next at 1 Corinthians 10:16, he translated *koinonia* as *communicatio corporis Christi*, with the annotation that this means "participation in the body of Christ". In Philippians 1 and 2, he used *communio*.

Not surprisingly, this complexity was then reflected in the ambiguities of the Reformation-era vernaculars. Luther rendered all our instances as *Gemeinschaft*, hereby evading the question of distinctions of sense in the one word. But Tyndale used "partaking" at 1 Corinthians 10, while he gave "fellowship" in the others. The Zurichers, as one would expect from students of Erasmus, adopted

the four-fold distinction in Acts 2, where as in Philippians 1 and 2, they used *gmeinschaft*; but in 1 Corinthians 10, they nuanced the translation with *die gmeinsame* of the bread and body. Olivétan, Calvin's kinsman, gave all four as *la communion*, rendering Act 2 as "*perseverant... en la communion et en la fraction du pain*" (respecting Erasmus's proposal). Tyndale's distinction with two different renderings was maintained by some of the later English translations, but the English Geneva version of 1562 gave "communion" at 1 Corinthians 10, while retaining "fellowship" with Tyndale in the others. The Bishops Bible of 1568 stayed with Tyndale at 1 Corinthians 10 ("partaking"); but the King James Bible of 1611 agreed with Geneva's "communion," despite the royal mandate that it remain as close as possible to the Bishops.

What this brief (and I trust not too confusing) overview of the translations of *koinonia* in Reformation-era New Testament translations demonstrates is a genuine disagreement around whether the term could carry a Eucharistic implication. Looking at the traditional mediaeval sense, a Eucharistic overtone would be an obvious conclusion in the Acts 2:42 text, where *koinonia* was linked syntactically to the breaking of bread. On the other hand, Erasmus deliberately separated communion and breaking of bread in Acts 2; there were four items in the list, not three. But did the latter term (the breaking of bread) have Eucharistic connotations, or was this rather the partaking of meals in common, as this seems to be indicated in Acts 2:46? It seems unlikely both terms would be used in the same phrase for Eucharistic fellowship, unless the mediaeval rendering had in fact been more accurate.

The Communion of Saints

A second area of Reformation-era ambiguity concerned the credal confession: *Et [Credo] in Spiritum sanctum, sanctam catholicam ecclesiam, communionem sanctorum...*: "And [I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints." I point out first of all that the Latin *communio* was equivalent to *koinonia* in the Greek version of the Creed. For most of us in the twenty-first century, it may come as a surprise that this third familiar statement—"the communion of saints"—was not found in the oldest forms of what we know as the Apostles' Creed. Writing about 404 CE, the Latin Father Rufinus, in his *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, is not aware of this clause[4]. It seems to have emerged in the Latin church only some time after 1000 CE, when the phrase *communio sanctorum* begins to be commented upon by theologians

4 J.N.D. Kelly, *Rufinus: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed, Ancient Christian Writers, No. 60*, (New York: Newman Press 1954), 71-77.

like Bernard of Clairvaux, Aquinas, and Bonaventure[5]. Now we should first note that the Latin expression itself is ambiguous: the second word, *sanctorum*, could be masculine grammatical gender and so translated as it generally is today as "the communion of saints" (as holy persons); but it can also equally be neuter gender and then translated as "the communion of things holy," as for example the sacraments. In fact this ambiguity is present precisely in the mediaeval Catholic theologians, some of whom like Peter Abelard saw in this expression a sharing in the Church's sacraments. But others (like Jean Gerson) read this as community with the Church triumphant (the saints), while still others saw the expression as naming both realities, that is, that believers are joined in a fellowship of unity through the same practice of the sacraments with the departed who were now in the presence of Christ. The *Catechism* of the Council of Trent issued in 1566 would reaffirm the mediaeval teaching, while expressing this reality with a particular sacramental emphasis:

> The fruit of all the sacraments is common to all the faithful [...] After Baptism, the Eucharist holds the first place in reference to this communion. (*magis tamen proprium est eucharistiae, quae hanc efficit communionem*). [Now all the sacraments] unite us to God and render us partakers of him whose grace we receive.[6]

Now in the practice of the faithful, with the passage of centuries, significant attention had shifted to the departed members of the holy community who, having enjoyed the blessings of sacramental grace in this life, were now in the presence of God. Thus the unity of the church's fellowship meant for the faithful in this life a growing reliance upon the intercessory gifts of the departed saints now in the church triumphant. If invocation of saints and martyrs was a practice known as early as the second century CE, by the late Middle Ages it had mushroomed into a virtually universal piety addressed to countless intercessors in the next life for every conceivable ill in this one, and piety was sustained at a panoply of distinct and highly ornamented side altars within churches, as well as at dedicated chapels by roadsides.

Beginning with Luther, the evangelical reformers adopt without hesitation the Apostles' Creed. Already in his polemical writings of 1520-21 and specifically with the Franciscan Augustine Alveld, Luther proceeds to defend himself and

5 An excellent analysis of the mediaeval understandings is given by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, volume 3 in The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine Series, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1978) 174-184.

6 *The Catechism of the Council of Trent,* Part 1, chapter 10, question 21.

articulate his understanding of the Church both out of Scripture and from the Apostles'Creed. In 1530 Phillip Melanchthon would underline the Lutheran claim to catholicity and orthodoxy, by shaping the *Augsburg Confession*[7] in accord with the Apostles' Creed, and he would explicitly print this creed within subsequent confessional documents. Luther's ecclesiology lay at the heart of his difference with Rome, and the article of the Creed together with the Scriptures noted above are central to the formulation of that ecclesiology[8]. To summarize briefly, Luther moved away from the definition of the church by its institutional structures, built as these were around the personnel of ministry—the bishops in council, and the primacy of the bishop of Rome. His definition of the Church was drawn from the *communio* language we have been surveying: he wants to speak of an ecclesial community (*Gemeinde*), congregation (*Gemeine*) or assembly (*Sammlung*).

To the word church (German *Kirche*) he preferred *Christentum*, a term we would normally translate as Christendom. We must hear this definition while understanding he is far from what we encompass pejoratively in the term today. Luther wants to derive the proper meaning of his "Christendom" from Scripture and the Creed: "it is an assembly of all the people on earth who believe in Christ, as we pray in the Creed, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints'"[9]. Now Luther's opponents, like Johannes Eck, the fierce Catholic apologist, claimed that Luther would have a purely "hidden," purely spiritual church[10]. Reading the early Luther in polemic against the papal institution and its hierarchy, one understands easily how he could be understood that way. But having dismissed the external Roman church as unbiblical, having argued that the true assembly of Christ is "a spiritual assembly of souls in one place," he then identifies that by which such an assembly is known as Christ's: "Not Rome or this or that place but baptism, the sacrament and the gospel are the signs by which the existence of the church in the world can be noticed externally. Wherever there is baptism and the gospel, no one should doubt the presence of saints."[11] Thus Luther has defined his ecclesiology in this understanding of the communion of saints as the unity of community of people in the sacraments and scriptures (the holy things),

7 See in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb & Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress 2000).

8 Much literature exists on this subject. A succinct and useful discussion is Vilmos Vajta, "The Church as Spiritual-Sacramental Communion with Christ and his Saints in the Theology of Luther," in *Luther's Ecumenical Significance: An Interconfessional Consultation*, ed. Peter Manns, Hardin Meyer, et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress 1984), 111-121.

9 *On the Papacy in Rome* (1520), in *Luther's Works*, v.39, transl. by Eric and Ruth Gritsch (Philadelphia: Fortress 1970), 65.

10 Johannes Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces against Luther and Other Enemies of the Church*, tr. By Ford L. Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker 1979) 12.

11 Luther, op.cit., p.75.

as this is created and sustained by the Holy Spirit. These three clauses of the Creed—Spirit, church, communion—are rightly set together.

In a sermon preached the previous year (1519) and frequently republished, Luther elaborated on this unity. The sacrament as bread and water is an external *sign*, and these are needed for the communion to take place; but its *significance* is in the effect, "the fellowship of all the saints." Some have argued that Luther means here all the people of God in the church militant, but he goes on to state that as we are buffeted by trials and temptations in this world, "it is necessary that Christ and his saints intercede for us before God." A sentence later he names them as "all Christ's saints, in heaven and on earth."[12] Now Luther's opposition to the cult of saintly intercessors, while not as dramatic as that of Zwingli, Bucer, or Calvin, is well known. He is certainly not promoting prayers to the saints as intercessors in place of Christ, but he clearly does believe that they work with Christ in support of those members still in this life.

Luther passes to another dimension of this communion/*koinonia*. It involves a mutuality of physical support amongst the members. In Acts 2, the text states that these first disciples instituted a sharing of possessions: "they held all things in common" (44-45). This sharing of goods does not pertain to the church triumphant, which has no needs of this sort; "here your heart must go out in love and learn that this is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given you, you must in turn render love and support to Christ in his needy ones."[13] He contrasts pious practice in his day—where people were giving significant gifts to the departed saints by lavishly decorating their altars—with an earlier apostolic time, when according to the New Testament people "gathered food and material goods in the church and distributed among those who were in need." This is in contrast with the general preaching of pious works of satisfaction around the sacrament of penance.

Martin Bucer (1491-1551), the reformer of Strasbourg, addresses the *communio sanctorum* as *koinonia* not surprisingly in both his treatment of the Eucharist and of the church. In 1526, when the quarrel amongst evangelical reformers called the Supper Strife was just warming up, Bucer wrote a defence of his and the other Strasbourg preachers' teaching on the Eucharist as an *Apology and*

12 Martin Luther, *The Blessed Sacrament of the holy and true Body of Christ…*, in *Luther Work*s, vol.35, pages 49-73, 50, 53.

13 Op.cit. p.54.

Straightforward Account of his own Beliefs... concerning Christ's Supper.[14] Arguing against any physical transformation of the bread and wine and insisting that this is a true partaking of Christ as a spiritual reality, he advances Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. His words are such a mirror image of Erasmus' translation seen earlier that we should imagine him working directly from that text: the *koinonia* is a *communicatio corporis Christi* for we all "participate" out of the one bread. Bucer claims that his argument is not only Scriptural but credal ("having consulted the analogy of the faith"). Near the end of his career, installed in Cambridge University, and having long since found reconciliation with Luther, Bucer returned to comment on *koinonia* in his discussion of the church. Citing Acts 2:42 as a definitive description, he names "fellowship in the Spirit, in the sacraments and the word, in prayers and everything spiritual," and he adds that this *koinonia* is "an active kindness whereby according to our ability we contribute from the whole of our material possessions to all, even the absent, according to their needs."[15] From these it is clear that Bucer sees the credal passage as pertaining to the sacraments as well as to the community, and that like Luther he is clear that the fellowship must include a serious tending to the social welfare of needy members.

In Zurich, meanwhile, Huldrych Zwingli addressed the sense of *koinonia* both in his call for evangelical reformation, and in his on-going exposition of his understanding of the Eucharist. The *communio sanctorum* is affirmed explicitly and is at the heart of his definition of the church, in Article Eight of Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles. These he had prepared and defended in January 1523 before the Zurich City Council, and their acceptance by Council constituted the launching of evangelical reformation in Zurich. Article Eight reads: "All who live in the Head are members and children of God; and this is the church or communion of saints, a bride of Christ, *ecclesia catholica*." Noting that the *communio sanctorum* was unknown to Rufinus, the fourth-century commentator on the Creed, Zwingli makes the argument that the clause was added at a later date precisely to make explicit the sense of the *sancta catholica ecclesia*[16]. This last is not, however, a buttress for the claim of Rome to universality, but rather was to underline the proper sense of the ecclesia, namely as the *gathered assembly* of the faithful, a point he further makes by reference to the Hebrew word for the gathering of the community, a gathering that is local and equivalent

14 *Apoloia Martini Buceri qua fidei suae atque doctrinae circa Christi caenam... rationem simpliciter reddit*, (Strasbourg 1526), f.22 r. ; tr. and ed. in Common *Places of Martin Bucer*, By D.F.Wright, (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press 1972), 333-334.

