

# AFFIRMING KOINONIA ECCLESIOLOGY: AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** In light of modern scepticism on communion ecclesiology, this article seeks to provide a theological justification of *koinonia* as a most appropriate term for understanding the nature and function of the church. After providing a brief overview of the meaning of the term '*koinonia*', the article examines the extent to which *ekklesia* and *koinonia* are connected, in this way affirming the term's suitability for ecclesiology. The paper then aims at further consolidating its case by analysing how the New Testament church lived out this fellowship with God and one another. Accordingly, communion ecclesiology is shown to be a highly significant way of approaching the church; indeed one with existential and salvific ramifications.

**F**undamentally, communion ecclesiology is simply a most basic way of characterising and approaching the very nature of the church, together with its various ministries and functions. 'Communion', or more precisely *koinonia*, is a theological expression – and an extremely useful one at that – for approaching the inner mystery of the church, together with its concrete structures; more specifically, it underlines that the way or mode by which the church exists is *koinonia*. And this *koinonia*, as will be shown, has its origins in God. Although some have questioned such an expression for approaching the church,<sup>1</sup> a brief assessment of certain key biblical passages will show the theological justification of communion ecclesiology.

## **The Emergence of Communion Ecclesiology in Orthodox Theology**

In Orthodox ecclesiology, the experience of the church, at its deepest ontological level, has always been articulated in terms of communion. As can readily be observed in the writings of certain notable Orthodox theologians (Karmiris,<sup>2</sup> Harkianakis<sup>3</sup> and Zizioulas<sup>4</sup>), communion ecclesiology has presented a vision of the church as an existential reality in which the genuine presence of God within the world is truly made manifest, thereby giving the created realm the possibility to communicate with God. Unlike initial studies on 'communion' which were sociologically based<sup>5</sup>, Orthodox theology has consistently argued for a theological meaning of the term. Accordingly, ecclesial *koinonia*, approached from an Orthodox viewpoint, has fundamentally designated the church's fellowship with God through Christ and the Spirit, together with the common fellowship of the faithful with one another. In this way, the importance of communion ecclesiology lies in the fact that it sheds light on the inner life of the church as an existential reality determined by God's being as communion.

Beyond its importance for ecclesiology, the success of the term *koinonia* also lies in its ability, within contemporary ecclesiological and ecumenical discussions, to capture, in a very clear manner, the nature of unity that the different Christian churches seek. Indeed, since 1991 at the 7<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra, *koinonia* has become the predominant model for describing church unity. Accordingly, references to the unity of the churches today in terms of communion are ubiquitous: indeed, its success in this area of theological work has been its ability to integrate different ecclesiological perspectives in both multi-lateral and bi-lateral ecumenical dialogues.<sup>6</sup> In particular, it has been able to speak of diversity as enhancing unity and communion, rather than stifling it.

Not only is the term '*koinonia*' successful for providing the dominant framework today for reflecting upon the nature and unity of the church, but its success is also attributed to the fact that it is a concept deeply rooted in both the biblical and patristic traditions. Far from being derived from any sociological, political or even ethical perspectives, which

usually espouse a tolerance of difference in the name of some form of exterior social cohesion within a community – so that its citizens can live together amicably for their advancement – *koinonia* is a theological term bearing a specific meaning about the way that God communally exists. And since the Scriptures assert that the church is ‘the church of God’<sup>7</sup>, this implies that the church’s quintessential nature must fundamentally reflect God, after whose image the church is.<sup>8</sup>

What follows, is a brief examination of the meaning of the term *koinonia* in order to decide its appropriateness for depicting the nature of the church. Invariably, we will only be in a position to truly grasp the proper meaning of communion ecclesiology if, based on the Scriptures, we can (a) comprehend what is precisely meant by *koinonia*, (b) establish a connection between *koinonia* and church and (c) examine how the New Testament church lived out this *koinonia*. And it is to these three points that this article now turns.

