TOWARD A PARACLETIC KOINONIA: PROMOTING THE TRANSFORMATIVE RELATIONAL ASPECTS OF FELLOWSHIP ON THE INDIAN MISSION FIELD OF THE WISCONSIN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN SYNOD

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ABSTRACT

The two-fold purpose of this missiological study is first, to engage in scriptural/theological study on paracletic *koinonia* based on a reflective ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM), which is the Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), and second, to derive missiological implications for the sake of promoting transformative relational aspects of fellowship between the WELS and its partner church in India.

I recently served as a WELS missionary to India for six years, during which time I experienced the challenges of working in true partnership with the national church that had become increasingly dependent on the financial subsidy they received from WELS. Meanwhile, Covid-19 restrictions and Indian government interference hampered my ability to be physically present on the mission field I was called to serve. I began to wonder what fellowship might look like if missionaries could no longer walk side-by-side with our partners in India. I also questioned whether the relationship that existed between the two church bodies and their representatives faithfully followed the pattern established for *koinonia* in the New Testament.

In this study, then, I provide a reflective ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries in India and its relationship to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. I then used the historical-grammatical-exegetical hermeneutic approach for a theological reflection on the theme of *koinonia* throughout

the New Testament, and particular in the letters of Paul. Finally, I derived missiological implications from that theological reflection for the relationship between WELS and CELM as they continue to partner in the work of the gospel in India.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) is a confessional Lutheran church body of 335,600 members in 1,243 congregations. WELS World Missions conducts gospel outreach in 45 foreign countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 19 additional countries. WELS world missions "brings the light of God's Word to the world through evangelism efforts, church planting, training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials." [1] Forty-six world missionaries partner with over 400 national pastors to conduct outreach and train more than 380 students for service in Christ's kingdom.

In the last two decades WELS World Missions has made a conscious shift away from a resident ex-pat missionary presence in each field towards short-term visiting instructors. In some restricted-access fields, even this much contact with the national church is difficult. The global COVID-19 pandemic with extended lockdowns and tighter border control has only exacerbated the situation. The process and goal of WELS world missions remain the same, however: to bring the light of the gospel of Christ to those in spiritual darkness, to guide Christian believers in discovering the truths of Scriptures, to partner with these believers as they gather in culturally appropriate congregations and

[1] WELS, "Missions," *WELS*, accessed January 24, 2024, https://wels.net/serving-others/missions/.

church bodies, and finally to walk together with them in fellowship which is based on unity of doctrine and practice.

Although Lutherans in India first contacted the WELS as early as 1969, the first resident missionaries from the WELS only arrived in India in 1999. From the start, the mission field differed from many others initiated by the WELS in that the focus was on supporting multiple groups of pre-existing churches, rather than on evangelism and church planting done by expatriate missionaries. The field was served for some time by a subcommittee of the WELS Administrative Committee for Southeast Asian Missions, with mission counselors making occasional trips to oversee and teach in various regions assigned to them. This was an untenable solution for the long term, however, and in 1998 the committee "recommended that two resident missionaries be called to serve the WELS mission field in India."[2]

Over the following twenty-three years, a total of seven WELS missionaries served the mission field in India, never with more than three of them concurrently. I was one of them, serving as a mission counselor to India from 2015-2022. The missionaries' stay in the country was limited always by India's immigration restrictions. During the COVID-19, from March 2020 through December, 2021, no expatriate missionaries were able to visit the field. Recently, at the end of 2022, the last WELS resident missionary left India and the determination was made that a replacement would not be sent.

[2] Thomas J. Barthel, "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries: The Birth of a Confessional Lutheran Church Body in India" (WLS Senior Church History Paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 2008), 8, accessed February 23, 2023, http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/244.

The Researcher

I was trained as a confessional Lutheran pastor, but I have served most of my ministry as a WELS missionary in two foreign mission fields—Brazil first and later India. From 2016 to 2022, I served as a Mission Counselor (also known as a "Friendly Counselor") for the WELS mission in southern India, stationed in the city of Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. My primary role was to serve as principal of the pastoral training program of "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries" (CELM), our national church partners, with both administrative and educational oversight. As principal and counselor, I had regular contact with a wide range of CELM leaders, not only in the classroom, but also in counseling and devotional settings, in planning meetings, and many informal settings. My goals on the Indian mission field, then, included both equipping and encouraging individuals for gospel ministry and guiding a fledgling church body through the process of organizing itself.

Recently my access to the Indian mission field became limited and then completely cut off during the pandemic of 2020. My call was to be alongside of the leaders of this nascent church body, but that became physically impossible. Now my church body has asked me to serve in a different capacity in Asia, and I am no longer residing in India. A full-time replacement will not be sent. My desire continues to be to find ways to maximize our spiritual walking together with our national partners in India and throughout Asia, even if necessarily at a distance for a time.

