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Koinonia in Bilateral Dialogues

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Abstract. *The present study gives an outline on how bilateral dialogues have used the notion of koinonia in relation to ecclesiology with a view to full visible Eucharistic fellowship. It is not so much an inquiry on the relation between modern communion ecclesiology, on the one hand, and scriptural and patristic visions of ecclesial unity, on the other. However, this comparison remains an important factor in the development of the present study. Its main purpose is to see which were the starting points and the conclusions of the bilateral dialogues in relation to koinonia and how close have churches come in the process of building consensus around the notion.*

Keywords: Koinonia, Bilateral Dialogues, Ecclesial Unity, Eucharist.

Ecclesial unity has always been a Christian focus, but the form in which this attention was expressed varied greatly. There is an impression that ecclesiology is a modern theological field not previously explored. The reality is, however, a bit more nuanced. It is true that in the first centuries Church unity, being lived by all Christians, did not require an extensive doctrinal definition. It was enough to declare that there is *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* Church. Why should one ponder upon a thing that came naturally to all? Yet, it is also apparent that, from its beginnings, Christianity worked to maintain its ecclesial cohesion. From the Apostolic age on, schismatic teachings had to be confronted by the communities and by the whole Church. In other words, throughout Church history, unity required testimony and dialogue, self-denial and martyrdom. It may be said that, because of the context in which the churches find themselves nowadays, the ecclesiological discourse moved from the acknowledgement of what prevents unity, to the recognition of what can bring it.

In today's ecumenical context, the attempt to describe the unity of the Church in a way that would suit both the local identity and the universal cohesion, brought bilateral and multilateral dialogues to a communion ecclesiology¹. However, the connotations of the concept have become, at a certain level, ambiguous. It is difficult to see what exactly does communion ecclesiology and *koinonia* imply for all ecumenical partners. In this respect, coming closer to an answer pushes one to ask: *How has 'koinonia' and its related concept of 'communion' been developed to date in ecumenical dialogues, and where might they be strengthened in understanding?* Many of the recent ecumenical agreements and convergence documents define unity by appealing to the biblical notion of *koinonia*. The ecumenical success of this ecclesiological approach is due to the notion itself.

1. Koinonia, a flexible concept

¹ In the present study "communion-ecclesiology" and "koinonia-ecclesiology" are considered synonymous. Theologians have hinted that the usage of the two notions should be nuanced. This, however, lies outside the scope of the following study. For a presentation of the problem cf Mark Edward Chapman, *Unity as Koinonia: the Ecclesiology of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1993 (dissertation)*, vol. 1, Washington D.C., 1996, p. 1-6.

Koinonia has a frequent occurrence in the New Testament – it appears over sixty four times², and has a high semantic flexibility³. Analysing the scriptural corpus, the vast majority of scholars have highlighted particularly the relational side of the concept⁴. Thus, communion has the meaning of: **a.** partaking in a thing (*1 Tim* 5: 22; *Mt* 23: 30-31; *1 Co* 1: 9; *2 Ptr* 1: 4; *Ef* 3: 6; 2: 19), **b.** partaking in the life, sufferings and ministry of Christ (*2 Co* 1: 7; *1 Ptr* 5: 1; *Ga* 2: 9), **c.** partaking in the mission of the Church (*Rm* 12: 13; 15: 26; *2 Co* 8: 23; *Flp* 4: 14-15; *Evr* 10: 23, 33; 13: 16; *Ga* 6: 6), **d.** following a moral code that differentiates one from the world (*2 In* 2; *Ap* 18: 4), **e.** being gifted by the Spirit (*FA* 2: 42; 4: 42), respectively **f.** staying in unity and continuity with the Apostolic teachings and life (*FA* 2: 42). All of the connotations mentioned by scholars hint (1) an activity and (2) a transformation imposed by it. The text from *1 Co* 10: 16-17 adds to the ecclesiological relevance of the term. The passage speaks about a communion that is beyond a covenant or a participation; it talks about an incorporation in Christ.

If the scriptural association between *ekklelesia* and *koinonia* can be contested by scholars⁵, the ecclesiological relevance of the notion is recommended, secondly, by its patristic incidence⁶. Significant theologians, including Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard and John D. Zizioulas, have proved this extensively in their works⁷. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, to give only one example, describes the Church as a communion with Christ, in the Spirit⁸.

2. Methodology

The present study gives an outline on how bilateral dialogues have used the notion of *koinonia* in relation to ecclesiology with a view to full visible Eucharistic

² John Reuman, "Koinonia in Scripture: A Survey of Biblical Texts," in Thomas F. Best, Ghunter Gassmann (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia: Official Report of the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1994, p. 38-69.