### **Meaning of *Koinonia***

Etymologically, the word *koinonia* basically signifies a common share that a person may enjoy with someone in something.<sup>9</sup> That is, *koinonia* denotes something that is held in common from which all can benefit and in which all can share. The opposite of *koinonia* is the word *idion* [ἴδιον], which signifies that which is private and therefore cannot be participated in and enjoyed by all. For this reason, in wanting to define the meaning of *koinonia*, New Testament scholars speak in terms of ‘participation, impartation and fellowship.’<sup>10</sup> The New Testament specifically understands *koinonia* in terms of participation in, or fellowship with, the very person and life of Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor 1:9) made possible through fellowship with the Spirit of God (cf. 2 Cor 13:13). Accordingly, *koinonia* essentially signifies the church’s intimate unity with God the Father mediated through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, this most intimate share in the life of the Godhead – which is what *koinonia* signifies – also brings about an indissoluble relationship between human persons as well. What emerges, therefore, is

both a vertical and horizontal dimension to communion. It is only in their active mutual sharing – within the ecclesial setting as will be shown – that the realisation of God’s gift of communion, amongst the faithful, can be made real on an existential and historical level. Indeed, it is these horizontal and vertical aspects, which fundamentally characterise the biblical meaning of *koinonia*. That is to say, according to the New Testament, the possibility of life-giving communion with God was made possible by the Son’s gift of the Holy Spirit to the world, but this divine gift of communion was also meant to bring the believing community closer together as well.

Now, in an attempt to further understand the meaning of communion, many theologians today formulate their theology of *koinonia* from within the context of the Trinitarian communal relations.<sup>11</sup> The theological justification for being able to presume such a correlation in the first place is centred on St John’s gospel in which Christ called for a model of communion and unity based upon the relationship between himself and his Father: “that they may all be one; *even as* [καθώς] you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (Jn 17:21). The phrase ‘even as [*kathos*]’ is significant, in that it validates the presumption that the nature of unity sought between the different Christian churches can in fact be based upon the Trinitarian communal relations.

Christian theology would claim that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in interpersonal *koinonia*, dwelling in each other through a movement of reciprocating love, yet without losing their distinctive personal attributes.<sup>12</sup> The three persons of the Holy Trinity are said to continually embrace one another in an interpenetrating communion of unimaginable and captivating love known as *perichoresis*. This perichoretic communion is central to the being of God. Already in the fourth century, St Gregory of Nyssa (b.335AD) wrote:

In the life-creating nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit there is no division, but only a continuous and inseparable communion (*koinonia*) between them... It is not possible to envisage any severance or division, such that one might think of the Son without the Father, or

separate the Spirit from the Son; but there is between them an ineffable and inconceivable communion (*koinonia*) and distinction.<sup>13</sup>

For the Holy Trinity, the diversity and uniqueness of each divine person does not destroy their unity but on the contrary enhances it. Even though there are three entirely different ways that God's undivided and identical life exists, there continues, nevertheless, to be an unbreakable unity and communion, since there is a harmonious and permanent unity of will, action and life within the Godhead. This is possible because their *koinonia* is ultimately the expression of their unitive love, which thereby intensifies, on a deeper level, the mystery of their communion. It is this paradigm of *koinonia*, which acts as the model *par excellence* for safeguarding both the unity of the churches and their diversity.