Statement of the Problem

The Greek word *koinonia* has a wide range of meaning in the New Testament, but generally refers to a "sharing," "partnership," or "fellowship." It is God's gift to those he

unites as one through faith in Christ. Every stage of intercultural mission work relies on and is enhanced by God's gift of *koinonia*: from witnessing to and discipling individuals to partnering with a newly formed church body. In WELS world missions, while spiritual unity in doctrine and practice has properly remained the foundation of church fellowship, the ongoing relational aspects of walking together have not received the same amount of energy and attention.

The Lutheran approach to church fellowship begins with establishing and celebrating a unified understanding of the teachings of Scripture. The temptation can be to focus so much on the cognitive (doctrine) elements of fellowship, that it results in an unintentional neglect of the affective and the relational (practice). This incomplete and unbalanced perspective of fellowship can be evidenced at every step of the journey: from initial evangelism efforts, through the training of church leaders, and on into the partnership stage between sending and receiving church bodies.

Meanwhile, access to many mission fields around the world is becoming increasingly limited. Even before the lockdowns and border closings during the coronavirus pandemic, a number of anti-Christian nationalistic movements raised themselves in opposition to the spread of Western influence through the Christian message.

As a result of all these factors and others, important relational and interpersonal aspects of *koinonia* can be neglected or underdeveloped, and God's people are denied blessings intended for them by the Lord of the church. This neglect has further ramifications in the majority world where relationships are highly valued.

Purpose of the Study

The two-fold purpose of this missiological study is primarily an attempt to engage in scriptural/theological study on paracletic *koinonia* based on a reflective ethnographic description of the Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and secondarily to derive missiological implications for the sake of promoting transformative relational aspects of fellowship between the WELS and its partner church in India.

Research Questions

1. What is an ethnographic description of the Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod?
2. What can be learned from scriptural/theological study of paracletic *koinonia*?
3. What are the missiological implications for promoting paracletic *koinonia* between WELS and its Indian mission field?

Definition of Key terms

***Koinonia*:** The scriptural teaching of *koinonia* among Christian believers refers to a joint participation, a spiritual fellowship created and sustained by the Holy Spirit though the gospel. This Christian fellowship has both vertical and horizontal dimensions (between God and human individuals, and between human individuals), and consists of both doctrinal and practical elements.

Paracletic: The adjective *paracletic* describes a ministry approach which imitates that of the Holy Spirit in coming alongside of someone as a continuation of Christ's ministry with the goal of producing change and growth, according to God's will.

"Paracletic *koinonia*" describes the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in, among, and through believers, who participate jointly in Christ through faith and

consequently express that unity in mutual love for one another. It is a divine gift which is 1) centered in the person and work of Christ, 2) values reciprocal relationships throughout the body of Christ, and 3) pursues mutual transformation through the Word of Christ.

Relational definition of Christian mission: Emphasizes both the vertical and the horizontal relationships involved in bringing the lost to salvation. The Great Commission at the end of Matthew's Gospel must be viewed in light of the previous 28 chapters. First, God brings us into a relationship with him in Christ through the gospel, then he works through us with that same gospel to bring others to saving faith as well. Our act of witnessing to others and the motivation to do so flow from the reality that we have been called to be witnesses.[3]

An **ethnographic description** is a written account of values, beliefs, customs, and practices of a particular group or culture. The description is formed through a combination of observation and interpretation of the culture being researched. My ethnographic description in this study combines archival resources with my own personal observations from years within this culture.

[3] Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missions to International Students* (Western Seminary Press, 2019), 14–15.

Assumptions of the Study

Theological:

1. The teachings and beliefs of Confessional Evangelical Lutheranism are centered on the gospel of Christ and firmly grounded on the Holy Scriptures as the *norma normans*, with the writings of the Book of Concord as a *norma normata*.
2. "Theology is an active aptitude to administer the treasures of Scripture."[4] The study of the Scriptures is profitable insofar as God the Holy Spirit blesses the student of his word with the ability to understand, apply, and practice the truths he or she discovers there.
3. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no one can come to the Father except through him. He gave his followers the privilege and responsibility of proclaiming his name among the nations. That Great Commission flows from the great reality of who we are in Christ. The work of evangelism – that is, sharing the good news of what Christ has done for all – will always be necessary until Christ returns on the Last Day. This mission work is performed by individual believers as well as by groups of believers working together.
4. Unity among Christian believers is not achieved by human effort or established by human agreements. True Christian fellowship or *koinonia* is a gift of God, graciously given and brought into reality by the Holy Spirit through the gospel of Christ. All those with saving faith in Christ Jesus are united in him.

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[4] Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 24.