15 *Praelectiones in Epistolam ad Ephesios* (1550), tr. in Wright, *Common Places*, p.210-211.

16 See above in this section. This same observation is suggested by Calvin in later editions of the *Institutes*, without naming Rufinus: see below.

to the local parish[17]. Two pages later, discussing the church as "bride of Christ," Zwingli attacks the understanding of the "saints" as those in the church triumphant. That dimension of the faith is covered later in the Creed, he states, in the clause "the life everlasting" and was therefore not intended here; whereas by our clause is meant "the communion of all godly, believing Christians" which "here on earth lives in hope alone and does not ever come together visibly." It is united in the Spirit and faith, but not as a visible reality. To Zwingli's exclusion of the saints in glory from intent of "the communion of saints" in the Creed, it may be useful to observe that in contrast, his successor in Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger, would later explicitly name them as part of that *communio* in the sermon "Of the Holy Catholic Church" which was translated for the Church of England within his *Decades* (1552 and often reprinted).[18]

In his *Subsidiary Essay on the Eucharist* (1525) Zwingli is setting out his position on these texts in response to a moderate Catholic defender of the traditional view, responding to the Catholic claim that the koinonia in the blood (and body) of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16) intends to name the Eucharist, that is, "a communion of the body and blood." Zwingli denies that this is the sense of the verse. Rather, using contextually the Pauline contrast between the Christian rite and the partaking of the feast of the idols, he argues that what is meant here is the *community* of the meal that is created by participation; not the meal itself, but "the church or communion which gives thanks," a "companionship," a "special congregation and society."[19] In this he is in effect importing into 1 Corinthians 10 the social senses for *koinonia* found in other New Testament texts. In another short treatise, the *Letter to Matthew Alber* of 1524/25, Zwingli expands on this reading of the Corinthian text. He argues that it is the following verse seventeen which provides the correct understanding of verse sixteen. The many are become one body, because they have united as the one body they are in the rite that commemorates their common salvation through the self-offered body and blood of Christ. The core sense remains social. [20]

We look now at John Calvin (1509-64). Calvin's masterwork, the *Institutes*, was first published in Latin by the young French scholar in 1536. It would be translated by him into French and both it and the Latin much enlarged in

17 *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*. Vol.1, tr. H.Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park PA: Pickwick Publications 1984) "The Exposition of the Sixty-Seven Articles", p.42-43, 45.

18 in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, tr.G.W.Bromiley, The Library of Christian Classics, 24 (London: SCM 1953), p.290-91.

19 *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*. Vol.2, tr. By H.Wayne Pipkin (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984), p.222-223.

20 Op.cit. p.140-141.

revisions until 1559. Calvin structured the work first to include a commentary on the Apostles' Creed, and we shall start there[21]. "All the elect, who with true faith worship God together have reciprocal communication and participation in all goods." We observe that the language of Erasmus New Testament has been retained. Nothing is said here of sacraments. But the law student Calvin had been does take care to specify that "the constitution of the civil order" requires that possessions be held individually, rather than communally! Within the faith community, nonetheless, there will certainly be some mutual sharing "with kindness and due charity." In 1559 he expands these statements slightly, and appends reference to Acts 2 and Ephesians 4, concluding that "if truly convinced that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another." He also observes that the *communio sanctorum* was not known in the Creed in the patristic age[22].

Calvin was a prolific and systematic commentator on scripture, with volumes on both the biblical books of Acts (1552, rev.1560) and Corinthians (1546). Writing on Acts 2, he maintains Erasmus's four-fold treatment we saw in the first section of this paper: the text speaks of persevering in four things, doctrine, in *koinonia*, in breaking of the bread, in prayer. He recognizes that some commentators read *koinonia* as the sacramental table fellowship, and "breaking of bread" as shared daily meals, or alms-giving. But he disagrees. *Koinonia* must rather be "mutual association, alms and other duties of brotherly fellowship." For read in this way, verse 42 gives the four genuine marks of the visible church[23].

When we look at the Corinthians commentary, we find that he addresses the meaning of *koinonia* in the context of the sacrament of the Eucharist. It is the unity of believers as one Body in Christ, which takes place precisely as a consequence of "being incorporated into Christ" in a spiritual union through sharing the bread and cup, in order to be united to each other. He concludes: "*koinonia* is the alliance ("*societas*") which we have with the blood of Christ when he in-grafts all of us into his body, so that he may live in us and we in Him."[24] That is, *koinonia* is not the Eucharistic meal in itself, but the social consequence of engagement in the sacramental mystery.

21 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, tr. Ford L. Battles, rev ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans 1986), chapter 2, part 4, p.63.

22 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. & tr. John T.McNeill & Ford L.Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, 21, (Philadelphia: Westminster 1960), 1014-15.

23 *Calvin's Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*, tr by David W. and Thomas F. Torrance, (Edinburgh & London: Oliver & Boyd 1965), 85-86.

24 *Calvin's Commentaries. The First Epistle... to the Corinthians*, tr. By John W.Fraser, (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press 1960), 215-217.

Communio and the Eucharistic Celebration

A detailed account of the controversies over the Eucharist in the Reformation era lies outside the purview of this introductory essay. It will be useful nonetheless for our purposes to provide a thumbnail sketch of the conflict.

At the end of the Middle Ages, the term "Mass" was of universal usage in the western church. It is generally agreed today that the term, whose origin can be traced to Patristic expressions, was linked to a formula of ending and dismissal, as in the on-going Roman rite, *Ite, missa est.* The doctrinal definition of the Eucharist, which was likewise of general acceptance within late mediaeval orthodoxy, came relatively late, when the Fourth Lateran Council provided the statement of transubstantiation, employing Aristotelian philosophical categories of matter and substance. At consecration the bread and wine, whilst remaining to all appearance in their natural state, are substantially altered, becoming the genuine body and blood of Christ. It was believed that both body and blood were present in each of the bread and wine, and the occasional practice in earlier centuries of partaking of only one species (the bread), had likewise become virtually universal by the later Middle Ages. This effective limitation of the cup to the clergy was challenged by the Hussites in the fifteenth century, and some concession to them on this point was made in 1437 but then revoked in 1462 by Rome.

Beginning in 1519, Luther challenged the denial of the cup to the laity. His thought evolved over the next couple of years, beginning particularly with *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in 1520: He attacks the legitimacy of the doctrine of transubstantiation, and the doctrine of the Mass as a repetition of Christ's sacrificial offering. The widespread practice of private masses must cease and the sacrament be intimately associated with the Word in communal worship. He insisted, however, on the reality of the presence of the risen Christ in the sacrament, and that this is indeed communicated to the participants.

It was apparently the Dutch humanist Cornelius Hoen (died c1524) whose tract on the Eucharist launched what became the evangelical Supper Strife. He argued that as a result of his ascension the risen Christ was in heaven and therefore his physical presence could not be in the Eucharist. Hoen's treatise attracted great interest in the upper Rhine valley; it also contended that in the words "this is my body (and blood)," the verb "is" means "signifies," i.e., this "points to" my body and blood. Zwingli and Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531) of nearby Basel were strongly influenced first by Hoen, and then by Andreas Bodenstein von

Carlstadt (1480-1451), erstwhile a senior colleague of Luther on the Wittenberg faculty of theology, whose increasingly radicalized views led him into violent confrontation with Luther. Expelled from Wittenberg, Carlstadt had now found a permanent home in the upper Rhine valley. By 1525 Zwingli, Oecolampadius and Bucer were all writing of the Eucharist as a public memorial, a remembrance of Christ's death, and the participation of believers was a purely spiritual reality. Their treatises promptly brought on public challenges from Luther and his colleagues. Apart from cultural and educational differences amongst the reformers, personal factors aggravated matters. For example, the actions of Bucer made matters worse, when, to earn a living and support his wife and family, he undertook to translate works of Luther and a colleague for eager Basel publishers, but then massaged the expression of his author in order to promote his own views of the Eucharist!

But within a couple of years, the same Bucer learned from correspondents in Catholic territories (the kingdom of France in particular) that the public quarrel was doing immeasurable harm to the cause of evangelical reformation. Bucer was part of the upper Rhine delegation to the Colloquy at Marburg in Hesse which brought Lutherans and Swiss together to end the quarrel. Alas, the attempt failed to find agreement between them; but it did convince Bucer that their differences were above all a matter of formulae, that beyond verbal differences of expression at heart there was solid agreement on the substance of the matter. From protagonist he became a fervent advocate of unity, overcoming Luther's suspicions with the help of Phillip Melanchthon (1497-1560) in a series of engagements that culminated in the 1536 Concord of Witternberg. Here both parties agreed that on both sides there had been unhelpful misrepresentation of the views of their opponents. Bucer agreed formally on a doctrine of the real, not merely figurative, presence of Christ in the sacrament, asserting that the body and blood of Christ "are truly presented and received with the visible sins of bread and wine." The spiritual reality is not dependent upon the believer's faith, nor on the minister's worthiness.

Bucer carried most of his south German colleagues with him, but the Swiss proved a different case. With rare exceptions, they refused to subscribe, considering that the formula of agreement was deceptive, and that Bucer had betrayed the spiritualist, or as Luther called it, the Sacramentarian case. While both Zwingli and Oecolampadius died in 1531, their successors maintained their distance from Bucer and the Lutherans. On the other hand, the young Calvin spent three critical years in Strasbourg (1538-1541) as Bucer's junior associate, and he eventually led the French-speaking Reformed tradition from

his subsequent place in Geneva into a Eucharistic understanding which, through emphasizing the work of the Spirit, maintained a position similar to the Real Presence as taught by Bucer.

It is not our concern here to pursue the lengthy quarrels of Reformed and Lutheran in the coming decades and eventually centuries, until the reaching of the Leuenberg Concordat in 1973 finally brought inter-communion between most Lutheran and Reformed churches. It is, however, worth noting, especially in the context of twenty-first-century ecumenical dialogue between Reformed and Anglicans, that in the first decades of the reformed Church of England, the continental reformer most influential for Eucharistic thinking was the same Martin Bucer. This has not always been as apparent as it should have been, for Heinrich Bullinger had a significant number of correspondents and disciples in England in the mid-century, and they insisted on the Swiss interpretation of the sacrament. A great deal of ink has been spilled over the theological sources of the complicated, at times enigmatic even self-contradictory Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. The most recent scholarship by Ashley Null and others, and the splendid biography by Diarmaid MacCulloch[25] would seem to have settled the case that in his last years Cranmer held a Bucerian doctrine of the Real Presence, which he transmitted through the *Book of Common Prayer* to early Anglicanism.

Finally, some comment upon terminology. When Luther begins in 1519 his challenge to late mediaeval doctrine and practice of the Eucharist, it was natural for him to refer to the "Mass," although he also uses "the sacrament," as in his title, "the blessed sacrament of the holy and true Body of Christ." Within a short time, these terms have become his principal usage, although he will later also use "the Supper." In 1524, Bucer already uses "the evening meal, i.e., the Supper," later "the supper of Christ," and finally "the sacred Eucharist." Zwingli frequently uses "Eucharist," as well as "sacrament" and "the Lord's Supper." Calvin uses "the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist" in 1536, while later he prefers above all the first term, often in the form, "the holy supper of the Lord." So it would be become the French practice to use the term *la sainte cêne*, the holy meal.