³ For a comparison between the meaning of communion in the Holy Scriptures and in the Greco-Roman world cf. John. Y. Campbell, "Koinonia and its cognates in the New Testament", in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LI (1932), no. 4, p. 352-380. For a more systematic perspective cf. Jack Suggs, "Koinonia in the New Testament", in *Mid-Stream. An Ecumenical Journal*, vol. 23 (1984), no. 4 (October), p. 351-362. Cf. also Betty Hane Lillie, "Koinonia in the New Testament: Integral Dynamic of the Christian Life", in *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies*, XXVIII (2008), p. 55-66.

⁴ Cf. Jeffrey Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament", in: *Concordia Journal*, vol. 38 (2012), no. 1, p. 23-32 and Thomas A. Rand, "A Call to Koinonia: A Rhetorical Analysis of Galatians 5: 25-6:10", in *Proceedings: Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies*, XV (1995), p. 79-92.

⁵ Cf. in comparison J. Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," p. 30-31 and "Philip Kariatlis, "Affirming Koinonia ecclesiology: An Orthodox Perspective", in *Phronema*, XXXVIII (2012), no. 1, p. 23-32.

⁶ Cf. Nicholas Lossky (ed.) et. al., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva, WCC Publications, 2002, p. 646-652.

⁷ Cf. Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 2001. John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, Brookline, Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001.

⁸ Cf. Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 123-126.

fellowship. For methodological reasons the study was focused on three bilateral dialogues: the Lutheran-Catholic, the Anglican-Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox-Catholic dialogues. The grounds for such a choice are both historical and theological. From a historical standpoint, these were the first official bilateral discussions to use the notion in recent times and because of them *koinonia* came to be taken up by other contemporary dialogues. The use of the concept was not directed towards convincing *the other*, but played a role in the life of each partner in dialogue. From a theological perspective, the three dialogues give an overview of what communion is and may become in the future.

3. *Koinonia* in Ecumenical Bilateral Dialogues

There is a tendency among Christian confessions to describe themselves as “communion”⁹. The importance of this transformation can be related to the frequency in which the notion occurs in bilateral dialogues. In recent years, regardless of the purpose of the theological debate or of the agreements the commissions came to, the concept of *koinonia* was implied. But, exactly because the term has been so widely used, it has also gained in ambiguity. It has become difficult to separate what is transitional and what is transversal, what is contextual and what can play a role in the wider ecclesiological debate. Moreover, the span of meanings generated by constant reinterpretations is not balanced by an equal acceptance of these connotations in Orthodox and Reformation theologies, for example. If the Church can be depicted as a communion, the term must show dogmatic precision. This calls for a reverse process, as one must start from the usage of *koinonia* in bilateral conversations in order to find out what it may mean for the ecclesiological self-understanding of the communions in dialogue.

4. The Lutheran – Roman-Catholic dialogue

At the international level, the first connection between *koinonia* and Church unity was made by the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue¹⁰. This dialogue, initiated in

⁹ From where a vast majority of churches previously focused on defining themselves in terms of local separated congregations, today there is a tendency to understand the church in terms of a wider, universal, perspective. A good example is the Lutheran World Federation. Since its foundation in 1947, the necessity of clarifying the relation between local communities became stringent. Slowly, in the Lutheran ecclesiological debate an antithesis between the local and universal dimensions of the Church came at surface (1963 – Helsinki, 1973 – Dar-es-Salaam, 1977 – Evian). Finally, at the 1990 Curitiba assembly, the Lutheran Federation defined itself as a “communion of churches”, highlighting the universal dimension of the Church – Cf. Kjel Nordstokke, “The ecclesiological self-understanding of the Lutheran Federation: from association to communion of Churches,” in *Ecumenical Review*, VII (1992), no. 4, p. 478-490. See also: Viggo Mortensen (coord.) et. al., *From Federation to Communion: The History of the Lutheran World Federation*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997, p. 216-245. It is, however, important to mention that the Lutheran ecclesiology does not require an *organic unity*, but a *reconciled diversity*.

¹⁰ Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, London, SCM Press, 2012, p. 49-52, considers *koinonia* to be an intrinsic notion in the bilateral conversations between the Orthodox and the Old Catholics from the 19th century. However, the emergence of the concept, as we know it today, depends of the Malta Report from 1972.