5. By Scripture's definition, the Holy Christian Church (the *Una Sancta*) is intercultural, consisting of believers "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9, NIV). Visible gatherings of Christians are to embrace that ideal, welcoming all to come to know the one Lord and Savior of all the nations.

Theoretical/Thematic:

1. Christian fellowship (*koinonia*) in Christ is foundational to missiology. It begins with God's love for me in Christ (vertical) and continues with my giving witness of that truth to my neighbor (horizontal). Mission work is not possible if either the vertical or the horizontal aspect is missing.
2. Most commonly, world mission endeavors of Western Christian denominations seek to progress through multiple stages, such as: evangelizing, discipling, mentoring, and partnering. There is a natural progression from total dependence of the national church towards independence. The scriptural definition and examples of *koinonia*, however, prefer a final goal of interdependence rather than complete independence.

Methodological:

1. An integrative missiological approach will allow me to keep the discussion of fellowship grounded on the eternal truths of Scripture while simultaneously exploring how those principles inform and impact related themes and issues.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

1. I conducted only archival research due to my limited ability to travel to India during and subsequent to the pandemic.

2. I am limited in only being able to conduct research in the English language, despite my focus on the church in India which largely operates in Telugu and Hindi.

Delimitations

The doctrine and practice of Church Fellowship in confessional Lutheran churches has historically emphasized the limits on relationships with heterodox church bodies and individuals. As a confessional Lutheran pastor, I do not deny the truth or necessity of this aspect of the doctrine nor do I reject the practice. In this dissertation, however, I have chosen to focus on what I believe to be the heart and center of biblical *koinonia* which is a celebration of our relationship in Christ with those who confess a common faith. My goal is not to delineate those with whom we should or should not engage in such fellowship, but rather to explore how such relationships might be more fully enjoyed in keeping with the mutually transformational purposes for fellowship found in the Scriptures.

While there may be applications to other mission fields, I have chosen to delimit my implications specifically to the mission work of the WELS which has been conducted in India.

Significance of the Study

It is my hope that this study will encourage those involved with WELS World Missions to actively pursue and promote *koinonia* as paracletic partnership among believers in culturally appropriate ways at every level of their interactions with people of other cultural contexts. I also hope that Christian believers of all nations will find increased joy as they come to perceive and to put into practice God's gift of *koinonia*.

As one who has served in multiple world mission settings, I know the struggles of expatriate missionaries consciously working to relate to those they were sent to witness to. It becomes even more challenging when both anti-Christian governments and pandemics restrict access to mission fields. Over much of the last few years, I have not been able to physically walk side-by-side with the pastors and seminary students of South Asia that I was called to serve as a mission counselor and theological instructor. Even before that, our ability to visit the mission field was being increasingly restricted. My hope is that this study will give me better insights for applying paracletic *koinonia* principles and practices in my current and future callings.

Finally, since true Christian fellowship and unity is a gift of God the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace, I pray that those who are blessed by this fellowship give praise to God who has brought them into his eternal family by grace. Soli Deo Gloria!

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this integrative missiological study is to identify the paracletic relational aspects of the scriptural teaching of *koinonia* and their implications for the mission endeavors of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in collaboration with Indian Lutherans. In this chapter, I first review literature regarding partnership in world missions for a thematic background. Next, I review literature which speaks of the Lutheran understanding of church fellowship for a theological background. It is important to note that neither "partnership" nor "church fellowship" are synonymous with the New Testament concept of *koinonia*. These first two literature reviews are included to give context to the fuller conversation about *koiononia* as it is described in the Bible. Finally, I review literature regarding ethnographic methodologies.

Thematic Background

From Three-Self to Partnership Model

For much of the last century, the goal in mission work has been partnership between the sending church and the newly formed church of the mission field. But that has not always been the case.

Henry Venn was General Secretary of the Church Missionary Society from 1841 to 1873. At that time, Rufus Anderson was foreign secretary of the American Board of

Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Together they developed the three-self formula as "a reaction against the paternalism and colonialism of the Western mission societies."[5] The principles of self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation also served as a way of dealing with the growing phenomenon of "rice Christians" – those who came to worship or identified as Christians only as long as they received free handouts (such as rice).

The missionaries provided initial resources and framework until the indigenous church became self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing. When has a church become indigenous? Once that has happened, there is no room for the non-indigenous. Then the missionaries could move on to preach the gospel elsewhere. Bosch suggests that a fourth self be added: self-theologizing.[6] The WELS Mission Handbook has added self-disciplining (sec. 4.2.3.b) instead.

The three-self formula gave the mission societies a benchmark to measure progress. But there were a number of weaknesses to the formula. First, it is not mandated in the Scripture. Also, it "promotes a disconnect between the indigenous church and foreign churches."[7] There is no encouragement towards the responsibility that Christians have toward one another.