The appearance of "communion" in the title of the evangelical rite seems to date from the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer,* where we find "The Supper of the Lorde and the Holy Communion, commonly called the Masse." As we have seen, the term "Supper" became common in the continental reformers. Apart from here, the long-standing appellation "Mass" occurs above all and understandably in

25 *Thomas Cranmer. A Life* (1996).

the earliest Luther and others, and we should understand its appearance in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* as a simple recognition of what was still customary usage in an English church not yet reformed. But three years later, in 1552, the title shifts significantly: "An order for the Administracion of the Lordes Supper, or Holye Communion." Note that whereas in 1549 "Holy Communion" is *added* to the Lord's Supper, in 1552 it is the alternative term. From this shift, "communion" becomes, at least in English-speaking churches, the proper name for the sacrament, rather than, as we have seen in sixteenth-century usage, the naming of the effect. Luther states it best, when he writes in 1519:

> The significance or effect of this sacrament is fellowship of all the saints. From this it derives its common name *communion*, that is fellowship. And the Latin *communicare* [...]means to take part in this fellowship.

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Communion: A Biblical Perspective on Communion and Covenant

Royce M. Victor

Introduction

The literal meaning of the word "communion" is the sharing or exchanging of intimate thoughts and feelings, especially on a mental or spiritual level. The New Testament uses the Greek word *koinonia* to mention the sharing of believers in fellowship together with God. This is word is most common in Paul's letters (e.g., 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 13:13...). According to Christian understanding, the term "communion" is applied to sharing in the Eucharist by partaking of the consecrated bread and wine, an action seen as entering into a particularly close relationship with Jesus Christ. Often, the term is applied not only to the partaking but to the whole of the rite or to the consecrated elements.

The night before Jesus was to endure his suffering, he assembled himself with his disciples to partake in the customary Jewish Passover Meal. Jesus knew that this would be his last opportunity to teach his disciple of certain principles. This particular evening meal of Jesus and his disciples established what we call the Lord's Supper or Communion or Holy Communion.

The term "communion" is also used of a group of Christian churches that maintain a close relationship with each other. There are examples of WCRC and Anglican Communion, etc. We do also have another term, "full communion," which is frequently used in a broader sense, to refer instead to a relationship between churches that are not united, but have only entered into an arrangement whereby members of each church have certain rights within the other. If a church recognizes that another church, with which it lacks bonds of pastoral governance, shares with it some of the beliefs and essential practices of Christianity, it may speak of "partial communion" between it and the other church.

Open communion or Open Table is the practice of Christian churches that allow individuals other than members of that church to receive Holy Communion. Many but not all churches that practice open communion require that the person receiving communion be a baptized Christian, and other requirements may apply as well. Open communion is the opposite of closed communion, where the sacrament is reserved for members of the particular church or sect

or others with which it is in a relationship of full communion or fellowship, or has otherwise recognized for that purpose.

Old Testament Perspectives

The most explicit connection between Communion and the Old Testament is the Christian idea of the Eucharist as a New Passover in which Christ serves as the paschal lamb whose body and blood, offered as a sacrifice in his Passion, effect redemption (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). It was on the day of Passover; Jesus ate his last supper with his disciples. For Christians, Jesus becomes the Passover lamb, who sacrificed his life for the redemption of the whole world. Just as the Passover lamb rescued the Israelites from the hands of death, Jesus, the new Passover lamb, redeemed the whole creation from death.

The Eucharist or Communion relates to the ancient Israelite festival of Passover specifically as a sacrifice through their common background in the *todah* or thanksgiving sacrifice (Leviticus 7:12-15). The Passover sacrifice was the collective *todah* of Israel under the Mosaic covenant and, as such, the highest instances of *todah* sacrifice in the Old Testament. Likewise, the very term "Eucharist" (from the Greek *eucharistia*) reflects the centrality of thanksgiving. Christ's words of institution emphasize the essential *todah* elements of thanksgiving and remembrance, whose object in this case is his "body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19). As suggested by the Gospel's use of Psalm 22, a classic *todah* psalm, Christ's Passion, death, and resurrection exemplify the characteristic *todah* movement from lament to praise.

Just as Passover recalled and made present the Exodus from bondage in Egypt, the New Passover recalls and makes present the New Exodus from bondage of sin. The New Exodus, in which the twelve tribes of Israel would be redeemed along with the nations, was a major theme of the Old Testament prophets. In Isaiah 40-55 and the New Testament (1 Peter 1:18-19), the New Exodus is closely associated with redemption from sin.

Communion and Celebration

As seen earlier, the primary connecting link between the Communion and the Old Testament is Passover festival. Passover is the festival that commemorates Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The festival reminds the people of Israel of their suffering at the hands of Pharaoh and Egyptians, cry for help, and deliverance from their tyranny. In the narrative of the Exodus, God helped the People of Israel to escape from their slavery in Egypt by inflicting ten plagues

upon the Egyptians before the Pharaoh would release his Israelite slaves; the tenth and worst of the plagues was the death of the Egyptian first-born. The people of Israel were instructed to slay a lamb and *"take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses"* (Exodus 12:7) on that night. Then the Lord promised, *"When I see the blood, I will pass over you"* (Exodus 12:13). The captives were also told to eat the sacrificial lamb in haste as they prepared to leave Egypt in the first Exodus.

Passover is a celebration, a joyous celebration of people of Israel who are in covenant relationship with God. Initially it was celebrated at houses as a family festival, later Jerusalem and the Temple at Jerusalem became the centre of the celebration. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the festival days of Passover became an integral part of the Jewish religious life. Passover became one of the three most important pilgrim festivals of Judaism (the other two festivals are *Shavaot* and *Sukkot*). As per the instruction found in Deuteronomy 16:16, "Three times a year all your men must appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should appear before the LORD empty-handed." Jews travelled to Jerusalem and have the priest offer the animal sacrifice that was incumbent on each of them. A large number of people used to gather together during these festival days in Jerusalem.

According to Josephus, in the late Second Temple period, Passover offered an opportunity for political activism involving the great numbers of people who crowded into Jerusalem for its celebration. Josephus provides several examples where the festival turned violent (e.g., *Antiquities* 3.10.5 248-251; *Against Apion*). There is a political significance to the Passover as the anniversary of the deliverance of the Jewish people out of slavery into freedom, a fact emphasized by Josephus each time he mentions the festival. The Roman occupation was seen as the equivalent of slavery to the rebels of Josephus' day, and so Passover was the perfect time, theologically, to attempt a new deliverance, specifically political deliverance from the Empire. This was the new understanding of Passover gathering during this era.

Passover is a remembrance of the wonderful liberation of the people in the past. Today, the new Passover celebration, the Communion, invites the participants to continue to participate in God's works for liberation of the oppressed and marginalized in the present and to help them to have a new era of peace, justice and harmony.

Communion and Covenant

According to Luke 22:7, Jesus transformed his last Passover Feast into the "communion meal," which the church celebrates today with much reverence. Christians believe that Jesus celebrated the Passover to signify its fulfillment through his imminent sacrifice as the ultimate Passover lamb (John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7: 1 Peter 1:19). Through the sharing of this Passover meal Jesus also instituted the New Covenant and so, as well as being a Passover meal, Jesus' last supper bears all the markings of a covenant meal. Moreover, Paul's descriptive language for what Luke calls "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42; 20:7) is covenantal in character. He understands this supper, cup, and table by the analogy of Israel's sacrificial system and draws on redemptive history to call the Corinthians to faithfulness (1 Corinthians 10:1-4, 18). This "breaking of bread" is a meal in which the Lord's death is remembered (1 Corinthians 11:24-25), proclaimed (1 Corinthians 11:26), and shared (1 Corinthians 10:16). This supper bears all the characteristics of a covenant meal, which links it to the flow of redemptive history where God communed with his people as covenant Lord.

A study of the Old Testament Covenant would easily help us to recognize certain criteria that an ancient covenant followed.

1. There are promises and commitments to which the parties bound themselves.
2. Presence of witnesses.
3. The covenant would be sealed, or ratified, with a solemn ceremonial act that often involved a blood sacrifice.
4. Often this ceremony is included a meal (Genesis 31:54 and Exodus 24:4-8,11);a meal between the parties affirmed the friendly and peaceful acceptance of the terms of the covenant.
5. "There was also a memorial, some kind of physical token of the oath, which served to remind the parties of their commitments."
6. There are blessings and curses attached to the covenant for the one who keep and break it respectively.

Since creation God has sought covenant relationship with creation in order to establish community. Later, God entered into covenant with Abraham and his descendants—Israel—and ultimately with all the nations toward the eschatological end of eternal communion. God's covenant desire was to make us—the covenanted people—God's people. Throughout the history of

God's redemptive work, God has established fellowship and covenant through sacrifice (Psalm 50:5) and has confirmed that fellowship and covenant through eating the sacrificial element, a meal. Those meals within redemptive history anticipate the eschatological messianic banquet when God will dwell with his people in the New Jerusalem. The "Lord's supper" is the present stage of this redemptive-historical trajectory of covenant meals. Since it embraces the past and anticipates the future, the full meaning of this meal can only be understood in the light of redemptive-history. The most inclusive disclosure of this meaning might be the category of "covenant meal."

Covenant or *berith* in the Old Testament is a formal commitment made by one party to another party, or by two parties to one another. There are several covenants mentioned in the Old Testament., e.g., Noah Covenant, Abrahamic Covenant, Sinai Covenant, and Davidic Covenant.

Covenant became a term for the relationship between God and Israel even where the word *berith* does not occur. (e.g., Jeremiah 7:23; 24:7; 30:22). Covenant emphasizes the relational and communal aspect of life, which includes human relationship with each other and with other creations. It explicitly mentions that we do not live to ourselves but in mutual commitment to each other. Covenant involves the closest relationship but without compromising the truth that the entire relationship is based on the sovereign grace of God. That is to say, covenant involves the idea of communion between God and human beings, although this is general implicit and not actually expressed in terms of "communion."

There is a close connection between *hesed* (steadfast love) and covenant in the Old Testament. The Lord is the one keeping Covenant and steadfast love (1 Kings 8:23; 2 Chronicles 6:14; Nehemiah 1:5; 9:32; Psalm 89:28). *Hesed* is a commitment that one shows to another when they are in a covenant relationship.

Covenant and election are often linked with each other in the Old Testament. Israel's relationship with God is always defined by covenant (Joshua 24:25; cf. Exodus 19:5, 24:3ff). The election of Israel, the covenant between God and Israel, and Israel's covenanted obligations are often remembered in the scripture. The question arise here is whether covenant was made open for all or only with the chosen ones. God made covenant with individuals: Adam (Genesis 2:15-17), Noah (Genesis 9:12-16), Abraham (Genesis 17), and with the nation Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28), and finally the Old Testament talks about the New

Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-37). All these covenants demand certain social and moral obligations to the Creator.

The Old Testament also speaks of covenant between two individuals or parties. When Abimelech and Isaac decided to settle their land dispute, they made a binding agreement, league, or covenant to live in peace. An oath confirmed it (Genesis 26:26-31). Joshua and the Gibeonites bound themselves, by oath, to live in peace together (Joshua 9:15), although the Lord commanded that Israel was not to bind themselves to the people living in the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:2; Judges 2:2). Solomon and Hiram made a binding agreement to live and work in peace together (1 Kings 5:12). A friendship bond was sealed by oath between David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:3; 1 Samuel 20:16-17). Marriage is a bond (covenant) for life.

The covenants referred to above were between two equal parties; this means that the covenant relationship was bilateral. The bond was sealed by both parties vowing, often by oath, that each, having equal privileges and responsibilities, would carry out their assigned roles. When God was a party in the covenant, God took initiative; determined the elements, and confirmed God's covenant with humanity. It is more or less unilateral and unique. In other words, the ancient Israel witnessed bilateral as well as unilateral covenant relationships. People of Israel shared communion with everyone who entered into covenant with them. It was open for all those who willingly enter into covenant relationship, which was fundamentally meant for bringing peace, justice and harmony to the society. Moreover, the Old Testament hardly puts restriction on having covenant with the "other."