More particularly, basing itself on this communal approach, theological reflection upon the *ekklesia* has also underscored not only the church's relationship to the Holy Trinity but also to the Eucharist. Accordingly, whilst the former Trinitarian approach highlights the inextricable link between the communal being of the church and the Trinitarian communal relations, the latter places special emphasis upon the celebration of the Eucharist as the unique context in which the church's communion with God can be most perfectly expressed. Chief amongst the proponents of the Trinitarian approach to communion ecclesiology today has been Harkianakis<sup>14</sup> whilst that of the eucharistic approach can especially be seen in the works of Zizioulas.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this hallmark of Orthodox ecclesiology, namely the understanding of communion ecclesiology in relation to the Trinity and the Eucharist, has contributed immensely to an understanding of the *ekklesia* as the potentiality, but at the same time proleptic actualisation of God's communion with the faithful, together with the unity between God's people and the entire created *cosmos*.<sup>16</sup>

### **Connection between *Koinonia* and *Ekklesia***

Having briefly defined the meaning of *koinonia*, its theological justification for understanding the church must now be examined. Now, the New

Testament word for church – *ekklesia* – itself betrays a communal connotation, since the term signifies being called together by God to form an assembly of his chosen people.<sup>17</sup> Coming from the Greek verb to ‘call out’ (ἐκ - καλέω), *ekklesia* thereby denotes a select gathering which has come together and been called towards unity as the result of a call or invitation by God.<sup>18</sup> And so, in calling themselves an *ekklesia* – and, more particularly ‘the church of God in Jesus Christ’ (cf. Acts 20:28; 1Cor 1:2) – the early Christian community understood themselves to be a people gathered and headed by God in Jesus Christ. That is – and this is a significant point – it was only in their conviction that God was the One summoning them, that the early Christian community could claim to be the *ekklesia* of God.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, from the very beginning, the church was understood to be a communal event where God was the One who was responsible for gathering his people in order to communicate to them everything that He was and had.<sup>20</sup>

Now, if the only mention of the word *ekklesia* in the Gospels is considered – namely, in Matthew – it becomes clear immediately that the church is a gathering of people called by God to be in communion with Christ. Immediately after the confession of faith by Peter in response to Jesus’ question, ‘who do you say that I am?’, Jesus said, ‘you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it’ (Mt 16:18). This carefully constructed pericope links the person of Jesus, as revealed by Peter in response to Jesus’ question, to the church. One is able to conclude easily from this juxtaposition between the confession of faith in Jesus by Peter, and the building up of the church by Christ, that there can be no church without Christ, since the church, according to Matthew is in Christ and Christ is in his church.<sup>21</sup> And so, it is only within the context of communion with Christ that the church’s deepest nature can be unequivocally and definitively revealed.

Furthermore, it could also be said that only in relation to the church, can Christ be truly experienced and properly understood, since the church is also the extension and fullness of Christ. The letter to the Ephesians (and for that matter the letter to the Colossians) clearly states that the church is ‘the fullness [πλήρωμα] of him who fills all in all’ (Eph 1:23).

In this sense, there can be no Christ today without the church. Invariably, the church is depicted as the extension and complement of Jesus Christ. And so, the inextricable link between Christ and the *ekklesia* can again be discerned. The witness of the Scriptures regarding the church's intimate communion with Christ, and Christ's intimate communion with the church is very clear on this: for example, Jesus is the bridegroom, the church is the bride; Jesus is the head, the church is the body; Jesus is the new Adam, the church is the new Eve; Jesus is the cornerstone, the church is the building blocks, Jesus is the vine, the church is the branches. Church and Christ go together, and one cannot be thought of apart from the other.

It is for this reason that the early patristic tradition spoke of the church in terms of *koinonia*. To quote from St John Chrysostom (d. 407AD), who made a clear connection between *koinonia* and *ekklesia*: 'Ekklesia', he wrote, 'means assembly. It is not a name of separation but a name of unity and concord.'<sup>22</sup> Or, to use a well-known phrase from St Augustine: the whole Christ is Jesus and his body - namely, the church - [*totus Christus, caput et corpus*]. And so, the biblical and patristic traditions are very clear in their vision of the church - namely, a gathering headed by, and inextricably conjoined to, Christ. Clearly, in the patristic tradition, Christ could not be thought of apart from being joined, or in communion with the church, but the church could also not be thought of apart from or in communion with Christ. Undoubtedly, this goes to show the importance that the church, from the time of the New Testament period, attached to the term *koinonia* believing that this binding relation formed the necessary condition for its existence.