A better approach for Lutherans is shown by Hopf who points to the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, which says that the Church is located where the Word is

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[5] Albert B. Collver, "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations: What It Means That Lutheran Mission Plants Lutheran Churches," *Journal of Lutheran Mission* 1, no. 1 (March 2014): 23.

[6] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Kindle Edition. (ORBIS, 2011) Kindle location 10613.

[7] Collver, "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations," 23.

preached and the Sacraments administered.[8] So the Church is not bound to any one place, time, culture, ethnic group. It is truly universal. A healthy church is not measured primarily by the three selfs, but rather by the church's relation to and use of Word and Sacraments. Once a mission church is able to man its own pulpits and administer the sacraments, that is not the end of the relationship, as in the three-self model. Rather,

> [I]t begins a new phase where each church encourages, helps and the supports the other to remain a responsible Lutheran church. One church body with more resources in a given area has a responsibility to help the other that is lacking. The relationship is mutual. Each church assists the other as it is requested and as the other is able. The formation of a separate partner church from the sending church continues with a true partnership. The body of Christ assists the body of Christ.[9]

From Colonialists to Global "Partners"

We live in a "global village," which means that everything and everyone on earth is interconnected. The local, with its cultural distinctions, hasn't disappeared, but has become connected to every other locality.[10]

Western powers have slowed down or even reversed their colonialization efforts. But mission agencies unwittingly help to maintain a Western dominance over much of the rest of the world. The West continues to ask the question, "What can we do?" but should change to "How might we be part of the problem?"[11]

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[8] Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf, "The Lutheran Church Plants Lutheran Missions," *The Journal of Lutheran Mission*, no. Special Issue (April 2015): 8.

[9] Collver, "Ecclesiology, Mission and Partner Relations," 25.

[10] Eleazar S Fernandez, "A Theology of Partnership in a Globalized World," *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 1 (February 2016): 25.

[11] Fernandez, "A Theology of Partnership in a Globalized World," 26.

Even the move towards building closer relationships can perpetuate a Western lopsidedness. Van der Water observes that one issue that continues to be a problem is the relationship between donors and recipients. The fact that those terms are avoided these days keeps us from perceiving the ongoing problem. The donors want better communication and transparency, while the recipients are frustrated with the paternalism and lack of trust on the part of the donors.[12]

Kollimon characterized the relationship between churches in the West and the East as a "subject-object relationship." Globalization is, in effect, the new colonialism. It maintains relationships "characterized by subject and object, strong and weak, helpers and those in need of help."[13]

In 1971, John Gatu, who was then General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in East Africa, suggested that a moratorium on missionaries was the only solution. All missionaries should be withdrawn from the field for no less than five years to give time for each side to reconsider what their role in the relationship was going to be.[14] Emerito Nacpil, president of Union Theological Seminary in the Philippines, went so far as to say that "the most missionary service a missionary under the present system can do today in Asia is to go home."[15]

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[12] Desmond Van der Water, "Friendship--a More Excellent Way towards Global, Regional, and Local Ecumenical Partnership in Mission," *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 1 (February 2016): 49.

[13] Mery Kolimon, "Mutuality in Mission," *Review & Expositor* 113, no. 1 (February 2016): 105.

[14] Van der Water, "Friendship--a More Excellent Way towards Global, Regional, and Local Ecumenical Partnership in Mission," 50.

[15] Emerito Nacpil, "Mission But Not Missionaries," *International Review of Mission* 60 (2011): 360.

From Partnership to … Better Partnership?

We have made mistakes in partnership, but that is no reason to abandon the goal. There is too much at stake.[16] Van der Water also believes "the theory and practice of partnership in mission is seriously in need of new life, motivation, and energy" not because the idea of partnership is lacking, but because the partners have not taken their roles seriously enough.[17]

Relationships are good, even existentially necessary. Fernandez states that "at a fundamental and ontological level, we exist only in relation."[18] That's because we are made in the image of the Triune God whose very essence is "to-be-in-relation."[19]

So what do we mean by partners in missions? J. Andrew Kirk offers this definition:

> Within world Christianity, "partnership" expresses a relationship between churches based on trust, mutual recognition and reciprocal interchange. It rules out completely any notion of "senior" and "junior," "parent" and "child," or even "older" and "younger." It is a term designed to show how different parts of the Church belong to one another and find their fulfillment through sharing a common life.[20]

The terms "mutual" and "reciprocal" are key. In true partnership, there is much give and take. For example, those who work in a different culture come to see themselves

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[16] Fernandez, "A Theology of Partnership in a Globalized World," 29.

[17] Van der Water, "Friendship--a More Excellent Way towards Global, Regional, and Local Ecumenical Partnership in Mission," 49.