1967, has gone through four phases so far – it is now in the fifth stage¹¹ – and has produced a series of documents with a significant impact upon ecumenical theology¹². At first, communion played a secondary role and was used in describing the Eucharistic gathering of the community. The 1972 *Malta Report* briefly affirmed that the Eucharistic fellowship is a sign of ecclesial unity¹³. Using this subtle construction, the commission seemed to give little value to *koinonia*, since they distinguished it from Church unity in itself. In other words, the text gives the sense that the Eucharist is related to Church's cohesion, without determining it.

Things took a shift in 1978, when the second document was released. Christology remained central in defining communion, yet a Trinitarian orientation and a practical relevance were considered as well. Thus, the 1978 agreement starts by affirming Christ's redemptive sacrifice, through which humanity is brought into the intimacy of God¹⁴. Jesus's kenotic act is continued in the service of the Church, where, by receiving the Eucharist, the faithful lives a closeness to Christ that is "akin to the communion of the Son with the Father."¹⁵ The parallel between the kinship humans have with Christ and the Son has with the Father, shows a great progress in *koinonia* ecclesiology, because it recognizes Jesus as the Way towards human transformation and Church's communion¹⁶. Seen from a different angle, the

¹¹ *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2013, is the only document published so far in this fifth stage of dialogue.

¹² The first phase of the dialogue, between 1967 and 1972, was highlighted by the Malta Report from 1972: *The Gospel and the Church*. The second stage of the conversation, from 1973 to 1984, came to a wide consensus on more than one problem through: 1978 – *The Eucharist*, 1980 – *All Under One Christ*, 1980 – *Ways to Community*, 1981 – *The Ministry in the Church*, 1983 – *Martin Luther – Witness to Christ* and 1984 – *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*. The third period of the dialogue, 1986-1993, furthers the ecclesiological debates on the *Church and Justification* – 1993, while the fourth stage, 1995-2006, after affirming the existence of a differentiated consensus between the two traditions (*Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* -1999), considered the relation between apostolicity and the Church (*The Apostolicity of the Church* – 2006). From 2011 onwards, the conversation is focused on the understanding and recognition of baptism.

¹³ *Report of the Joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic Study Commission on "The Gospel and the Church" (Malta Report)*, § 68-72 – in Harding Meyer, Lukas Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement I. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. 1972-1982*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2007, p. 184-185: "68. Fellowship in Eucharistic celebration is an essential sign of church unity.41 Therefore, striving for altar fellowship is central for all those who seek the unity of the church [...] 71. Although there are considerable differences of opinion on this matter [the fellowship in Eucharist, subl. ns.] in the Catholic Church it is pointed out on Catholic side that there is no exclusive identity between the one church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. This one church of Christ is actualized in an analogous manner also in other churches. That also means that the unity of the Roman Catholic Church is not perfect but that it strives toward the perfect unity of the church. In this sense the eucharistic celebration in the Catholic church also suffers from imperfection. It will become the perfect sign of the unity of the church only when all those who through baptism have been invited in principle to the table of the Lord and are able in reality to partake."

¹⁴ *Final Report of the Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission*, 1978, § 6 p. 193.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, § 19, p. 197.

¹⁶ This brought the dialogue closer to the Christological understanding of the Holy Fathers. See, for example, Saint Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* 8, 18 (PG 32, col. 100 BC).

text works a transition from God's *oikonomia* – Christ gives Himself for the life of the world; to God's *theologia*. This movement from *oikonomia* to *theologia* is interesting¹⁷, especially because it is doubled by a transition from the personal level of encountering Jesus, to a communitarian one¹⁸. If in 1972 ecclesial unity was indicated by chalice fellowship, in 1978 it refers to *perichoresis* and is set up as a communion¹⁹.

1980 marked a third enlargement of *koinonia* theology in the Catholic-Lutheran discussions. *Ways to community* used the concept to describe the ecclesial realities of the two traditions. The text portrayed Church's cohesion as a result of shared responsibility²⁰ and, consequently, the dynamic aspect of communion was stressed. In other words, the gift of *koinonia* could grow in evidence due to human efforts²¹. It was on this double foundation, the unity already given in the Spirit and the work to multiply it that a precision *ad extra* was gained. Thus, the document states that Church communion is characterized by joint service in preaching the word, in celebration and in diaconal activities²². This observation connected the Church's visibility in mission to its inner unity. Not without sense, the same report speaks about degrees of communion and levels of unity²³, as a statement to the world of the Church's essence.

The 1984 agreement: *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, made a decisive step towards adopting *koinonia* ecclesiology. Especially two things are noticeable. On the one hand, the Lutheran theologians reassessed the mystery of the Church in light of unity in faith, Eucharistic fellowship and episcopate²⁴. Here, the effort to overcome the Church-Gospel antithesis was evident and communion was presented as a harmony between the word and the institutional aspects of the Church. Unfortunately, the language of the text introduced the idea that the Church is an instrument²⁵ and this potentially

¹⁷ It is interesting to see in comparison the text of this dialogue with the Pentecostal-Catholic dialogue from 1989: *Perspectives on Koinonia*. The same connections seem to be put forward in both documents.