A comprehensive understanding of the communal nature of the church in the Scriptures - especially to see also how *koinonia* was lived out - also dictates an assessment of the Holy Spirit's role in the constitution of the church. The pneumatological foundation of the church must be seen together with the christological, since the Scriptures clearly reveal a real reciprocity between the Son and Spirit in the work of salvation.<sup>23</sup> Whilst Christ became incarnate and in this way gave the church its 'body', it was the Spirit who breathed life into this body thereby 'animating' (i.e., giving it a spiritual or Spirit-filled existence) and preparing it for its universal

mission in the world. That is to say, the church must also be seen as a product of the Holy Spirit who constituted it as the historical gathering of Jesus and leads it, in Christ, to a communion with God the Father. Consequently, it is only through the Spirit that the church can exist as the sacrament of salvation offering to the faithful a real encounter with Christ in history.

### ***Koinonia Lived Out***

This Spirit-filled communal being of the church, together with the daily living out of that *koinonia*, is most clearly indicated in the second chapter of the book of Acts which describes the permanent out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the ecclesial gathering. Undoubtedly, for the author of Acts, the descent of the Spirit onto the apostolic gathering in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:5) marked a radically new phase for the church of God. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit is depicted as an extraordinary gift bursting forth into the ecclesial gathering, thereby introducing a pneumatological dimension to the church and firmly establishing, in this way, the communal mode of the church's existence. On the other hand, the effects of this divine presence are discerned in the overwhelming fellowship within the members of the ecclesial community, whose missionary zeal would subsequently take them to the ends of the earth in order to give witness to the priceless treasure of Christianity to the entire world.

The communal dimension of the first Christian community is specifically captured by the author of Acts in his use of the term *omothymadon* [ὁμοθυμαδόν] (Acts 2:46); the term – unfortunately usually translated simply by the word ‘together’ – implies something profoundly deeper than simply being in an identical physical locality. Essentially, *omothymadon* signifies a profound harmonious unity, which when applied to the ecclesial assembly, implied their unbreakable solidarity since they were all ‘of one mind and unanimous desire’. It follows, therefore, that the ‘togetherness’ of the church on the day of Pentecost, according to St Luke’s account, was so intimate that their mind, soul, desire and action were inseparably one and homologous.<sup>24</sup> Far from being a unanimity simply resulting from being ‘together’ in the same place at the same time, their



harmonious unity was one which was actualised by the Spirit's bestowal of the gift of profound fellowship or communion upon the church, resulting in an indissoluble concord within the believers of the community.<sup>25</sup> Without doubt, therefore, for Luke-Acts the source of such fellowship was the presence of the Holy Spirit who had initiated a most profound communal mode of existence within the ecclesial community on the day of Pentecost.

The communal nature of the church is evidenced concretely in four actions which are depicted in Acts 2:42-47. The text reads as follows: 'They devoted themselves [ἤσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες] to the apostles' teaching and fellowship [τῇ κοινωνίᾳ], to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42).<sup>26</sup> Luke's use of the present participial form of the verb προσκαρτερεῖν<sup>27</sup> is significant in that it emphasised the church's *ongoing* persistence to adhere firmly to, and put into practice, on a daily basis, (1) the apostolic proclamation, (2) the celebration of the Lord's Supper, (3) fellowship and (4) corporate prayer. Specifically, the concrete expressions of fellowship or communion would have included a willingness for the ecclesial gathering to deepen the bonds they had with one another, which would have also been expressed in the material collection of gifts and money for distribution to the poor and those in need. Beyond this, however, their fellowship would have been made manifest in their desire and passion to share with others their faith in Jesus as the Christ.<sup>28</sup> From this it is clear that St Luke was most concerned to underscore the depth of the early church's communal life.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed such an understanding of *koinonia*, in terms of having 'everything in common' corresponds to Luke's description of the New Testament community only two verses later: 'all who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need' (Acts 2:44-45). This again emphasises in the strongest of ways, the communal life of the early church. Far from being concerned with any form of personal piety or individual progress in the virtues, the Christian experience fundamentally presumed a thirst for an other-centred manner of life free from corruption – namely, a life in communion with Christ – made possible by the Holy Spirit. In this state, all within the church were regarded as sisters and brothers; one family firmly knit together. It was precisely for

