

## Book Review

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**Philip Kariatlis**

*Church as Communion: The Gift and Goal of Koinonia*, St Andrew's Orthodox Press Series

2 Adelaide and Sydney: ATF Theology and St Andrew's Orthodox Press, 2011. xiii + 267 pp.  
\$AU20.00. ISBN 9781921817083

**Reviewed by:** Kevin Lenehan, Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia

This helpful study will be welcomed by all those with an interest in the theology of the Orthodox Church, and in an ecumenical theology of Eastern and Western Christianity. It also makes a valuable contribution to the fields of ecclesiology, eucharistic theology and trinitarian thought. The author locates himself firmly within the *koinonia-communio* ecclesiology that has become predominant in Eastern and Western theology in recent years, continuing the theological trajectory initiated by his teacher, S. Harkianakis (b. 1935), Archbishop and Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia and Founding Dean of St Andrew's Orthodox Theological College in Sydney. In particular the author explores the *koinonia* character of the church through the eschatological dialectic of divine *gift* and historical *goal*, recalling the 1991 Declaration of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Canberra, *The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling*.

Having identified *koinonia* as the defining mark of the Orthodox understanding of the church's nature and mission, Kariatlis unfolds the implications of this in the subsequent chapters of the book, each dealing with a key ecclesiological theme: the New Testament origins of the church, the celebration of the eucharist, the exercise of authority in the church by episcopate and synod, and the ministry of primacy in service of the *koinonia* of the local churches. In each case, the author argues that a richer and more fully Orthodox understanding of the *koinonia* character of the church is given by identifying the creative tension between the divine gift of God's own *koinonia* to the world through the church, and the human goal of continually responding to that invitation until the kingdom is fully realised in the parousia.

That the church is the result of God's initiative in calling a people into relationship through the divine self-communication is suggested by the biblical use of the word *ekklesia* (ἐκ καλέω) as the self-description of the church (Chapter 2). There is an intrinsic link between *ekklesia* and *koinonia*, in that God's calling out of one people for the sake of all in the economy of salvation is precisely the call into a

common share in the relationality that exists within the Godhead. The divine self-communication has both a Christological and a pneumatological dimension, each of which has an 'already realised' and a 'not yet fully actualised' quality, for the communal mode of existence in the church is a participation in both the mystery of Christ and the activity of the Spirit. While rejoicing in the focus on the Incarnation and Pentecost in founding the reality of the church, a Western theologian might add an emphasis on the whole paschal event, including the passover of Christ from death to new life, as the necessary *transitus* into the life of communion offered by God.

The *koinonia* character of the church is expressed and deepened in the celebration of the eucharist, the sacrament of communion (Chapter 3). The act of sharing in holy communion signifies and effects the two-fold dynamic of *koinonia*, both vertically (communion of the believer in the triune life) and horizontally (deepening the communal shared life of the church). From the communion that is encountered in the eucharist, Kariatlis outlines an organic process of development to the communion that is expressed and maintained in structures of church authority (Chapter 4). Since it is the manifestation in history of the authority that exists within the triune God, the gift of authority in the church is conditioned by its trinitarian origin, and serves the purpose of drawing all creation into that triune communion. Finally, the author develops the topic of authority structures as *koinonia* in the direction of the question of primacy (the *protos*) in the communion of the church (Chapter 5). He finds unsatisfactory an earlier argument that the fullness of God's self-communicating authority is already realised in the autonomous and independent local churches, and thus while the Church of Rome may have attracted a priority in decision making in the course of history, there is no theological place for primacy in the Orthodox Church. At the same time, Kariatlis is not satisfied with the pragmatic argument that while the historical fact of primatial episcopates may have served the good ordering and social prospering (*bene esse*) of the churches, a ministry of primacy is not constitutive of the church's essence (*esse*). Rather, again following the argument of Harkianakis, the author sets out a case for a ministry of primacy that expresses and safeguards both the unity and multiplicity of the churches, based on the mutual relations of the trinitarian persons as described by the Cappadocian theologians. Here the *monarchia* of the Father is not an external and predetermined relation of power to the Son and the Spirit, but a being-with in the divine essence that gives rise to clear differentiation between the divine persons, yet in a way that simultaneously establishes the relationality of the Godhead. Similarly, a ministry of universal primacy in the church can be described that is communally conditioned, in which the ministry of the one who embodies the source of communion (*primus*) is theologically constitutive in the church, yet is exercised in a communally conditioned manner (*inter pares*) that secures rather than displaces the distinctiveness of the local churches. Although the author acknowledges (in a footnote on p. 218) that this method of correlating the structure of the eternal triune community and the historical human community has limitations, it would strengthen his case if these limitations were articulated and the



considerable literature on this question brought into the discussion. Kariatlis is clear, though, that this correlation must be understood in its eschatological character; an ecclesial communion served by a universal *primus* is a real yet incomplete foretaste of that gracious communion of love between the Trinity and humanity towards which we work in faith and hope.

This book is well-structured and the argument is carefully developed. It is clear and pleasurable to read, although some sentences need simplifying and the use of commas around subordinate clauses sometimes leaves the reader confused about the meaning. The numerous content-laden footnotes are perhaps more suited to a thesis than a monograph. There are a number of typographical errors in the text, the notes and the bibliography. There is some confusion in the bibliography about the works of the biblical scholar Frank Moloney SDB and the theologian Raymond Moloney SJ.

This study makes an important contribution to the ecumenical reflection on the theology of primacy in the churches, identified as the greatest obstacle to unity by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II. Interestingly, it also draws our attention to the synodical structure of the church – which Harkianakis insists is an ‘indispensable element’ of Orthodoxy (p. 182) – just at a time when Pope Francis seems determined to place synodality at the centre of his strategy to renew the mission of the Roman Catholic Church in our time. Kariatlis’ book suggests the wide-ranging ecumenical implications that such a strategy could produce, and enriches a Catholic understanding of the theological character of a synodal ecclesiology.