Conclusions

When we look at the Communion from a biblical covenant perspective, we may come to certain conclusions.

Covenantal Memory. When we remember Christ in the Communion, we remember the covenant God has made with the creation. The spiritual reality of this covenant is actualized for us through our remembering. It moves from a past memory to a present experience of the reality and to move forward. To remember God's work in Christ is to experience the reality of our covenantal fellowship with God. The spiritual reality of God's salvation is present through our remembering in the covenant meal.

Covenantal Renewal. When one partakes in the communion, one renews covenant with God and also with fellow beings. We pledge ourselves to keep the covenant. Just as Israel voiced its willingness to obey the covenant, so we ratify the covenant in our life when we eat and drink. It is a moment of rededication and recommitment to our Call and to the well-being of the society. Communion also gives an invitation to all to partake in the redemptive act of God in this world. In the context of the worship experience, we voice our commitment to live worthy of the gospel (cf. Philippians 1:27). We vow to take up our cross, call upon Jesus as Lord, and follow him into the world as an obedient servant to bring peace, justice, and harmony to the society.

Covenantal Presence. God has always promised to live among his people and to be their God (cf. Genesis 17:7-8; Leviticus 26:11-12; Jeremiah 11:4; 24:7). God is present among his people in the covenant meal. It is an eating and drinking in the presence of the covenant Lord (Exodus 18:12; Deuteronomy 12:7, 18; 14:23-26; 15:20; 1 Chronicles 29:22). This presence is found in the church through the indwelling Spirit by whom we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16), and by whom the Lord is present through faith (Ephesians 3:16, 17). As we worship in the Spirit (Philippians 3:3), Christ is present through the covenant meal.

Covenantal Fellowship. The covenant meal symbolizes and mediates the fellowship between God and his covenant people and between different individuals or groups. It testifies to the reconciliation that God has enacted and the peace that exists between God and the redeemed, and between the redeemed. It is a moment of joy, celebration, communion, and thanksgiving. The people of God celebrate their reconciliation by God's work of liberation; they rejoice in the redemptive work of God for them. The covenant meal is a Eucharist, a thanksgiving, which assures the worshipper of God's love and redemptive work. It is a moment of communal fellowship between God and his community. It is a moment of communion with the risen Lord at whose table we eat and drink.

Covenantal Promise. The covenant meal is one of hope and expectation. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of God's victory over evil and death. It is not a funeral, but a celebratory affirmation of hope in the midst of rejection, pain and agony of today. Through the covenant meal we proclaim our faith in God's promises, and we anticipate the messianic banquet in God's eschatological kingdom. As we eat and drink now, we eat and drink in the hope of eating and drinking with Jesus in the fullness of his kingdom.

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Wider Ecumenical perspectives on *Koinonia*

Mary Tanner

1. Koinonia Becomes a Central Concept in Ecumenical Conversations

Over the last one hundred years, the notion of *koinonia* has increasingly become central in the understanding of the nature and life of the Church and its mission. The first two World Conferences on Faith and Order, Lausanne 1927 and Edinburgh 1937, had emphasized the Christological approach to ecclesiology. The Third World Conference in Lund 1952, emphasized the Church as the Body of Christ, reflecting much theological writing of the time: "because we believe in Jesus Christ, we believe also in the Church as the body of Christ." Even the Orthodox theologian George Florovsky could write that ecclesiology was nothing but a chapter of Christology. This was reflected in the basis of the World Council of Churches (WCC): "the World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."

However, a shift was made at the New Delhi Assembly in 1961, when the basis of the WCC included a reference to the Holy Trinity, as theologians, not least of all the Greek Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis, shifted emphasis onto pneumatology. It was not that there was an abandonment of Christology. The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal stressed that an understanding of the Church should not derive only from Christology but from a Trinitarian understanding of God.

With the entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement as a consequence of Vatican II came a much greater emphasis upon the necessity of agreement in faith, "sufficient and required" for visible unity. The Roman Catholic Church, while not becoming a member of the World Council of Churches, did become a full member of the Faith and Order Commission of the Council, the theological arm of the Council. It brought with it an understanding of the Church as communion, which gave added emphasis to the direction in which the ecumenical conversation was already itself heading. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in its first chapter on Catholic principles on Ecumenism, holds together the Christological and pneumatological foundations of the Church:

> This is the sacred mystery of the Church, in Christ and through Christ, the

> Holy Spirit energizing the various functions. It is a mystery that finds its highest exemplar and source in the unity of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God.[1]

Some bilateral dialogues set up as a result of Rome's entry into the ecumenical movement show the spread of the understanding of the Church as *koinonia*. As Metropolitan John Zizioulas has pointed out, this is a concept rooted in Scripture and present in both the theology of the Greek Fathers and the Latin Fathers as well as the Reformers. In that sense it can be said to be "a truly ecumenical theme." The Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic report in a section of affirmations about the unity they sought comment:

> Through their common life and fellowship (*koinonia*) the members of this community which is the Church witness to salvation as they pray and worship together, forgive, accept, and love one another, and stand together in time of trial. Such communion is made possible by a deeper communion, a communion in the good things that come from God who makes the people of the Church his own as a new creation in Christ.[2]

While *koinonia* here refers to the visible communion of Christians, the Old Catholic- Orthodox Agreed Statement on ecclesiology, reflecting on the prayer of Jesus in John 17, agree that "the Lord prayed for this unity and in doing so, pointed at the unity of Father and Son, as the ground of the unity of believers, is the image of the unity of the Triune God."[3]

One of the most inspirational reports from the first phase of bilateral dialogues is *God's Reign and Our Unity*, from the Anglican-Reformed International dialogue. The influence of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, a member of the conversations, is easy to detect throughout not least of all in its emphasis on the Church's missionary calling. Although the report never uses the term *koinonia*, the Trinitarian understanding of the nature of the Church is clearly there and, in a final section, the first of seven things to be kept in mind is: "Participation in Christ and in the life of the Triune God. In our different communions we are all participating, in the Spirit, in what Christ has done and is doing, and in his communion with the Father and his mission to the world and his will for peace and justice."[4] The

1 Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio, para 2.*

2 Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, ed., Disciples–Roman Catholic Conversations 1981, in *Growth in Agreement,* Faith and Order Paper 108, (WCC, 1984),163.

3 *Growth in Agreement*, 403.

4 *God's Reign and Our Unity* (SPCK, 1984), 79.

implication of this Trinitarian ecclesiology is surely that all the baptised already share a degree of communion.

The statement that develops the notion of *koinonia* most fully in these years is *The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission* (ARCIC). The Commission situates its agreed statements on Eucharist, ministry, and authority in an introduction exploring the concept of *koinonia* (communion). The point is made that in early Christian tradition, reflection on the experience of *koinonia* opened the way to the understanding of the mystery of the Church. "Although *koinonia* is never equated with 'Church' in the New Testament, it is the term that most aptly expresses the mystery underlying the various New Testament images of the Church. When the Church is described as the body of Christ, the household of God, or the holy nation, where the emphasis is on relationships among its members of the Church as well as upon their relationship with Christ the Head."

> Union with God, in Christ Jesus through the Spirit is the heart of Christian *koinonia.* Among the various ways in which the term *koinonia* is used in different New Testament contexts, we concentrate on that which signifies a relation between persons resulting from their participation in one and the same reality (cf. 1 John 1:3). The Son of God has taken to himself our human nature, and has sent upon us his Spirit, who makes us so truly members of the body of Christ that we too are able to call God "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15; Galations 4:6). Moreover, sharing in the same Holy Spirit, whereby we become members of the same body of Christ and adopted children of the same Father, we are also bound to one another in a completely new relationship. *Koinonia* with one another is entailed by our *koinonia* with God in Christ. This is the mystery of the Church.[5]

It is the theme of *koinonia* that binds the three individual statements together, situating them within an ecclesiology of communion. The Eucharist is presented as the effectual sign of *koinonia, episcope* as serving the *koinonia*, and primacy as a visible link and focus of *koinonia*.

ARCIC is clear that the Church as *koinonia* requires visible expression and speaks of the Church as sacrament, which is both sign that God's *koinonia* is being realised and instrument for accomplishing God's purpose of drawing all into communion with God and with one another. The statement looks for full, visible

5 *The Final Report of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission* (CTS/SPCK, 1982), paragraph 5.

communion between the two Churches with mutual recognition of sacraments and ministry and the common acceptance of a universal primacy, at one with the episcopal college in the service of the *koinonia*.

It was not surprising that the understanding of the basic reality of the Church as *koinonia* influenced both the bilateral dialogues as well as the work of the Faith and Order Commission and was more and more spoken of as a theme that had come of age. Many ecumenical theologians were involved in more than one bilateral conversation and many of them also served on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. *Koinonia* was not, however, simply a theological concept to be written about. Some participants in dialogues spoke of their shared life grounded in prayer, listening, and waiting on one another in conversation, deepening friendships, all of which convinced them of their already existing degree of communion.

2. Koinonia Affirmed in the Canberra Statement of the World Council of Churches 1991

In 1987 the Central Committee of the WCC invited the Faith and Order Commission to prepare a draft statement on the unity of the Church to bring to its next Assembly in Canberra. The delegates would consider the draft, make suggestions for changes, and, at the end of the Assembly, be invited to adopt it as a statement to guide the work of the Council. In his opening address, the Moderator of the Central Committee, Bishop Heinz Joachim Held, reflected that it seemed to him that the draft statement, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*, "gives an apt description of where our churches stand in the quest for unity: between unity that is a gift and the unity that is lost, between a renewed experience of communion and a communion which is still to be realized."[6] The experience of the Assembly left an indelible mark upon the statement. The theme of the Assembly, "Come Holy Spirit: renew the whole of creation," ensured an emphasis on pneumatology and the moving experience of worship throughout the conference provided a doxological character to the Statement. But questions were raised about whether the notion of *koinonia* was being made to bear too much weight, or was being used in too broad and imprecise a way. Nevertheless, the theme remained central to the Assembly's understanding of the nature of the Church, echoing the convergence that was emerging in bilateral conversations.

6 Hans Joachim Held, "The Work of the WCC: Past and Future," in *Signs of the Spirit,* Official Report of the Seventh Assembly 1991, ed. Michael Kinnamon, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 173.

The Statement adopted by the delegates begins not with the Church as communion but with God's intention to bring all things into communion with God. The communion of the Church is inseparable from God's intention in creation for all humanity and God's ultimate purpose in God's Kingdom. The Church is understood to be foretaste of what God intends for all people, nothing less than the world ahead of itself, for the Church already shares in the communion of God's own life. The Church is nothing less than "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit."

The Statement describes the visible characteristics of a life of *koinonia*: a communion of faith, a common sacramental life entered by baptism and celebrated in Eucharistic communion, sharing a mutually recognised and reconciled ministry, shared service and mission. Moreover, "full communion will be expressed both on the local and universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action." So, while the Statement began emphasizing the personal and relational life of communion grounded in the Trinitarian communion, it emphasized also the visible elements of communion, faith, baptism, Eucharist, ministry, and structured life. The personal and relational are prior but structure serves and nurtures the relational life of the fellowship.

The explosive reaction to a presentation by a young Korean woman theologian of the Assembly theme, "Come Holy Spirit: renew the whole creation" in dance and seeming invocation of Korean spirits, raised sharply the question of the tolerable limits to diversity in communion. This led to a challenge from the delegates to include something on diversity. In response the statement makes clear that *koinonia* does not imply uniformity but entails diversities, rooted in theological traditions, cultural, ethnic, and historical contexts; challenged to say what those limits might be it offers the thought that those limits are when it is no longer possible to confess together Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, the same yesterday, today, and forever, and when it is no longer possible "to confess together salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in the Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community." This reticent statement about the limits of diversity was a firm marker for the ecumenical community that there are indeed limits in a life of communion. It is a discussion that continues 25 years on, not least of all over apostolicity and succession, the ordination of women, and newly emerging ethical issues. In the light of the discussion about tolerable limits to diversity it is not surprising that the Assembly saw the need to say something about conciliar life and the coming together for discernment in communion of what those limits might be.