this reason that service towards the ‘other’ was not only presumed but was seen as a necessary condition of what it meant to be a member of the ‘church’. And, this entirely new way of life was only possible insofar as the community continued to dwell and abide in the life of God made possible in Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God.

### **Concluding Remarks**

From all the above, it has become clear that the New Testament vision of the church was, undoubtedly, a gathering of believers called from above to be fundamentally in communion with Christ leading them to the Father by the Holy Spirit. Far from being depicted as a merely human institution, the New Testament church marked an entirely new reality whose nature was indeed defined not only by its *koinonia* with God but also by its communion between its members. Rooted in the solidarity that found its communion with Christ and the finality of his work, the early Christian *ekklesia* was not a gathering simply coming together in a casual or passing manner, sharing, for example common religious ideas. Rather, the church gathered in a radically ‘new’ way, transformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit from being a group of detached individuals into a single harmoniously united organism.

Life in the church was now realised as communion and not autonomous self-existence. Accordingly, in understanding the church from the perspective of *koinonia*, it becomes possible to appreciate its unique potential of salvation from the impasse of isolationism and alienation. The presupposition of communion enables the church to be the unique means of radical transformation from an ‘individually-centred’ culture of worldly success imposed upon society by consumerism, to one where the person is defined principally in terms of this existential event of communion. In the church, the entire world can share in God’s communal mode of existence, which includes freedom – that is, being free from the bounds of death; love – that is, ceasing to draw one’s existence from their individuality which is corrupt and mortal; but instead seeking the freedom of personal relationships – a life as a communion of love.

This has led to a fundamental understanding of the church in terms of communion. Consequently, from the above, it would be no overstatement to presume that the very being of the church experienced as communion could be considered as a foundational ecclesiological article of faith [*articulus fidei standis et cadendis ecclesiae*] which contributes in a positive way to the understanding of the nature and function of the church. And so, in touching on the very essence of the church, *koinonia* could thus be characterised as the very heart of all ecclesiology.



NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. José Comblin, *The People of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), Clare Watkins, ‘Objecting to *Koinonia*: The Question of Christian Discipleship Today – And Why Communion is not the Answer’, *Louvain Studies* 28(2003): 326-343. Also, Nicholas Healy, ‘Communion Ecclesiology: A Cautionary Note’, *Pro Ecclesia* 4(1995): 442-453.
- <sup>2</sup> John Karmiris, *The Orthodox Dogmatical Teaching on the Church* [in Greek] (Athens, 1964).
- <sup>3</sup> Stylianos Harkianakis, *The Infallibility of the Church in Orthodox Ecclesiology*, trans. Philip Kariatlis (Sydney: ATF Press, St Andrew’s Orthodox Press, 2008).
- <sup>4</sup> John Zizioulas, *Eucharist Bishop Church*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001).
- <sup>5</sup> In his insightful survey study, Dulles summarised the major literature available in communion ecclesiology. He correctly noted that in the earlier part of the 20th century certain theologians – such as Rudolph Sohm and Emil Brunner [but before them, Schleiermacher] influenced by the classic works of Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887 [*Community and Society* (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1963)] and Charles Cooley, *Social Organisation* (NY: Schoken Books, 1909) and *Introductory Sociology* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1933) – began to show a certain affinity for the idea of the church as communion since such a theology emphasised more the historical or ethical dimension of the church and less its juridical or institutional aspects. Moreover, it saw the church predominantly as a human society constituted solely by human persons. In reaction to this, Roman Catholic theology, especially Yves Congar and Jerome Hamer would make communion central to their ecclesiology but see it both from its horizontal and vertical aspects. In this way, they were able

to argue for a theological meaning of communion beyond its sociological or secular usage. Cf. Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, expanded edition (NY: Image Books, 2002), 39-54.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Harding Meyer, *That All May Be One: Perceptions and Models of Ecumenicity*, trans. William G. Rusch (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 67-70.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Acts 20:28; 1Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13.