[18] Fernandez, "A Theology of Partnership in a Globalized World," 26.

[19] Fernandez, "A Theology of Partnership in a Globalized World," 27.

[20] J. Andrew Kirk, *What Is Mission?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 184.

as much of a disciple as a teacher.[21] Ott and Craig say that mission partnerships can be "learning communities" especially when both expatriate and local communities are reaching out to a third culture.[22] "The goal is that both entities, although different, preserve their cultural distinctives, learn from each other, and contribute something significant to the common goal according to their respective abilities."[23] They suggest that the mission team, comprised of both expatriate and local workers use resources "synergistically."

Kolimon also used the terms "mutuality" and "reciprocity" to describe the ideal relationship between Christian believers. "In a relationship of *koinonia* marked by *perichoresis*, no one is higher than another. Each partner in the relationship is valued for herself or himself; the partners are equal and need each other."[24] The Apostle Paul encouraged such mutuality in various letters, such as in Galatians 6:2 where the believers were told to "bear one another's burdens."

Van der Water offers the concept of friendship as a scriptural term which might be more meaningful than partnership. He cites a 1910 Edinburgh conference speech by Indian bishop V.S. Azariah who called for "the development and nurture of friendships between foreign missionaries and local evangelists."[25] Azariah encouraged both

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[21] Paul O. Wendland, "Confessionalism Contextualized: Lutheran Identity Across Cultures," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 282.

[22] Craig Ott, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011), 374.

[23] Ott, *Global Church Planting*, 374.

[24] Kolimon, "Mutuality in Mission," 104.

[25] Van der Water, "Friendship--a More Excellent Way towards Global, Regional, and Local Ecumenical Partnership in Mission," 53.

Westerners and his local colleagues alike to reevaluate their relationship with each other based on this easily understood concept of friendship.[26]

Guidelines for Better Partnership

Fernandez offers six guiding principles for partnerships: (1) solidarity and accompaniment; (2) interdependence and mutuality; (3) trust and respect; (4) humility and hospitality; (5) dialogue and openness; and (6) mutual empowerment.[27] These closely parallel Van der Water's main values of friendship that he encourages: "dignity, respect, equality, justice, integrity, freedom, community, spirituality, honesty, and solidarity."[28] (Van der Water, 59).

Ott and Craig add these tips: "Have a clear purpose. Clarify expectations. Remain flexible. Include a bicultural mediator. Grow the partnership with patience. Make the benefit mutual. Establish a fair decision-making process. Exercise wisdom regarding financial assistance."[29] Daniel Rickett adds that a good partnership requires commitment and the determination to "go the distance." He compares the best partnerships with long-term investments.[30] He also adds the vital reminder to "keep God at the center"[31] which brings us back to the relational realism. Finally, Walter C. Wright Jr. reminds us that

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[26] Van der Water, "Friendship--a More Excellent Way towards Global, Regional, and Local Ecumenical Partnership in Mission," 54.

[27] Fernandez, "A Theology of Partnership in a Globalized World," 29.

[28] Van der Water, "Friendship--a More Excellent Way towards Global, Regional, and Local Ecumenical Partnership in Mission," 59.

[29] Ott, *Global Church Planting*, 377–378.

[30] Daniel Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work*, Third Edition edition. (S.l.: Daniel Rickett, 2015) Kindle location 867.

[31] Rickett, *Making Your Partnership Work* Kindle location 890.

intercultural leadership is about "accountability and vulnerability."[32] As Paul instructed the Galatians, even as partners "carry each other burdens," so also "each one must carry his own load" (Gal. 6:2,5)

Theological Background

While much of the missiological conversation about partnership has to do with ecumenical endeavors, this study will focus on Lutheran missions where the concept of partnership is different. For confessional Lutherans, partnership in missions is closely related to its understanding of church fellowship, which is based on full doctrinal agreement, rather than an agreement to disagree about doctrinal differences for the sake of external operations.

The term "Church fellowship" can refer to either a status or an activity. "Both as a status and as an activity, church fellowship needs to be distinguished from the spiritual fellowship of faith in the Holy Christian Church (*Una Sancta*) which it is meant to reflect but with which it cannot simply be identified." [33] All believers are united as one in Christ Jesus, but not all members of Christian churches are believers, and not all churches which identify as Christian are agreed as to the meaning of the Scriptures.

The Lutheran doctrine of the Church is summarized in the Augsburg Confession, Article VII, par. 1-3:

> Our churches teach that one holy Church is to remain forever. The Church is the congregation of saints [Psalm 149:1] in which the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are correctly administered. For the true unity of the Church it is

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[32] Walter C. Wright Jr., *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Influence and Service*, Kindle ed. (IVP Books, 2012) Kindle Location 2537.