The portrait of unity offered in the statement is of the communion of God's own Trinitarian life made visible in the life of the church for the sake of the world, to serve God's eternal purpose in creation. It conveyed something of the quality of life in communion, something about the structured life of communion and the rich diversity of that life, warning at the same time about the limits to diversity in communion. The Statement gathered up insights of recent ecumenical theology that had emerged in bilateral and multilateral conversations. It helped divided Christians to understand that they are not out of communion with one another but already share a profound degree of communion in faith and in common baptism, and challenged them to take further steps towards mutual recognition and common action and mission wherever they could.

The Statement ends with an evocative, prayerful reflection:

> The Holy Spirit as promoter of *koinonia* (2 Corinthians 13:13) gives to those who are still divided the thirst and hunger for full communion. We remain restless until we grow together according to the wish and prayer of Christ that those who believe in him may be one (John 17:21). In the process of praying, working and struggling for unity, the Holy Spirit comforts us in pain, disturbs us when we are satisfied to remain in our division, leads us to repentance and grants us joy when our communion flourishes .

3. A Second Phase of Bilateral Conversations Endorses an Understanding of the Church as Communion

The influence of the theme of *koinonia* continued in a second phase of bilateral dialogues. The Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic Commission set out to discover "the degree of communion they already shared" and came to agree that they shared the same understanding of the basic nature of the Church as *koinonia*.[7]

> To speak of communion (*Koinonia*) is to speak of the way human beings come to know God as God's purpose for humanity is revealed. God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, calls human beings to share in the fellowship within the divine life, a call to which they respond in faith. Thus, communion refers first to the fellowship with God and subsequently to sharing with one another. Indeed it is only by virtue of God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ that deep, lasting communion is made possible: by baptism persons participate in the mystery of Christ's death, burial and resurrection and are

7 Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch, ed., "The Church as Communion in Christ," *Growth in Agreement II* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 386-398.

> incorporated into the one body of Christ, the church. (p. 391)

Their reflection on the understanding of the church as communion made them sure that by confessing together that the church is communion, in spite of real diversities that remained, they were "in agreement on a very crucial issue, which is not isolated from many issues of the faith." In six beautiful paragraphs, they set out the important truths they agree which flow from their understanding of the church as communion: agreement concerning the nature and mission of the church; the church as the part of humanity which is joined in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and are bound in communion with the Father and with one another; participation in this communion begins through baptism and is continued through Eucharistic communion; the visibility of this communion is realized especially in the celebration of the Eucharist; the people of God are served by ministers with responsibility for oversight. The communion of the church is the effective sign to the world, in contrast to the divisions and hatred of humanity. Because God wants all humanity to become members of Christ, the church is given to loving witness and service to humanity. So, the Commission affirms: that "the church is at one and the same time an epiphany of the destiny which God wills for all humanity and a means to achieve that destiny."

The Agreed Statement from the Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic Dialogue, *Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist/Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, emphasizes a further aspect of *koinonia*, namely the communion of local churches through the world and through time and into the eschaton. "Each Eucharistic community is truly the body of Christ, in communion with the first community of the disciples and with all who throughout the world celebrate and have celebrated the memorial of the Lord. It is also in communion with the assembly of saints in heaven, which each celebration brings to mind." This emphasis adds another rich dimension to the understanding of communion:

> The Universal and the local are necessarily simultaneous... because the one and only God is the communion of three persons, the one and only church is a communion of many communities and the local church a communion of persons. The one and unique church finds her identity in the *koinonia* of the churches. Unity and multiplicity appear so linked that one could not exist without the other. It is this relationship constitutive of the church that institutions make visible and, so to speak, "historicise."[8]

8 Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William Rusch, ed., "Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist/ Mystery of the Holy Trinity," in *Growth in Agreement II* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 653-659.

To these bilateral statements many others might be added, among them the Methodist-Roman Catholic Agreed Statement: *Towards a Statement on the Church 1986* and, not least of all, the Agreed Statement of ARCIC II, *Church as Communion* 1990.[9] This latter statement includes a description in some detail of the "essential constitutive elements of ecclesial communion… essential for the visible communion of the church, derived from and subordinate to the common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord." Communion is rooted in the confession of the one faith, revealed in Scripture and set forth in the creeds; founded on the one baptism; celebrated in the Eucharist; shared commitment to mission; qualities of life in communion are explored; and acceptance of the same basic moral values; a ministry of oversight is seen as being for the maintenance and expression of unity, holding together the local church and the wider communion of churches, and is expressed both in collegial and primatial dimensions. The statement goes on to say that "in the context of the communion of all the churches the episcopal ministry of a universal primate finds its role as the visible focus of unity." ARCIC is clear that "All of these inter-related elements and facets belong to visible communion of the universal church." The Commission admits that there remain unresolved matters between the two churches but that it is in the light of their understanding of the church as communion and the degree of communion they know already exists between them that these must be overcome.

4. Towards Koinonia *in Faith, Life and Witness*: The Theme of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Santiago de Compostela 1993

By 1988 the Faith and Order Commission had taken the decision to call a Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, in 1993, thirty years after the Fourth World Conference in Montreal. One task of a conference was to lay before the churches the work of the past 30 years in three major studies: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Confessing the One Faith and Church and World.*[10] The Commission decided to harvest these studies in a way that would begin to give some answer to the frequently asked question, "Where are we, where are we going in the ecumenical movement today?" The theme of the Conference, "Towards *koinonia* in faith, life and witness," was the beginning of an answer to the question. It allowed the Commission to place before the conference the convergence in ecumenical conversation around the notion of the church as *Koinonia* and

9 Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William Rusch, ed., "Church as Communion," *Growth in Agreement II* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2000), 328 – 343.

10 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,* Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: WCC, 1982); *Confessing the One Faith,* Faith and Order Paper 153 (Geneva: WCC, 1991); *Church and World; The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community,* Faith and Order Paper 152 (Geneva: WCC, 1990).

to draw into the picture the three studies relating to the characteristics or requirement of visible communion: faith, baptism, Eucharist and ministry, witness and service.

In my opening Moderator's address to the Conference, I described the potential of the theme of *koinonia* to breathe new life into our understanding of the unity which is God's gift and our calling. It re-orders our priorities, God, the world, the church, reminding us that the communion of the church is grounded in the life and love of God and in the order of creation itself. The visible communion of the church is to be a sign of what God intends for the whole of humanity and a foretaste of the life of God's Kingdom.[11]

There were many rich contributions to the theme of *koinonia* that stand the test of time. The Lutheran biblical scholar John Rueman offered an exhaustive survey of biblical material on *Koinonia* and cognate terms. He summed up with seven concluding observations. The first was his judgment that Faith and Order was well grounded in the New Testament in speaking of *koinonia* in faith, life, and witness, but he was clear that it goes beyond what the New Testament says to equate *koinonia* with the Church or with the inner life of the Trinity. This was forged in later theology. He ended his presentation with the question, "Can *koinonia* bear the weight we wish to put on it when the term and concept are virtually non-existent in the Hebrew scriptures and not used by Jesus himself?" His answer was "yes for ecclesial purposes and for understanding God.... For it is precisely the God known in Christ after Easter and through the Spirit, and the community that results from *koinonia* with the Father, Christ and the Spirit... Where better to begin a fresh understanding of the church today than from the days when the church was fresh and new?"

Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke near the beginning of the conference, emphasizing that unity is fundamental to Christian obedience. Speaking out of his own context he said that "apartheid is too strong for a divided church... there can be no question at all that a united church is a far more effective agent for justice and peace against oppression and injustice." He offered a "small gift" from Africa to help in understanding communion, "the gift of *Ubuntu*, which declares that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours... I am because I belong." The Archbishop's contribution strengthened the understanding of the relationality and the qualitativeness of the communion of the church, a communion of shared witness and action for justice and peace.

11 Thomas Best and Gunther Gassmann, ed., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia, Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper 166 (Geneva: WCC, 1994).

Metropolitan John Zizioulas followed with an appreciation of the emergence of the concept of *koinonia* in the ecumenical discussion. The basic ingredients of *koinonia* he suggested are: first, that *koinonia* does not derive from either sociological experience or from ethics. "God is Trinitarian: he is a relational being by definition; a non-Trinitarian God is not *koinonia* in his very being. Ecclesiology must be based on Trinitarian theology if it is to be an ecclesiology of communion." *Koinonia* is basic in our understanding of the person of Christ—a person born by the Spirit and anointed by the Spirit. We cannot have Christology without pneumatology. He proceeded to draw out the implications of this understanding of the Trinity for ecclesiology:

> We can now raise the ecclesiological question... If the very being of God in whom we believe is *koinonia*, and if the person of Christ in whose name we human beings and the whole creation are saved is also in his very being *koinonia*, what consequences does this faith entail for our understanding of the church? How does the notion of *koinonia* affect the church's identity, her structure and her ministry in the world? How can this understanding of the church as *koinonia* affect our efforts towards visible unity and the overcoming of the scandal of division? Finally, how can the understanding of the church as *koinonia* affect her mission in the world, including her relation with the entire creation? (p. 105)

In what followed the Metropolitan reflected on the identity of the church as relational, raising again the question posed at Canberra about tolerable limits to diversity and suggesting that the most important condition attached to diversity is that it should not destroy the unity. This led him to explore the place of the ministry of oversight, synodality and primacy in the service of communion. He rejected all forms of authoritarianism maintaining that only by a structure, or ministry that involves the local church can synodality and primacy be realities of communion. The ecumenical movement, he warned, cannot avoid these issues if the approach is of a theology of communion. He went on to explore how authority in the church is relational, the mission of the church is relational and reflected on the relatedness of the church through the ages, a succession of communities and not of individuals. In communion there is a meeting of communities of the past with communities of the present as well as those of the future.

The Metropolitan drew into his rich reflection on *koinonia* the theme of the integrity of creation, a theme gaining attention in the life of churches and in

programmes of the WCC. The Church as *koinonia* relates also, he said, to the animal and material world as a whole. "Perhaps the most urgent mission of the Church today is to become conscious of, and proclaim in the strongest terms, the fact that there is an intrinsic *koinonia* between human being and its natural environment, a *koinonia* that must be brought into the church's very being in order to receive its fullness."

He was clear that full communion entails Eucharistic communion where the entire economy of salvation is recapitulated, where past, present, and future are united and where communion with the Holy Trinity and with the rest of the churches as well as creation takes place. Baptism, chrismation or confirmation and the rest of the sacramental life are given in view of the Eucharist. Communion in these sacraments may be described as "partial" or anticipatory communion, calling for its fulfilment in the Eucharist. This he heard reflected in the title of the World Conference: "Towards communion in faith, life and witness." "Communion, however, is the fabric not only of the goal but also of the way to the goal. If we have nothing already, we cannot hope ever to share everything. And if we wish to move in the right direction, we must never lose the sight of the final goal."