<sup>8</sup> Locating the model of *koinonia* for the church from within the Trinitarian communal relations is characteristically an Orthodox approach to communion ecclesiology. However, that is not to say that such an approach does not appear in the theology of other Christian churches. For example, in a recent article tracing the emergence of communion ecclesiology in Roman Catholic thought, Lennan suggested that Roman Catholic communion ecclesiology, especially as formulated by Kasper, sees the roots of this understanding of the church in God's Trinitarian life. Cf. Richard Lennan, 'Communion Ecclesiology: Foundations, Critiques and Affirmations', *Pacifica* 20(2007): 28. Kasper wrote: 'The communion of the church is prefigured, made possible and sustained by the communion of the Trinity. Ultimately, as the council says, echoing Cyprian, the martyr bishop, it is a participation in the Trinitarian communion itself.' Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 152.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Henry George Liddel and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Revised by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. with new supplement added (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 968.

<sup>10</sup> F. Hauck, 'Koinos', in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT), ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981) 3:798. Cf. Heinrich Seesemann, *Der Begriff Κοινωνία im Neuen Testament* (Geiben, 1933), 24 in which *koinonia* signified 1. *Mitteilsamkeit* (generosity – that is the act of sharing with someone or contributing to something) Eg: 2 Cor 9:13, Rom 15:26 and Heb 13:16; 2. *Anteilhaben* (participation or having a part in something) Eg 1Cor 1:9, 1Cor 10:16, 2 Cor 8:4, Phil 1:5, Phil 2:1, Phil 3:10 and Philem 6 and 3. *Gemeinschaft* (community) Eg: Gal 2:9, Acts 2:42 and 1Jn 1:3,6,7.

<sup>11</sup> Stylianos Harkianakis, 'Die Trinitätslehre Gregors von Nazianz', *Kleronomia*, 1(1969): 83-102 and John Zizioulas, 'The Church as Communion', *Sourozh* 53(2002): 3.

<sup>12</sup> St John Damascus (b. 676) would claim that the Three are "united yet not confused, distinct yet not divided". *Exposition on the Orthodox Faith*, 1.8.

<sup>13</sup> *On the difference between Essence and Hypostasis*, 4, PG 32: 332A.