[33] "WELS Theses on Church Fellowship," *WELS*, accessed December 30, 2019, https://wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/doctrinal-statements/church-fellowship/.

> enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies instituted by men, should be the same everywhere.[34]

What exactly is meant by "the doctrine of the Gospel" as well as how that Gospel is "purely" taught has been the source of much discussion in the Lutheran Church.[35] But it clearly means more than a partial agreement in a limited number of Bible teachings. A current Lutheran textbook on doctrine by Lyle Lange puts it this way: "When people agree on all the teachings of Scripture, they should practice church fellowship together. When they do not agree in doctrine, they should not practice fellowship together."[36]

So, what does it mean to "practice church fellowship"? Lange again, "Church fellowship is every expression of faith in which Christians join together because they are united by their acceptance and confession of all that the Bible teaches."[37] In the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), this is referred to as the "unit concept." Where the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) makes a distinction between altar, pulpit, and prayer fellowship, the WELS argues that the Scriptures do not differentiate between different activities which are expressions of a common faith.

In his important work, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries,* German theologian Werner Elert traced the concept of church fellowship back to the earliest history of the church. He wrote: "The unity of the church is the

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[34] Paul Timothy McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 34.

[35] Roland F. Ziegler, "Doctrinal Unity and Church Fellowship," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 78, no. 3–4 (October 2014): throughout.

[36] Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine*, 553.

[37] Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine*, 553.

presupposition of church fellowship. Whatever the early church meant by church fellowship (κοινωνία τῆς ἐκκλησίας or ἐκκλησιαστικὴ), it had to do with fellowship of or in one and the same church. This takes for granted that there is only one church.[38]

Establishing Church Fellowship

This true unity of all believers is not something man can establish or create on his own, however. It is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. The one, holy, apostolic Church is united by faith in her common Lord. The thing that unites them all, then, is faith in Christ. But such faith is unseen by the human eye. We cannot presume to know the mind and heart of another. Only their actions and their speech can give us an insight into what is in their heart. "In selecting specific individuals or groups for a joint expression of faith, we can do this only on the basis of their confession."[39] In his essay on "Fellowship Issues and Missions, Klaus Schulz writes at length about how to determine those with whom we as confessional Lutherans should practice church fellowship. Lutherans see such carefulness not as a lack of love for others, but rather a love and appreciation for the precious truths of Scripture. The gospel in Word and Sacrament is the only means through which the Holy Spirit brings the spiritually dead to life. That Word and Sacraments, therefore, can

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[38] Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, Electronic ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 49. Later Werner adds: "*Koinonia* never means merely being in company with one another and therefore never describes the church as a body of persons, nor even a single congregation. This would be in harmony with the later understanding of *sanctorum communio*. The *koinonia* is not the aggregate of members or parts of the church, but a relationship existing within the church and mediated by it, a relationship of members and parts with one another or a relationship of members and parts with the whole church. The unity of the church is there as a *datum* before the *koinonia*. It is objectively there as the common thing (κοινὸν) in which all belonging to the fellowship (κοινωνικοὶ) participate. But *koinonia* is only what results fellowship-wise (κοινῇ) for the actual life of the congregation and the church" (p 64).

[39] "WELS Theses on Church Fellowship."

be the only marks of the Church – the only way to perceive the presence of God's family on earth. "Fellowship is a matter of a confessional custodianship over the marks though which this triune God works."[40]

The Value of Church Fellowship Based on Common Doctrine

Former Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary president Paul Wendland elaborates on the value of church fellowship for the Lutheran church and its mission endeavors. "Experience has shown that any Lutheran church body can lose its uniquely scriptural, evangelical, and confessional identity. We need each other's help and encouragement in the Word if we wish to hold onto it." "We need to encourage and foster our worldwide fellowship by continuing to provide occasions where we can gather and jointly grow in the Word." [41]

For that reason, the WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) worked with like-minded church bodies to create the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) in 1993. Today thirty-two Lutheran church bodies comprise the CELC which meets triennially for "encouragement, fellowship, study, cooperation in projects, and an internationally united voice."[42]

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[40] Klaus Detlev Schulz, "Fellowship Issues and Missions," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (n.d.): 185.

[41] Wendland, "Confessionalism Contextualized," 285.

[42] "Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference," https://celc.info/.