In following contributions by the Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenburg on communion in faith, the Reformed theologian Elizabeth Templeton on communion in life, and Metropolitan Georges of Mount Lebanon on communion in witness, the participants had rich resources with which to discuss the conference theme, the results of which were reflected in a Final Message: "On the Way to Fuller *Koinonia*." The fourth paragraph sums up some of the insights the conference had grasped about *koinonia*:

> *Koinonia* has been the focus of our discussions. The word from the Greek New Testament describes the richness of our life together in Christ: community, communion, sharing, fellowship, participation, solidarity. The *koinonia* we seek and which we have experienced is something more than words. It springs from the word of life, "what we have seen with our eyes, what we have touched with our hands" (1John 1:1), especially where *koinonia* is being realized daily in such forms as local ecumenical projects and base communities. This *koinonia* which we share is nothing less than the reconciling presence of the love of God. God wills unity for the Church, for humanity, and for creation because God is a *koinonia* of love, the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This *koinonia* comes to us as a gift we can

only accept in gratitude. Gratitude, however, is not passivity. Our *koinonia* is in the Holy Spirit who moves us to action. The *koinonia* we experience drives us to seek that visible unity which can adequately embody our *koinonia* with God and one another. (pp. 225-226)

The message goes on to point out the significance for *koinonia* of common ethical commitment and action. It also emphasized that drawing closer together calls now for structures of mutual accountability. The delegates were clear that there still remained issues if difference in relation to faith, life, and witness to be explored in the context of *koinonia* and that beyond all particular challenges, "the churches and the ecumenical movement itself are called to the conversion to Christ that true *koinonia* in our time demands."

The final words were words of prayer reflecting the *koinonia* in prayer experienced throughout the Conference.

5. The Church: Towards a Common Vision

In the years between the World Conference and the publication in 2013 of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV) the concept of *koinonia* continued to permeate many reports from international bilateral conversations as a glance through the 600-page publication *Growth in Agreement III* shows.[12] The Methodist-Reformed, the Roman Catholic -Orthodox , the Lutheran Reformed are just a few examples, followed by the Anglican-Orthodox report, T*he Church of the Triune God* (2006) and the document *The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and Its Implications for Our Search for Communion Today*, from the Oriental Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue (2016).

When Faith and Order met to reflect on the implications of the World Conference for its future agenda it was clear that ecclesiology should be a major programme. A first ecclesiological statement was produced in 1998: *The Nature and Purpose of the Church.* Trinitarian communion was there but no longer the fundamental understanding of the Church. The Church was expounded as *creatura Verbi* and *creatura Spiritus*. Indeed, the question was posed:

> ...whether the notion of *koinonia* is being used today by many churches and in ecumenical texts as a major idea towards a common understanding of the nature and purpose of the Church. The question is being asked

12 Jeffrey Gros, Thomas Best, Lorelei Fuchs, ed., *Growth in Agreement III*, Faith and Order Paper 204 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2007).

> whether this notion is being called to bear more weight than it is able to carry. The questions for churches to consider include whether there is a shared understanding of "fuller communion," "full communion," "perfect communion," etc., and what sense is to be made of the notion of "restricted communion," "partial communion," "impaired communion"? [13]

A revised statement, modestly called "a stage on the way to a common statement," appeared in 2005, *The Nature and Mission of the Church,* in which Trinitarian communion as the fundamental reality of the Church was again not primary, though to a list of "images of the Church"—People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit—was added, Church as *koinonia.* This for some was confusing as *koinonia* was not understood by them as only one among many images for the Church. Indeed it was hardly an image.

In 2013 the Commission published its major convergence document on ecclesiology, the fruit of 20 years of work, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (TCTCV).[14] After a first chapter exploring the theme that "the Church is essentially missionary and unity is essentially related to mission,: comes a second chapter: "The Church of the Triune God." While there are many continuities with the two earlier ecclesiological statements on the way, in this matured text Trinitarian *koinonia* is once more foundational for understanding the being of the Church. "In the Church, through the Holy Spirit, believers are united with Jesus Christ and thereby share a living relationship with the Father, who speaks to them and calls forth their trustful response." While the images of the church remain, *koinonia* is no longer listed among them. The call to make ecclesial communion visible is stressed... Communion in unity and diversity and the communion of local churches is explored picking up themes which had been raised in the 20 years earlier in the World Conference. A third chapter—"The Church Growing in Communion"—describes "the essential elements of communion": faith, sacraments, and ministry, again picking up the World Conference themes. But there is newness here. Important issues that still need facing are not ducked: the threefold ordering of the ministry, the ordination of women, episcopacy and apostolic succession, but, seen in the overall holistic vision of the document, even these issues seem less formidable and their resolution more possible.

"The Gift of Authority in the Service of the Church," marks, perhaps, the most important advance. It is linked to the communion of the Church. "Authority within the church must be understood as humble service, nourishing and

13 *The Nature and Purpose of the Church,* Faith and Order Paper 181 (1998).

14 The Church: Towards a Common Vision, Faith and Order Paper 214 (Geneva: WCC, 2013).

building up the *koinonia* of the Church in faith, life and witness." In reflections on the exercise of a ministry of oversight, the personal ministry of oversight is never to be exercised in isolation but collegially with all the ordained and communally with the whole people of God. However, for the sake of good order, there is need for someone to summon and to preside over gatherings. This leads to the question of how "a personal ministry serving to foster and promote the unity of the Church at the Universal level might be understood and exercised?" TCTCV goes further in presenting the issue of a personal ministry of oversight at the world level than earlier multilateral agreed statements had done, opening a way for creative discussion in the future. By including the matter of authority and a serving ministry of oversight at the universal level in the service of *koinonia*, Faith and Order has provided the churches with a more complete ecclesiological portrait of visible unity to consider in the years ahead and taken further the discussion about the essential requirements of unity that were stressed at the Fifth World Conference. Two other advances which again were issues raised at the World Conference are what TCTCV says about unity and diversity in communion and moral discernment in communion.

There is no better way to summarise the understanding of the broadest ecumenical community represented in the membership of the Faith and Order Commission of an ecclesiology of communion than to quote the conclusion to TCTCV. Whether this claims too much must await the responses of the churches to this important ecclesiological convergence document.

> There is a growing consensus that *koinonia*, as communion with the Holy Trinity, is manifested in three interrelated ways: unity in faith, unity in sacramental life, and unity in service (in all its forms, including ministry and mission). The liturgy, especially the celebration of the Eucharist, serves as a dynamic paradigm for what such *koinonia* looks like in the present age. In the liturgy, the people of God experience communion with God and fellowship with Christians of all times and places. They gather with their presider, proclaim the Good News, confess their faith, pray, teach and learn, offer praise and thanksgiving and receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, and are sent out in mission.... Strengthened and nourished by liturgy, the Church must continue the life-giving mission of Christ in prophetic and compassionate ministry to the world and in struggle against every form of injustice and oppression, mistrust and conflict created by human beings. (paragraph 67)

It seems appropriate to end with the prayer from the Fifth World Conference.

> Holy and loving Trinity:
>
> We come to you in thanksgiving, for your gift of *koinonia* which we now receive as a foretaste of your kingdom;
>
> We come to you in penitence,for our failures to show forth *koinonia* where there is division, hostility and death;
>
> We come to you in expectation, that we may enter more deeply into the joy of *koinonia* ;
>
> We come to you in confidence, to commit ourselves anew to your purposes of love, justice and *koinonia;*
>
> We come to you in hope, that the unity of your church, in all its rich diversity, may be ever more clearly manifest as a sign of your love.
>
> Amen[15]

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15 Thomas Best and Gunther Gassmann, ed., *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia, Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Faith and Order Paper 166 (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 227.

The Trinitarian Grounding of Communion

Elizabeth Welch

"Communion" has been an increasingly visible theme amongst churches in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The formation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches has involved a dialogue about the nature of Communion, as can be seen in the statement published out of the Global Theological Consultation on Communion and Justice in 2010 and the consultation held on Communion in Grand Rapids, 2014[1]. International dialogues have reflected the theme of Communion, as drawn attention to by Bergen, who points in particular to thinking about the role of the Holy Spirit in Communion.[2] It is significant that international dialogues have focussed more on Communion at the same time in which there is an increase of Trinitarian writing.

This paper contributes to the discussion by focussing on the Trinitarian basis for looking at Communion. The argument is made that a key understanding of Communion arises out of focussing on the communion of the three persons of the Trinity, and the way in which the world is drawn to participate in this Communion. Communion is defined by being in personal relation—as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in relation with one another. This paper looks at theological perspectives with regard to the nature of Communion, as these arise out of our interpretation and understanding of who the triune God is. "Communion" describes the source and the goal of the Christian life. We enter into Communion, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, as we enter into the life of God. Communion arises out of our shared life in the triune God.

This paper focuses on two theologians from different eras and different confessions of the church, in order to draw out the interesting overlapping of their views on the Trinity and communion, and the way in which this overlapping in itself can be of assistance to the church in reflecting on and living out a life in communion with God. The argument is further made that our primary relationship with God is in the relationship and activity of worship, a relationship that we are drawn into and which is brought to fruition by the work of the Holy Spirit. This relationship into which we are drawn with God points us to both the

1 Global Theological Consultation on Communion and Justice 4-9 March 2010 Cartigny, Switzerland: A message to the members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches: *Communion and justice have always been core callings of Reformed people, but never more urgently than today! The meaning of communion* Report of the Consultation held in Grand Rapids,Michigan,USA February 4 to 7, 2014.

2 Jeremy M. Bergen, "The Holy Spirit and Lived Communion from the Perspective of InternationalBilateral Dialogues," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 49:2, Spring 2014.

otherness and the closeness of God. In terms of Communion, the understanding of the "otherness" of God draws people to an appropriate humility in the face of God which opens up the possibility of seeing that each church has more to learn about God. An understanding of the "closeness" of God leads to the possibility of affirming the presence of the one God in different ways in the different traditions of the church.

The Holy Trinity

Trinitarian faith has shaped the faith and the life of the church, as the church reflected on and put her faith in the three-fold revelation of God as Creator and Father, as incarnate in the Son Jesus, and as present in the power of the Holy Spirit. An understanding of God as Trinitarian has been central to the Christian faith since the early days of the Christian church, although a full doctrinal formulation took the early Councils several centuries to develop and agree upon.[3] Explicating an understanding of the Trinity has led theologians to a variety of interpretations, the divergence of interpretation being most clearly seen in the argument over the filioque that culminated in the split of the eastern and western churches in 1054.

There has been an interesting argument developed with regard to the seventeenth century in England, marking the time when the Trinity became a doctrine to be argued over, rather than a reality to be worshipped[4]. This century in England saw what has been argued is a degree of separation of Trinitarian doctrine from Trinitarian worship, a separation that led to a reduced emphasis on Trinitarian doctrine in the West until the twentieth century. The three persons of the Trinity were named in worship, and worship retained its Trinitarian focus. However, in terms of the intellectual arguments of the day, the doctrine and understanding of the Trinity became detached from the worship life of the church. People got tired of the arguments, and the doctrine of the Trinity went backstage.

This English seventeenth century move had another focus, that of the Enlightenment. A strand in Enlightenment thinking that is of particular interest

3 R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), focussing on the Arian controversy, offers a helpful analysis of the issues around this particular controversy in terms of the development of an understanding about the nature of God in the early centuries of the church.

4 Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2003); Paul Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012); Jason E Vickers, *Invocation and Assent: The making and Re-making of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2008).

in relation to the area of communion, is that of the increasing focus on the individual, in and of his or her own self, as the source of authority. Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* "I think therefore I am" and Locke's focus on reason and the rational mind each helped to move away from a sense of mutual connectedness to a sense of human autonomy. The diminishment of Trinitarian understanding as both holding people in being and as the focus of worship, and the rise of individualism with the focus on each person on his or her own, have offered theological and philosophical reasons as to why Communion as a way of thinking and living, diminished.

Grenz, in *The Social God and the Relational Self*, points to some of the issues about the way in which the understanding of the Trinity diminished over the subsequent two centuries:

> As Peters and Cunningham suggest, the current flowering of trinitarian thought forms a remarkable contrast to the paltry interest evident in much of nineteenth century theology, which in turn was deeply influenced by the challenge Enlightenment rationalism posed to all speculative dogmas of the Christian faith. The situation was exacerbated when Kant limited human cognition to the phenomenal real, thereby placing knowledge of God—and of course, the inner working of the divine life—beyond the pale of "pure" (i.e. scientific or empirical) reason... Daunted by either the seeming impossibility of trinitarian speculation or the superfluity of the doctrine, many theologians relegated it to at best second-rank status.[5]

The second half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century have seen a revival of books on the Trinity. However, it is interesting to note in the recent outpouring of books and theses on various aspects of the Trinity the limited attention given in many of these to the connection between

5 Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 24.