¹⁸ *Final Report of the Joint Roman Catholic-Lutheran Commission*, 1978, § 26-28, p. 198.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, § 72-73, p. 210.

²⁰ *Ways to community*, 1980, § 56-58, in H. Meyer, L. Vischer (eds.), *Growth in Agreement I...*, p. 226.

²¹ *Ibidem*, § 76, p. 231.

²² *Ibidem*, § 61-72, p. 227-230.

²³ *Ibidem*, § 54, p. 225: "In such an open growing together we can and should set our eyes on intermediate goals and keep on re-examining the methods of advance. By moving in this way from an incomplete to a more and more complete communion, we shall be able to take account of a wide variety of different historical, theological and regional situations." For the Orthodox standpoint the idea of deficient communion will remain ambiguous and problematic.

²⁴ *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, 1984, § 49 – in Jeffrey Gros (ed.) et. al., *Growth in Agreement II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. 1982-1998*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2000, p. 453-454.

²⁵ *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, § 85, p. 464: "At the same time it becomes clear why on the Catholic side one speaks today of the church as the «sacrament». The Lutheran tradition is not yet very familiar with this though, and it is often inclined to criticize it. But its intention should be acceptable for Lutherans: as the body of Christ and «koinonia» of the Holy Spirit, the church is the sign and instrument of God's grace, an instrument that of itself can do nothing. The church lives by the word as it lives by the sacraments and at the

diminished the reception of the dialogue in the ecumenical landscape. On the other hand, the Catholic theologians rethought the significance of local structures, declaring that in its nature the Church is a *koinonia* of local communities²⁶, which live their indivisibility in conciliarity²⁷. The impact this document had must be correlated with the bishops' synod from the following year (1985), which declared that communion ecclesiology was inspired by Vatican II. However, due to its ambiguities and since it tried to move from "an overall agreement to an agreement on the whole"²⁸, the 1984 document was not often considered by other traditions.

Koinonia played again a key role in the document *Church and Justification* signed by Catholics and Lutherans in 1993. Besides synthesizing prior reflections on communion, the report developed new insights. For instance, it puts forward the idea that the unity of the Church is rooted in the Trinitarian *perichoresis*, and that the Holy Spirit creates both types of communion²⁹. The joint Catholic-Lutheran Commission had not insisted on how the Holy Spirit sustains the ecclesial *koinonia*, but it recognized its veracity in the preaching act, in baptism and in the Eucharist³⁰. Therefore, a particular tension between the already present communion and its final fulfilment in the Spirit became obvious. The gift of faith empowers the entire community and each person to a hopeful expectation of the *eschaton*. *Koinonia* was understood, here, as 'part of the already', and 'not yet' dialectic³¹. In the same document, communion takes place in the world in concrete contexts³² and at different levels³³.

During the Catholic-Lutheran conversation period, the meaning of *koinonia* was constantly enriched. If in the beginnings the notion hinted at a horizontal unity proven by Eucharistic fellowship, eventually it came to denote a vertical unity as well. Not only that in Christ the community lives its unity, but in Him it shares in the life of the Trinity³⁴. In the same time, *koinonia* received after 1980 a

same time stands in their service." Cf. Andre Birmele, *La communion ecclésiale. Progrès œcuméniques et enjeux méthodologiques*, Paris, Les Edition Du Cerf, 2000, p. 21-22. Making the Church an instrument meant creating a new antithesis between the Church – as Body of Christ and the Church – as servant of the Word.

²⁶ *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, § 5-6, p. 445. The text highlights: "6.This view of church unity as communion (communion) goes back to the early days of Christianity. It is determinative for the early church as well as for the life and ecclesiology of the Orthodox churches. In recent times it has been particularly stressed in Catholic ecclesiology."

²⁷ *Facing Unity – Models, Forms and Phases of Catholic-Lutheran Fellowship*, § 124, p. 471.

²⁸ A. Birmele, *La communion ecclésiale*, p. 19: "Le dialogue devait essayer de passer d'un ensemble de consensus a un consensus d'ensemble."

²⁹ Cf. in comparison *Church and Justification*, 1993, § 41, 49, 61, 63 and 116 – in J. Gros, (ed.) et. al., *Growth in Agreement II*, p. 497, 499, 502 and 512.

³⁰ *Church and Justification*, § 66, p. 503.