Methodological Background

Ethnographic Research

Edgar J. Ellistan writes that missiology does not have a unique or distinctive methodology as an academic discipline. It does, however, "embrace components common to other academic disciplines around a theological core."[43]

I conducted reflective ethnographic research to prepare a description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries as a mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. John Creswell describes ethnography as "a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolong period of time."[44] Barbara Tedlock views the translation of specific events, interactions, and understandings in ethnographic research as resulting in "historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of human lives."[45]

Creswell states that inquirers in many qualitative studies collect multiple forms of data which they gather over time in a natural setting. These collection procedures involve four basic types: observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual/digital materials.[46]

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[43] Edgar J. Elliston, *Introduction to Missiological Research Design*, Scribd.com. (William Carey Library, 2011), 42, https://www.everand.com/book/566434235/Introduction-to-Missiological-Research-Design.

[44] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th edition. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2018), 31.

[45] Barbara Tedlock, "Ethnography and Ethnographic Representation," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2nd Edition. (London: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2000), 455.

[46] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 211.

Within the category of observations, Creswell identifies a range of four options: 1) complete participant (in which the researcher conceals his role), 2) observer as participant (in which the role of the researcher is known to the other participants), 3) participant as observer (in which observation is secondary to participation), and 4) complete observer (in which the researcher observes without participating).[47] My interaction with the target group might best fit the third category, participant as observer.

Kathleen Musante (DeWalt) lists the following key elements of the participant observation method:

- Living in the context for an extended period of time
- Learning and using local language and dialect
- Actively participating in a wide range of daily, routine, and extraordinary activities with people who are full participants in that context
- Using everyday conversation as an interview technique
- Informally observing during leisure activities (hanging out)
- Recording observations in field notes (usually organized chronologically)
- Using both tacit and explicit information in analysis and writing.[48]

Although I was able to employ most of those elements in my observation of CELM pastors and students, I was not conversationally fluent in the Telugu language and I had only occasional, limited interaction with them in their daily private lives outside of classrooms, meetings, and visits to their places of worship. This may restrict me from

[47] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 212.

[48] Kathleen Musante and Billie R. DeWalt, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers* (United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2011), 5.

labelling my research as purely "participant observation." On the other hand, some have argued that since we are naturally a part of the social world that we inhabit, all social research is founded on the human capacity for participant observation.[49]

Genzuk says that the purpose of participant observation is to develop an insider's view of what is happening – not only recording the facts but "feeling" what it is like to be part of the group.[50] At the same time, however, ethnography still requires both an emic and an etic perspective, describing the insider's experience in a way that outsiders might better understand. As principal and theological educator, I was a participant and an insider to the classroom experience in which I taught, but I remained an observer to the Indian students' personal experience and perspective.

Creswell and others emphasize the need for reflexivity in qualitative research. Those involved in this type of research must reflect on their role in the study as well as their personal background, culture, and other experiences potentially shape their interpretations. That might include both the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data.[51] I address this need for reflexivity in the following chapter on research design and methodology.

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[49] M. Hammersley and P. Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, Fourth Edition. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2019), 19.

[50] Michael Genzuk, *A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research*, Occasional Papers Series (University of Southern California Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research, 2003), 2, accessed October 15, 2023, https://rossierapps.usc.edu/facultydirectory/publications/33/Ethnographic_Research.pdf.

[51] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 206.

Summary

The two-fold purpose of this missiological study is primarily an attempt to engage in scriptural/theological study on paracletic *koinonia* based on an ethnographic description of Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for the sake of promoting transformative relational aspects of fellowship, and secondarily to derive missiological implications for this mission field.

In the first part of this chapter, I conducted a review of literature regarding partnership in missions for a thematic background. Although much discussed, no one has yet discovered the perfect model for the relationship between sending and receiving church bodies in the partnership stage.

The summary review of theological literature indicates that for Lutheran missionaries and missiologists, the concept of partnership in missions cannot be separated from the Lutheran doctrine and practice of church fellowship. My research will further explore the scriptural concept of *koinonia*, as well as how it might be practically applied in Lutheran mission endeavors.

The review of literature on ethnographic research in a missiological setting focused on participant observation methodology and how it might be conducted. The literature revealed a need for reflexivity in qualitative research in general and particularly where the researcher seeks to be a participant as well as an observer.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The two-fold purpose of this missiological study is primarily an attempt to engage in scriptural/theological study on paracletic *koinonia* based on an ethnographic description of Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for the sake of promoting transformative relational aspects of fellowship, and secondarily to derive missiological implications for this mission field.

Methodological Design

An integrative framework allows for a weaving together of various elements—ethnographical, theological, and missiological in this case—throughout the three-part study, ultimately creating a cohesive and more robust whole.

The first part of the study is an ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries, which is a mission field of the Wisconsin Synod in India. The ethnographic description combines archival research and personal observations from my years as a missionary on and off the field.

The second part is a theological reflection, tracing the relational and transformative themes of *koinonia* throughout the New Testament. I employed the theological discipline of biblical theology, engaging in an isagogical and exegetical reflection on *koinonia* throughout the New Testament.