Trinitarian faith and worship.[6]

The British Council of Churches study guide, *The Forgotten Trinity*, first published in 1989, illustrates both the concern about the decline in the doctrine of the Trinity, and the significance of its recovery. The introduction begins by saying that:

> [t]here is a feeling abroad that the doctrine of the Trinity is an irrelevance. Once the centre of fierce debate, it now seems to belong to our religious past and to have little to say about the great issues of the day. It appears to be a mere abstraction, a playing with mathematical conundrums, of interest simply to those engaged in the higher reaches of theological speculation but of little moment for the worship of the church and the life of the world.[7]

The introduction then continues, "it has become clear to us that, on the question of the Trinity, centre numerous matters of great moment." The study guide goes on to unpack some of these, for example, worship, creation and salvation, and the nature of the human person.

In Kay's stimulating book *Trinitarian Spirituality*, focussing on the seventeenth-century nonconformist theologian John Owen, he looks at the relationship of Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality. He writes about the late twentieth century rediscovery of the Trinity.

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6 Some of the more recent books: Khaled Anatolios *Retrieving Nicaea: the Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2011); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Paul M. Collins *The Trinity: a Guide for the Perplexed* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 2008); Stanley J. Grenz *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991); Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012); Catherine Lowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Thomas McCall, *Which Trinity? Whose Monotheism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010); Ted Peters, *God As Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); Christoph Schwobel, ed., *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995); Thomas F Torrance *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2016, first published A & C Black 1996); Robert J. Wozniak and Guilio Maspero, eds., *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012); Paraskeve Tibbs, "East Meets West: Trinity, Truth and Communion in John Zizioulas and Colin Gunton," Ph.D. dissertation (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2005); J. Scott Horrell, "Toward A Biblical Model Of The Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation Of Nature And Order," *JETS* 47/3 (September 2004), 399–421.

7 British Council of Churches, *The Forgotten Trinity: the Report of the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today* (London: 1989). A second expanded edition, including Part 2 A Study Guide and Part 3 A Selection of Papers presented to the BCC Study Commission on Trinitarian Doctrine Today has been published in 2011, by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, a reflection of the ongoing ecumenical interest in the Trinity. 1.

> The doctrine of the Trinity itself, as perhaps Christianity's most nuanced and irresolvably mysterious belief, has all the makings of a doctrine that should have been destined for permanent streamlining. And yet, not only has Liberal rationalism and even Evangelical pragmatism failed to entirely extinguish the old doctrine, Trinitarian studies seems now to be enjoying a renaissance across the theological spectrum—Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox theologians have all made notable contributions to the present revival.[8]

The late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century revival of interest in the Trinity is given weight by revisiting the writings of those for whom this doctrine has been significant over many centuries. While attention naturally turns to the early Fathers, an examination of the writings of those such as John Owen who have been more on the sidelines of church history can also cast an interesting light on the development of this doctrine and the way it is understood in relation to the world, the church, and the believer.

Trinitarian Perspectives on Communion from a Reformed and an Orthodox Theologian

In order to focus on the issues of the Trinity and Communion, this paper will look further at the writings of John Owen from a Reformed perspective. This paper also offers an Eastern Orthodox perspective, to explore the way in which communion has been taken up, in Trinitarian terms, in both the east and the west. The Eastern perspective will be given through looking at the writings of John Zizioulas, an Eastern Orthodox theologian; looking at the way in which his thinking helps to complement the western approaches to the Trinity. Both Owen and Zizioulas raise up the significance of rooting the Trinitarian doctrinal approaches in worship and in the relational belonging that comes out of participating in the triune life of God. Looking at two theologians from different eras and perspectives, out of whose thinking arise similar conclusions about what is central to the faith, despite the diversity between these two theologians in the practice of the faith in terms of ecclesial life and patterns of worship, opens up a model for dialogue across the churches.

It is interesting to note that three of Owen's and Zizioulas' key Trinitarian works

8 Brian Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality* (Paternoster, 2007), 8. Kay goes on to reference some of these theologians when he writes "The initial theological work, especially of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, has been seized on and creatively expanded by later writers such as Jurgen Moltmann, Robert Jensen, John Zizioulas, Colin Gunton, Alan Torrance, James Torrance, David Cunningham and Catherine Mowry LaCugna, to name a few." 9.

share the common theme of Communion: Owen *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*; Zizioulas *Being as Communion* and *Communion and Otherness*.[9] This shared emphasis on Communion, which emphasises the fundamental nature of relationality both within the Trinity and between God and humanity, is echoed in ecumenical dialogues since the Second Vatican Council, and is a helpful contribution to the development of an ecumenical understanding between churches in a time that has been spoken about as an ecumenical winter.

Owen and Zizioulas inhabit different worlds in terms of their centuries, their countries and their confessional allegiances. Nevertheless, this paper points to a degree of overlap in their theological orientation, an overlap that can helpfully feed in to contemporary twenty-first-century ecumenical and theological discourse, or rather, discourses, as the range of contemporary theological understanding and interpretation has broadened, by confession, country and theological orientation.[10]

Zizioulas represents a different perspective from Owen in, seemingly, almost every aspect. Owen was a leader of a minority English Independent tradition in seventeenth-century Britain, whose personal experience was entirely in England and Ireland. Zizioulas is a theologian of the widespread and deep-rooted Orthodox tradition that spans the world, and whose personal experience has crossed east and west. Owen, out of his Christian convictions, was caught up in the political ferment surrounding the English Civil War. Zizioulas, out of his understanding of the church, has been at a distance from political involvement.

Owen's writing was rooted in the Augustinian and Calvinist tradition that predominated in many parts of Puritanism. Zizioulas' writing is rooted in the early Fathers. Yet here the parallels begin. While Owen's theological roots lie in Augustine and Calvin, his theological understanding was also shaped by his wide reading in the early Fathers. Both Owen and Zizioulas are concerned to re-emphasise the Trinitarian nature of the Christian faith, Owen against the backdrop of anti-Trinitarian writing and thinking that was prevalent in certain quarters in the seventeenth century in England (for example among the Socinians) and Zizioulas against the perceived neglect of Trinitarian

9 John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost*, ed. William H. Goold (London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1856); John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Yonkers: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 129; John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 196.

10 This can be seen in a comparison of the range of "Companions" to various fields of theology, from Oxford, Cambridge, and Blackwell, covering Natural, Philosophical, Systematic, Evangelical, Feminist, Postmodern, and Reformation theology, amongst others.

thinking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly in the West. In the theological setting of England, both Owen and Zizioulas are minority ecclesial voices, over against the predominance of the Church of England, and, in more recent times, over the past two centuries, the renewed life of Roman Catholicism. However, their distinctive Trinitarian understandings have much to offer the whole church.

The contribution that both Owen and Zizioulas make is in the area of a personalist Trinitarian theology, with an emphasis on the particular role and activity of the Holy Spirit in relation to worship, within a confessional understanding. In this emphasis, they draw together both theology and experience, and worship and doctrine. In the midst of the many different angles from which theologians write about theology and practice, Owen and Zizioulas share a common orientation in keeping the starting point of their theological understanding as rooted in the life of the Trinity, rather than, for example, beginning with either one person of the Trinity or with human activity. They both share an emphasis on the significance of worship and an understanding of the Trinity that is embedded in worship.

Both Owen from his English seventeenth-century setting, rooted in a western Reformed understanding, and Zizioulas from his contemporary position in the Eastern church, argue for a Trinitarian framework that is foundational for the knowledge and experience of God, a framework that arises out of a particular emphasis on the Trinity, in terms of the language of persons in relationship. The setting for Owen and Zizioulas of their conceptualisations of the Trinity is laid out here in order to indicate the contribution they have to offer to contemporary Trinitarian thinking. Their emphasis on the personal, relational conceptualising of the Trinity is of particular significance. It is interesting to note the coherence between Owen's scripturally based understanding of God as Trinitarian, and of the personal nature of the three persons of the Trinity alluded to in Scripture, alongside Zizioulas' more philosophical approach with regard to the nature of being as personal and relational. The emphasis in Owen and Zizioulas on the Trinity as personal, arises not in terms of a social Trinitarianism or an individualistic "centre of self-consciousness" model, but in terms of the relational nature of the triune God shaping an understanding of the nature of person.

An understanding of "person" in relation to the Trinity has long been a contested matter, in terms of whether it is possible to conceptualise the revelation of God in scripture in personal terms, particularly when three "persons" are involved in one shared identity. The question of the definition of "person" in and of itself, as

well as the definition of person as applied to the different persons of the Trinity is one that has been wrestled with over many centuries. Angel Cordovilla Perez, in his writing on "The Trinitarian Concept of Person," outlines the historical debate with regard to the original derivations of *persona, prosopon*, and *hypostasis*, looking at "fundamental milestones" of the history of the concept of person, from the early Fathers, through to the medieval period, moving on to the psychological turn of modern philosophy and then to the contemporary debate: between "mono-subjectivity and inter-personality."[11] Grenz, in his Introduction to *The Social God and the Relational Self* refers to the range of contemporary ways of thinking about person, referring to the "widely accepted philosophical conclusion that 'person' has more to do with relationality than substantiality and that the idea stands closer to the idea of communion or community than to the individual in isolation or abstracted from communal embeddedness." From a sociological perspective, Christian Smith offers a helpful analysis of the emergence of personhood and the range of contemporary understandings of person.[12]

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Communion

Owen on the Holy Spirit and personal relationality

Owen, a Puritan divine, was reluctantly caught up in the movement towards the separation of churches in England. In the midst of this, he held to the importance of the Trinitarian understanding of God and the centrality of the Holy Spirit. Owen's longest work *Pneumatologia*, which he wrote later in his life, focuses on the Holy Spirit within the Trinitarian nature of God, as the one who leads God's people to worship and has a transformative role in personal life, in terms of sanctification. While Owen is rooted in the thinking of Calvin, it is interesting to note in this work, that in terms of the authors quoted, he refers more extensively to the Fathers of the Early Church. While the scriptures are foundational to his interpretation of the triune God, he holds these within the setting of the broader offered in tradition.

Much has been written and talked about in the Reformed tradition with regard to the interpretation of Calvin. Warfield has described Calvin as "the theologian of the Holy Spirit." Out of the reflection on Owen, this paper points to the significance, not only of scripture, but also of the wider theological inheritance of each of our traditions, with their shared rooting in the whole theological history

11 Angel Cordovilla Perez, "The Trinitarian Concept of Person," in *Re-Thinking Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Robert Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (T & T Clark, 2012), 105-145.

12 Christian Smith, *What is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

of the church, originating in the writing of the Holy Scriptures, but held within the broader framework of ongoing interpretation.

Kapic points to some of the tensions within Owen's argument, while also emphasising the way in which the knowledge of the Trinity is set in worship.

> Owen still has difficulties with the persons, betraying his Western roots. At the same time, this is as much due to the impossibility of defining persons. The human person is made in the image of God, who is incomprehensible, and so shares an element of incomprehensibility on a creaturely level. However, the Eastern approach has greater merit here, dealing with the revelation of the three in the Bible as given, following the way we come to know them in salvation. After all, while we relate to an object by definition, to a person it is more appropriately through recognition and communion. Hence knowledge of God the Trinity is grounded in worship. To that great goal Owen was pointing.[13]

In Owen's emphasis on the personal nature of the Spirit and the personal relations in which the Spirit engages, he draws together the relationship between God and humanity. If the Spirit is personal and acts personally with persons, humankind is given value in terms of personal identity. Insofar as the Spirit is personal, so the role of the Spirit in relation to human persons is to bring people to a full personhood.