³¹ Cf. in comparison *Church and Justification*, 1993, § 42 and 292,p. 497 and 553.

³² *Ibidem*, , § 79, p. 506.

³³ The effort of the Roman Catholic theologians to identify different ways of ministerial communion, which would facilitated the dialogue with the Reformation Churches, is noticeable. The document states that through the bishop a communion between communities is realised, while the priests live in a collegial communion. Cf. *Ibidem*, § 92-93, p. 508-509. The 2006 text that deals with the apostolicity in the Church will use the same theological pattern.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, § 63, p. 502.

pnematological nuance, forasmuch as the Holy Spirit is called agent and forwarder of it. By assuming these principles of thought, the documents subsequent to 1980 highlighted the practical and visible dimensions of *koinonia*.

5. The Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue

The Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue is the second bilateral conversation that addressed prominently communion ecclesiology³⁵. The *Final Report* of ARCIC I stated that, in drafting all documents from 1967-1981, it became clear that the notion of *koinonia* was indispensable³⁶. However, the term did not appear in the 1971 document: *Eucharistic Doctrine*³⁷, and was employed only from the 1973 agreement, when it was linked with ministry and Eucharist³⁸. From 1976 until 1981, communion was frequently brought into discussion to stress the role of authority in reaching unity³⁹. Given the similarities between the two traditions, the joint commission emphasized the relation between the bishop, jurisdiction and *koinonia*; searching to balance the importance of local communities, evident in Church's conciliarity, with that of universality, which is supported by primacy. *Authority in the Church II* affirmed that the papal primacy is a sign and instrument of communion⁴⁰, while the preceding documents spoke about the Church as being God's sign and instrument. The connection between the Church and primacy remain rather unclear, yet essential for *koinonia* ecclesiology.

It is with the 1990 document: *Church as Communion*, that communion theology comes to its fullness. Not only that the text framed a link between the four Nicene-Constantinopolitan marks of the Church and *koinonia*, but it showed clarity in defining the notion. Maybe because the commission was not interested in

³⁵ The dialogue was initiated in 1967 and has gone through three phases so far. The first ARCIC I (Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission), produced the following documents: 1971 – *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 1979 – *Eucharistic Doctrine: Elucidation*, 1973 – *Ministry and Ordination*, 1979 – *Ministry and Ordination: elucidation*, 1976 – *Authority in the Church I*, 1981 – *Authority in the Church: Elucidation*, 1981 – *Authority in the Church II*, and ended with a *Final Report* in 1981. The second stage, ARCIC II, begun in 1982 and created: 1986 – *Salvation and the Church*, 1990 – *Church as Communion*, 1993 – *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church*, 1998 – *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* and 2004 – *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. The third phase of conversation started from 2011. Alongside these documents, a second commission IARCUM (International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission) has worked on implementing the ARCIC agreements and produced a series of reports.

³⁶ *Final Report*, 1981, p. 62-63.

³⁷ The document makes short references to Eucharist fellowship. Cf. *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 1971, § 3 and 10, p. 69 and 71.

³⁸ Cf. *Ministry and Ordination*, 1973, § 3, 7, 10, 12 and 16, p. 79, 81 and 82-83.

³⁹ Cf. in comparison *Authority in the Church I*, § 5-10, 21-24; *Authority in the Church: Elucidation*, § 8; *Authority in the Church II*, § 11, 15, 17, 26-27, p. 91-93, 96-97; 103; 108-110 and 113.

⁴⁰ *Authority in the Church II*, 1981, § 11, p. 108-109: "Jus divinum in this context need not be taken to imply that the universal primacy as a permanent institution was directly founded by Jesus during his life on earth. Neither does the term mean that the universal primate is a 'source of the Church' as if Christ's salvation had to be channeled through him. Rather, he is to be the sign of the visible *koinonia* God wills for the Church and an instrument through which unity in diversity is realized. It is to a universal primate thus envisaged within the collegiality of the bishops and the *koinonia* of the whole Church that the qualification *jure divino* can be applied."

solving a particular division, *Church as Communion* draws into such an important convergence. Based on biblical images of the Church, communion had four characteristics in the 1990 agreement. (1) First, *koinonia* was transcendent. Paraphrasing the text's logic, because God initiates and sustains the Church's communion⁴¹, unity will always send to the Trinitarian mystery. This means that before creating communion, the Church receives it. It is in creation's solidarity⁴² and in Christ's self-giving love that this gift of unity becomes easy to recognise⁴³. (2) The second specificity of *koinonia* hinted towards Church's responsibility. Thus, even though unity was given in Christ, it requires personal and communal labour to be made visible in the world. The Church must respond to the sin of divisions⁴⁴ by a humble search of reconciliation⁴⁵. This second principle, of constituting communion by searching for it, has an original dimension. On the one hand, the uniqueness of every community affirms itself in pursuing communion, while, on the other hand, the power of communion reveals itself in the different communities⁴⁶. (3) Though present in previous documents, the 1990 dialogue gives greater weight to the sacramental aspect of *koinonia*⁴⁷. As in the precedent documents, *Church as Communion* invokes the nature of unity as connected with Baptism and Eucharist⁴⁸. (4) According to the Dublin agreement, the fourth characteristic of *koinonia* is its relation with apostolic succession and apostolic faith⁴⁹.