- <sup>14</sup> Harkianakis (Archbishop Stylianos of Australia), for example, wrote: ‘Just as the principle and prototype of Church unity is depicted as the inner Trinitarian life of God, it follows that the church and humanity called to be part of her must become already on this earth a representation, a single ‘imaging’ of the life of the Trinity.’ Stylianos Harkianakis, ‘The Ecclesiology of Vatican II’, *Diakonia* 2.3(1967): 246.
- <sup>15</sup> Zizioulas (Metropolitan John of Pergamum) wrote: ‘The point of altogether importance is that it was not just any assembly, but strictly speaking, the *eucharistic assembly* that was called *ekklesia* of ‘church.’ John Zizioulas, *Eucharist Bishop Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline: Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001), 46. Eucharistic ecclesiology was first developed by Afanassieff and then furthered in different ways by Schmemmann, Zizioulas and others.
- <sup>16</sup> Similar to this Doyle wrote: ‘communion ecclesiology is a content and a process, a vision and a summons to higher good.’ Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Note the similarity and linguistic proximity between ‘ἐκκλησία’ [church] and ‘ἐκλεκτοί’ [chosen ones].
- <sup>18</sup> According to St Cyril of Jerusalem, the early Christians came to call themselves *ekklesia* ‘because it called to and assembled together all people [ἐκκλησία δὲ καλεῖται φερωνύμως, διὰ τὸ πάντας ἐκκαλεῖσθαι καὶ ὁμοῦ συνάγειν].’ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, 18, 24.
- <sup>19</sup> The critical scholarship regarding the origins of the early Christian community simply as an offshoot of Judaism which had been influenced by the Hellenistic culture of the time and therefore developed into an entirely new religious society, whilst legitimate to a certain extent, nonetheless fails to take into account the constitutive role of Christ and the Spirit in the formation, consolidation and mobilisation of the ‘church of God.’
- <sup>20</sup> Furthermore, this communal dimension of the church is also explicitly exemplified by the English word, *church*, which is derived from the Greek word *kyriakos* meaning ‘belonging to the Lord’. Therefore the term ‘church’ also underscores the assembly’s specific connection to the Lord since it is assembled by him and belongs to him.
- <sup>21</sup> On writing about the Matthean church, Raymond Brown noted that the author of the gospel most probably would have insisted on making the connection between Christ and the church instantly recognizable so as to guard against any tendency on behalf of the community to view themselves apart from

- Christ: 'All this implies that the one evangelist [i.e., Matthew] to use the word 'church' and to speak of Jesus' building or founding the church understood the possibility that the church might become a self-sufficient entity... To counteract that danger, Matthew has insisted that the church should rule not only in the name of Jesus but also in the spirit of Jesus.' Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches The Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 138.
- <sup>22</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 1.1.
- <sup>23</sup> The New Testament, for example describes the constitutive role of the Holy Spirit in the conception of Christ (Luke), His baptism (Mark) and resurrection (Rom 1:4; 8:11). And in John, the Holy Spirit is given not only to Christ "without measure" (Jn 3:34) but also to the faithful enabling them to become sons and daughters by fellowship with Jesus Christ (Rom 5:15; 6:3-5).
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. Bauers who translated this word as 'with one mind or purpose or impulse.' Walter Bauers, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 566.
- <sup>25</sup> Besides, many Orthodox liturgical texts testify to the fact that it was the work of the Holy Spirit to draw humanity together into communion in contradistinction, for example with the division of the people at the tower of Babel (Gen 11:7). This particular aspect of the Holy Spirit's work is specifically mentioned in the hymnal tradition of the feast of Pentecost expressing it in the following way: 'when the Most High descended and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity.' (*Kontakion* of Pentecost).
- <sup>26</sup> Similar summaries found elsewhere in Acts which depict the common life are: Acts 4:32-5; 5:12-16.
- <sup>27</sup> Interestingly, that the tense of all the finite verbs in verses 42-27 is imperfect [and in the case of the participles, in the present] cannot be accidental but all point to the Spirit's dynamic presence in the church. Not only was the gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the church but its continued action necessitated a continued response which included the faithful of the community devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles [*προσκαρτεροῦντες*] and to the many signs which were being done by the apostles. As a result of this communal mode of existence, the members of the church in Acts began voluntarily to sell on their possessions [*ἐπίπρασκον*] (Acts 2:45) and to distribute them amongst those in need so as to have all things in common [*εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ*] (Acts 2:44). Furthermore, they continued to break bread [*κλῶντες*] (Acts 2:46) and eat together in their homes and to offer praise to God [*αἰνοῦντες*] (Acts 2:47) so that many Christians were added to the church thereby bringing about their salvation [*σωζομένους*] (Acts 2:47).

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- <sup>28</sup> Richard Lennan, *Risking the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 90.
- <sup>29</sup> It is important to note that, contrary to the critics of communion ecclesiology who claim it lacks a focus on mission, Acts 2 clearly underscores the necessity for outward looking mission.

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