Owen's emphasis on the personhood of the Spirit is helpful both in terms of reflecting on the personal qualities of the nature of God and in terms of focussing on the significance of the personal in human identity. Owen held to the Cappadocian view that the Spirit is a distinct "person" within the Trinity.14 He based his argument about the Spirit as a person, not so much on a philosophical understanding of "spirit" or "person" but on the basis of what he perceives to be the revelation of God in scripture, with scripture itself being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Owen's "personal" understanding of the Holy Spirit was argued from the grounds that the descriptions of the Spirit in scripture portray the Spirit as personal.

Zizioulas and the Holy Spirit, personhood, communion and worship

13 Mark Jones, *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kell Kapic and Mark Jones (Ashgate, 2012), 190.

14 A small sign of the weight that Owen gives to the Cappadocian Fathers is the way in which he quotes Basil twice as much as Calvin (Basil quote six times, Gregory of Nyssa three times, and Calvin three times, in *Pneumatologia*).

Zizioulas draws out a significant underlying aspect of the argument, which is the importance of the persons of the Trinity being in relationship rather than having separated and distinct identities. He summarises his at times paradoxical argument about unity and multiplicity in the Trinity in the matter of personhood as follows:

> With the help of the Trinitarian theology of the Greek Fathers, particularly the Cappadocians, and their understanding of what it means to be a person, first in God and then in the human being, communion and otherness are shown to be fundamental parts of the doctrine of the holy Trinity. God is not, logically or ontologically speaking, first one and then many, he is one in being many.[15]

Zizioulas treads with care the line between one God and three Gods, in pointing to the way in which *koinonia* defines the substance of God. He builds positively on the contribution of the Cappadocian Fathers in order to counter what he sees as the development of the concept of person in the period from the Enlightenment onwards:

> [the person]... should not be understood as an "individual" in the sense of an identity conceivable in itself, an "axis of consciousness" and a concurrence of natural or moral qualities, or a number that can be subject to addition or combination.[16]

> ...our Western philosophy and culture have formed a concept of man out of a combination of two basic components: *rational individuality* on the one hand and *psychological experience and consciousness* on the other. It was on the basis of this combination that Western thought arrived at the conception of a person as an individual and/or a personality, that is, a unit endowed with intellectual, psychological and moral qualities centre on the axis of consciousness.[17]

In building on the Cappadocian Fathers' understanding of God, Zizioulas also emphasises that knowledge of God comes through the worshipping relationship found in the liturgy rather than as an abstract principle which can be rationally proved without being in relationship with God. Weinandy points to the way in

15 John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T&T Clark 2006), 11.

16 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 171.

17 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 210-211.

which Zizioulas draws on the relational concept of person within the dynamic of the Trinity, most fully expressed in worship.

> Secondly,... a proper understanding of "person" demands not simply one personal being existing in isolation, but rather necessarily implies relationships with other persons. "Person" by its very nature is a relational concept. Thirdly, by illuminating the significance of the notion of "person" within the Trinity Zizioulas has brought to Trinitarian theology a renewed and intensified dynamism, that is, the persons of the Trinity are not statically embedded within a singular substance, but actively relate to one another in a communion of love. Fourthly, this dynamism spills over in the Trinity's relationships to creation and with human persons. This eternal communion of love allows the persons of Trinity actively to reach out and embrace other persons, and this is most fully expressed and accomplished within the Eucharist[18].

This emphasis on relationality stands in contrast to emphases on individuality or autonomy. It also marks the difference between an understanding of the social Trinity, which can seem to focus on three separate individuals within the Trinity, and a relational understanding of the Trinity, in which persons are primarily defined by relationship rather than self-consciousness.

Zizioulas' thinking about the personal aspects of the Trinity, giving relationality as the key identifier of "person," offers the possibility for a broader understanding of person than that which ocuses on the self as autonomous. A prior emphasis on relationality means that the self is primarily known in relationship and only secondarily in terms of individuality.

In his introduction to *Communion and Otherness*, Zizioulas offers three parts to his definition of person, arising out of his relational Trinitarian perspective, parts which he develops throughout this book:

1. The Person is otherness in communion and communion in otherness.[19]
2. Personhood is freedom.[20]
3. Personhood is creativity.[21]

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18 Thomas Weinandy, "Zizioulas: The Trinity and Ecumenism," *New Blackfriars* Volume 83, Issue 979 (September 2002): 410.

19 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness,* 9.

20 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 9.

21 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 11.

Zizioulas continues by arguing that it is the Spirit who draws the person into communion, a communion embodied in worship (for Zizioulas in the Eucharist) and who shapes the person as person. He further emphasises the connection between the relational aspects of the Trinity and the embodiment of these in the church:

> All the observations we have made so far concerning faith in the Trinity, in Christ and in the Spirit, take their concrete form in the Church. It is there that communion with the other fully reflects the relation between communion and otherness in the holy Trinity, in Christ and in the Spirit[22].

This embodiment takes place most fully in the worshipping life of the church. Worship is about being drawn by the Holy Spirit into a relationship with the One who holds all relationships in being. The relationship with God through the Holy Spirit which is embodied in worship is a relationship firstly with the triune God. Flowing out of this relationship is the relationship into which people are led with one another. Both relationships are characterised by otherness, but this otherness is of a different order. The relationship with God is characterised by the otherness between the created and the creator. The relationship between people is characterised by that which is experienced by those who find their shared common origin in the creator. Within this personalising relationality, the Holy Spirit is both the one who (together with the Father and the Son) is worshipped and the one who has a particular role in engendering worship[23].

Owen and Zizioulas: Similarities and differences

Owen and Zizioulas offer a particular explication of the role of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, seeing the Spirit as personal and relational and as the person of the Trinity who draws people into relationship with God through worship. Owen and Zizioulas approach the area of the personhood of the Holy

22 Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness*, 6. Zizioulas continues by reflecting on the role of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry in the realisation of communion. Here one of his differences from Owen is made clear, in terms of Zizioulas' emphasis on the constitution of the church around the bishop, while Owen focussed on the local church as fully constituting the people of God in each place, without the addition of a bishop.

23 Douglas Knight in his chapter "The Spirit and the Persons in the Liturgy" in the volume he edited *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007) helpfully analyses Zizioulas' connection between the Holy Spirit, the person and worship; he comments, "...our being as persons is not given to us complete at birth, but is part of a process, caused by the Holy Spirit, which unfolds thorough time because we must all participate in it. As we are sanctified we become more human, more responsive and available to God and through God to one another. The worship of God allows us to see others as his creatures, and thus to understand that they are ours because they are first his."

Spirit in distinctively different ways. Owen's argument arises from his close examination of the references to the Holy Spirit in scripture, while Zizioulas bases his explication on the philosophical and theological understanding of the Cappadocian Fathers. While Owen and Zizioulas come from two different starting points and two different ways of analysing the nature of the Holy Spirit, they both place great emphasis on the personal nature of the triune God. However, they each from their different perspectives point to the concept of person being shaped by the personal relationality within the Trinity, rather than an individualistic conception of the human person based around its self-conscious subjectivity.

A four-fold sequence emerges from this argument:

1. The personal and relational nature of the Holy Trinity;
2. The Holy Spirit drawing people into the relationship with God;
3. This relationship as a relationship embodied in worship, leading to communion with the triune God; and
4. The development of people into full personhood in this worshipping relationship.

Worship carries a dual significance. Firstly it embodies the relationality into which people are drawn by God, and through this embodiment of relationality becomes the place where humans become fully persons. Secondly, in worship there is an emphasis on mystery, pointing to the way in which the persons of the Trinity are held in both encounter and mystery and therefore the way in which human persons share in the sense of encounter and mystery.

Conclusions

This paper is pointing to the way in which communion is rooted in God the Holy Trinity. Communion is a gift of the loving God, into which the church is drawn by the Holy Spirit.

Holding together past, present, and future
An understanding of this communion is unpacked over many centuries of theological interpretation of scripture and experience. The comparison of a Reformed and an Orthodox theologian is offered in order to engage in the range of possible interpretation. This journey of theological interpretation needs to continue to be re-visited in each new age.

This common source and the need to look at theological origins is held alongside

the eschatological nature of the Spirit's work. The Spirit is present in the past, shaping the churches, bringing people to life, sanctifying God's people. The Spirit also comes from the future, drawing the body of Christ forward into new understandings and fuller ways of living.

This eschatological approach can lead to the sense of it not quite mattering whether the church embodies the lived reality of communion today, because "it can just wait until the end times." However, the reverse is true. If the church is to be attentive to the Spirit, and drawn to the ultimate goal in God's purpose, the imperative is to more fully embody the Spirit's life and calling in the present.

Communion as embedded in personal relationality
The Trinitarian perspective that is being argued points to communion as arising out of the personal relational identity of the triune God. Participation in this communion shapes the nature of what it means to be human, that is, to be a person in relationship, rather than an autonomous individual. Within this understanding of relationship, differences are honoured and are enriching. However, for this honouring and enrichment to happen, differences need to be held within the mutual relationality that is the participation in the Holy Trinity.

The interplay of doctrine and worship in the power of the Holy Spirit
The holding together of doctrine and worship is of key significance. Communion arises out of participation in the triune God, and is embodied in worship, through the power of the Spirit. The manifestation and understanding of the Holy Spirit is multiple and diverse. The dilemma comes in seeing any one particular interpretation or experience of the Holy Spirit as the only possible interpretation or experience, forgetting that there is one Holy Spirit, just as there is one triune God. The Holy Spirit leads into truth, truth which is greater than any one understanding. The encounter with the Spirit leads to humility, because of the sense of how much 'more' there is of the Spirit than any one person or church can imagine or dream of.

Communion is embodied in worship
The Spirit draws people into a relationship of worship that is then embodied in the activity of worship. Reflecting theologically on different interpretations of the nature of worship is another helpful entry point into an understanding of communion. It is also important to experience different practices with regard to worship and to reflect on what has brought these practices into being, alongside pointing to the undergirding reality of the worshipping relationship with God that underlies the different practices.

The "mission" nature of communion
It can be tempting to see communion as a kind of static state, in which people rest in peace in God, glorifying God's holy name. Communion that arises out of the Trinity shares in the activity of God—in creation, in redemption, in vivification. This relational understanding of communion has mission consequences.

The embodied reality of communion in worship points to the significance of a full-bodied approach to the life of the church, modelling the life of God, and a foretaste of the kingdom. This embodied reality of communion points to the way in which it is not possible to privatise religion, but that communion speaks in a revolutionary way to a hurting and divided world.

Communion leads to care for God's creation, as the participation in the Holy Trinity embraces the whole of the created world. Communion draws people into the importance of mutual relating as a model for shared living in God's world. This mutuality of relationship takes people away from human division towards human wholeness—whether on a personal level in seeking wholeness and healing in relationships; on a community level, in longing for communities in which people are included rather than excluded; on a political level, where governments and leaders have a responsibility to seek ways of living which decrease divisions between people and welcome the refugees and the homeless ones; on a world level where seeking peace rather than solutions by violence becomes the natural way of relating.

In conclusion, I finish with six points with regard to Trinitarian communion:

1. That communion flows out of the inter-personal life of the Trinity into the personal relationality of human existence.
2. That living in communion leads to a rooted theological dialogue within and between differing churches and traditions.
3. That communion involves a re-focussing on the nature and work of the Holy Spirit.
4. That communion is rooted in worship, as it is in the relationship and activity of worship that God is encountered.
5. That communion has an eschatological dimension, as the Spirit leads us from the future to the future.
6. The communion carries with it a mission understanding.

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