Building on the 1990 report, in 1993 the dialogue was able to take a step forward and focused on the ethical aspect of communion. The report *Life in Christ: Morals, Communion and the Church* is a unique ecumenical text to this day. If other agreements were preoccupied with describing the path towards full communion, this one was interested in how communities in communion have to act⁵⁰. Church's *koinonia* was delineated here from an eschatological stance.

The concept of communion therefore strongly influenced the Anglican-Roman Catholic conversations. Unlike the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, ARCIC started from accepting authority as an expression of *koinonia* and, from there on, it tried to display the road towards ecclesial unity. Seen in comparison, the

⁴¹ *Church as Communion*, 1990, § 6 and 22, p. 330 and 334.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 331.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, § 23, p. 334.

⁴⁴ The language sends to the ecumenical work (1948 – *Man's Disorder and God's design*) and to the ideas of *Faith and Order*. Cf., as an example, *Unity of the Church – Unity of Mankind, 1973*, in Gunther Gassman, *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*, "Faith and Order Paper," no. 159, Geneva, WCC Publications, 1993, p. 137-143.

⁴⁵ Cf. in comparison *Church as Communion*, § 1-4 and 19-24, 43, p. 329-330 and 333-334, 338.

⁴⁶ Communion is shaped here as a process. It is comparable with the construction of personal identity. See the remarks made by Paul Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology. The Church Made Whole?*, London, T&T Clark International, 2010, p. 144-148.

⁴⁷ On this aspect cf. Lorelei F. Fuchs, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology: From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality*, Cambridge, Grand Rapids, 2008, p. 314.

⁴⁸ The document from 1990 depends, here, on *Salvation and the Church – 1986*.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Church as Communion*, 1990, § 33, p. 336.

⁵⁰ For an overview of the document cf. P. Avis, *Reshaping Ecumenical Theology*, p. 169-182.

two bilateral conversations are like two sides of the same coin. They are indispensable for understanding what *koinonia* stands for in the West⁵¹. The interdependence between the Word, liturgy and *diakonia* or the relation of God's *oikonomia* and ministerial responsibility have remained themes that stir a lot of interest. Of course, many suggestions made by LARCIC must be considered in-depth and some questions remain without an answer.

6. The Eastern Orthodox – Roman-Catholic dialogue

While the Orthodox Church has used communion ecclesiology in abundance in bilateral dialogues⁵², the most original image of this notion is given by its conversation with the Roman-Catholic Church⁵³. The 1982 agreement: *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, catches in essence of all later developments on the theme. The text described *koinonia* using four marks.

Firstly, communion is pneumatological. The unity of the Church meant, for the joint commission, partaking in the life of the Holy Trinity⁵⁴ by the personal gift of the Spirit⁵⁵. Recalling a patristic doxology – *in the Spirit, through Christ, to the Father*⁵⁶, the Trinitarian *oikonomia* was not constricted to encountering the Holy Spirit and pointed towards a mobility. Therefore, in its conclusion, the text supported *koinonia*'s primacy over the community⁵⁷. Strictly speaking, each community joins the communion that precedes it and, for this reason, the Church is in an ever-lasting *epiclesis*⁵⁸.

⁵¹ However, for a more comprehensive picture two other dialogues would be worth considering. The first one, Pentecostal-Catholic, started in 1972 and came to speak in 1989 about *Perspectives on Koinonia*. The text from 1989 presents communion as a participation of the faithful in the life of the Trinity (§ 29, 70) and highlights the role of the community (Catholics), respectively of the person (Pentecostals) in creating ecclesial unity (§ 33). It is important to note the difference between the way one comes to such a *koinonia*. The Pentecostal will say that faith alone is enough, while Catholics will stress the necessity of Baptism (§ 49-50), in Jeffrey Gros (ed.) et. al., *Growth in Agreement II*, p. 735-752. The second conversation, between the Disciples of Christ and the Roman-Catholics, was initiated in 1977. In 1992 a document called *The Church as a Communion in Christ* was agreed upon. Among other things, this text links communion to the new creation and to revelation in Christ (§ 21-24) – in *Ibidem*, p. 391.

⁵² The conversation with the Anglicans is an example in this sense – see the agreements from Moscow (1973) and Dublin (1984). A second example is the dialogue with the Old Catholic – especially the text on unity in the Church from 1987. Cf. Viorel Ioniță, "The Vision of Unity in the multilateral dialogues and bilateral dialogues of the Orthodox Churches and other churches", in: *Studii Teologice*, 3rd series, III (2008), p. 7-59.

⁵³ The conversation was initiated in 1980 and produced the following documents: 1980 – *Mystery of the Church and of Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, 1987 – *Faith, Sacraments and Unity of the Church*, 1988 – *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church*, 1993 – *Uniatism: Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion* and 2007 – *Ecclesiological and canonical consequences of the sacramental nature of the Church. Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority*.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Mystery of the Church and of Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, 1982, § I, 1, p. 652.

⁵⁵ *Mystery of the Church and of Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*, § I,6,p. 653-654.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, § I,3-5, p. 654.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, § II,1,p. 654-655.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, § I,5c, p. 653.

Secondly, *koinonia* is a Eucharistic event. In the words of the document: "[...] the eternal life which God has given to the world in the event of Christ, his eternal Son, is contained in «earthen vessels». [...] the Eucharist exists as the sacrament of Christ himself."⁵⁹ This overlapping between the sacrifice of the Cross and the liturgical sacrifice, makes a great deal for Church's unity. Not only was the Eucharist juxtaposed with Christ's death and resurrection, but it became, at the same time, the founding sacrifice of ecclesial *koinonia*. A paradoxical aspect of the Church's unity is highlighted here. By the gift of His life, Christ creates the communion of the Church, but, because His sacrifice is not perceived as a past event, Christians attend the constitutive moment of their community.

The last two features of *koinonia* are the *kerygmatic* and *eschatological* aspects⁶⁰. It is worth mentioning the proximity of these two dimensions. In a certain way, their interdependence gives a basis for catholicity, as the Church must unite the entire creation and must turn down any temptation for separation⁶¹. Moreover, the Church's mission to spread the word of God and her eschatological foundation say something about the mysterious nature of the ecclesial communion. The Church, as the Body of Christ, reflects in the world God's eternity, while God's eternity intersects in the Church the time of the world.

In 2007 the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church issued a new document with great impact on communion ecclesiology. *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority* was meant to overcome ambiguities of the 1982 document⁶² and to develop, in a practical and institutional perspective, *koinonia* ecclesiology⁶³. For this reason, the *Ravenna document* focused on presenting the relation between authority and conciliarity in respect to three different levels of ecclesial existence: local, regional and universal. This alone constituted a breakthrough in the Orthodox – Roman-Catholic dialogue⁶⁴, because it retrieved the „ecumenical” model of ecclesial organization⁶⁵ and set it as *prototype* of Church's institution. By emphasising the

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, § I,1-2, p. 652.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, § II,2, p. 655.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, § III,2-4, p. 657-658.

⁶² Regarding the ambiguities of the document *Mystery of the Church and of Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* see: Dumitru Stăniloae, "Le dialogue entre l'Église orthodoxe et l'Église catholique romaine. Le document de la comission mixte de Munich", in *Romanian Orthodox Church*, III (1982), no. 12, p. 48-52.

⁶³ "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacrament Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority" § 3, in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, LII (2007), no. 1-4, p. 216: "On the basis of these common affirmations of our faith, we must now draw the ecclesiological and canonical consequences which flow from the sacramental nature of the church. Since the Eucharist, in the light of the Trinitarian mystery, constitutes the criterion of ecclesial life as a whole, how do institutional structures visibly reflect the mystery of this *koinonia*!"

⁶⁴ Cf. Sorin Șelaru, "La synodalité et l'autorité au niveau régional dans l'Église: de *Lumen Gentium* au *Document de Ravenne*", in *Irénikon*, LXXXVIII (2015), no. 2, p. 181-200.

⁶⁵ For a discussion on ecclesial organization in the first millennium see: John Erickson, "Autocephaly and Autonomy", in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, LX (2016), no. 1-2, p. 91-110.

regional level of conciliarity the Roman-Catholics came closer to the Eastern Churches, while the emphasis on universal manifestation of the Church brought the Orthodox closer to the Western world⁶⁶. Two things should be noted regarding the usage of *koinonia* in this document.

(1) *Koinonia* is rooted in the life of the Trinity, in Baptism and Eucharist⁶⁷. The Trinitarian foundation of ecclesial communion and the Eucharist expression of Church's unity are concepts belonging to the Munich document, and it comes natural that the Joint Commission starts from these aspects. However, when speaking of ecclesial communion, the document underlines Baptism and explains that all those who received Confirmation are responsible for the mission and life of the Church⁶⁸. Comparing this statement with previous affirmations, it is easy to see the effort made by the Commission to enlarge the sacramental understanding of ecclesial communion. *Koinonia* remains associated with the Eucharist, but it is no longer *reduced* to this particular *mysterion*⁶⁹. The gains of this enlargement should be consider with prudence, as there is still a long way until they become *efficient* in ecumenical dialogues. *Ravenna document* shows this in abundance. The text is ambiguous in the usage of *koinonia* and in the way it describes Church's sacramental nature. While accepting that Baptism brings one in communion with the Church, the text tells little about the ecumenical problems regarding Baptism. At another level, there is much ambiguity concerning what does „bear the conscience of the Church” mean⁷⁰. The text underlines that all members of the communion and all local communities are important for this conscience, but the practical implications are unclear. Furthermore, the documents specify that *only* bishops have a deliberate voice⁷¹ in the Church. Should „bear the conscience of the Church” be understood as an *obligation* to decide *for* the Church – in respect to bishops –, and a *freedom* to acknowledge the synod – in respect to the lay –? This would creat a wide gap between bishops and lay people, strengthening the false impression that a synod rules *over* the communion and not *with* the entire Church.

(2) Ecclesial communion requires both conciliarity and primacy. This seems the core of the whole document, the threefold structure – local, regional and universal – being an extensive affirmation of the interdependence existing between

Cf. Alexander Schmemmann, "Meaningful Storm: Some Reflections on Autocephaly, Tradition and Ecclesiology", in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, XV (1971), no. 1-2, p. 3-27.

⁶⁶ Kallistos Ware, "The Ravenna Document and the Future of the Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue," in *The Jurist*, LXIX (2009), no. 2, p. 766-786.

⁶⁷ *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacrament Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority*, § 6, p. 218.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, § 20, p. 223-224.

⁶⁹ Cf. John Behr, "The Trinitarian Being of the Church", in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, III (2003), no. 1, p. 67-88

⁷⁰ *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacrament Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority*, § 7, p. 218.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, § 25, p. 226. In comparison see John Behr, *Formarea Teologiei creștine, vol. 1: Drumul spre Niceea*, traducere de Mihail C. Neamțu, București, Editura Sophia, 2004, p. 278-279. On the principles of faith unity see: John A. McGuckin, "Eshaton and Kerygma: The Future of the Past in the Present Kairos. The Concept of Living Tradition in Orthodox Theology", in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 42 (1998), nr. 3-4, p. 225-271.

conciliarity and primacy. In some passages the coexistence of these two aspects is presented in a simplified manner that disregards the historical realities and remains theoretical⁷². Not a single reference is made to the parish and to its ecclesial significance⁷³, to give only one example. What is even more striking is the fact that the document, formulated in order to reach consensus on the problem of primacy and conciliarity, ends with questions that should have been addressed in its corpus⁷⁴. The International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church worked to overcome these difficulties and published a new document on synodality and primacy in 2016. In the meeting from Chieti, the Commission adopted the text: *Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church*⁷⁵. Unfortunately, although the document brought a significant numbers of clarification regarding the practical experience of communion, it did not solved the problems raised in the *Ravenna statement*.

A Short Conclusion Regarding the Bilateral Dialogues

Seen in comparison, the three dialogues prove how important communion ecclesiology became for bilateral encounters. The Church's unity is described in similar ways by all of these texts. Most of them will affirm a Trinitarian model as a basis for *koinonia*, for example. Yet, something remains fundamentally divergent when these conversations are read thoroughly. It is not solely about what they stress in particular, but about what they imply when using *perichoresis*, Eucharist, mission and so forth. There is a tendency to drop in the texts equivocal statements that bring two traditions closer, but yet create an obstacle elsewhere. How does the findings of the Lutheran-Catholic conversation affect the Orthodox-Catholic discussions, one may ask? When these and many more are taken into account, things tend to become complicated and *koinonia* splits into communions.

⁷² *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacrament Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority*, § 14, p. 221.

⁷³ This critique was raised by the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, "A Common Response," in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, LIV (2009), no. 1-4, p. 305.

⁷⁴ *Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacrament Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity, and Authority*, § 45, p. 232.

⁷⁵ "Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church", in *Apulia Theologica*, II (2016), no. 2, p. 301-307.