The third part of my study applies the findings of my theological reflection to the observations from the ethnographic description, to discover missiological implications for WELS world missions in India.

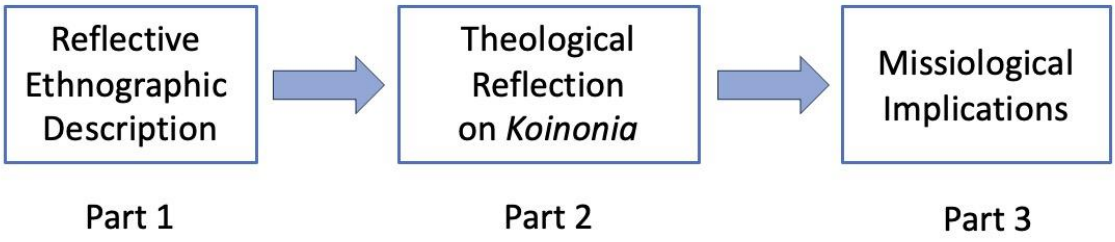


Figure 1. General methodological flow of research

Research Procedures and Techniques

Part One – Reflective Ethnographic Description

The first part of my study was a reflective ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries, which is the WELS mission in India. I used a combination of archival resources with my own personal observations from years of interacting with this culture, as described on page 5 in the section on "The Researcher." In this reflective ethnographic description, I described the historical context, values, customs, and challenges that this group faces during a time of transition.

I served the WELS mission field in India as a mission counselor from November, 2016 through December, 2022. Roughly half of that time I resided in Guntur, India, on the same street as the CELM Seminary. I had near daily interactions with the CELM leaders, pastors, students, and other staff. Many of my personal observations were collected during this time in field reports or my own personal journaling.

My observations are admittedly from the perspective of a WELS expat missionary. My personal background, culture, language, income, and education level were all quite different from those I observed. With the high power-distance culture of India, my position as principal often kept me at arm's length socially from both students and staff. As the field coordinator who approved all mission expenses, I was often expected to play a certain role in the patron-client relationship. All of this limited my ability to achieve a thoroughly emic, or insider, perspective.

My call from the WELS, however, was to serve the field as a mission counselor, to humbly walk with them before the Lord, and to serve the national church with the gospel of Jesus Christ, teaching and training them to serve as faithful pastors themselves in their own context and culture. I have worked and prayed to be understanding of the situation of the believers I was called to serve, to appreciate their cultural values and practices, and to love them as Christ loves the church. I spent hundreds of hours with Indian brothers and sisters in the classroom, in visits to village congregations, in meetings, and just chatting over chai. The primary reason I enrolled in this doctoral program was to increase my ability to work interculturally, so that my own personal and cultural biases would not be a hindrance to the ministry of the gospel among them.

To my personal observations, I added material from archival resources. The archival resources I consulted were limited to notes, reports, papers, and essays written by WELS pastors, missionaries, administrators, and church historians. They are written with a decidedly WELS perspective, even while they tried to objectively relate issues as they saw them from the Indian's point of view. I did not have access to any similar

archival materials written from the CELM perspective, nor do I believe any such materials exist.

I chose to compose a reflective ethnographic description of the WELS mission in India because my role on the field was in transition. First, I had no physical access to the field during the time of the pandemic, from March, 2020, until December, 2021. Then, when traveling restrictions eased, it became increasingly clear that I would not remain in that position for much longer. The WELS needed to make some difficult decisions regarding the future of their mission and partnership with the CELM. I, however, wanted to offer my mission team further guidance and encouragement to continue walking in a paracletic way with our brother and sisters in India. With limited access and time to conduct interviews or surveys on the field, I chose to use my observations and notes during my time in India to compose a reflective ethnographic description which would provide an accurate, if limited, picture of our once and future partners.

Part Two – Theological Reflection

The second part of my study was a theological reflection on *koinonia*. For this reflection, I followed the "historical-grammatical-exegetical" hermeneutical method, in the tradition of the Wauwatosa theologians[52] and the Wisconsin Synod. This hermeneutic considers the historical, literal, and grammatical contexts of a passage, rather than handling it in isolation. The Wauwatosa theologians soundly rejected the notions of

[52] Named for the Milwaukee suburb where their seminary was located, the term "Wauwatosa theology" came to describe the approach to the study and the interpretation of scripture taught by professors John P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller from 1904-1929. The three men greatly influenced the hermeneutical and exegetical approaches of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, whose pastors they trained for more than forty years between them.

negative criticism popular already in their day, being firmly convinced of the verbally inspired, inerrant Word of God. They also considered the Holy Scriptures to be both clear and sufficient for salvation. Two key principles of this hermeneutic is that "Christ is the center of Scripture" and that "Scripture should interpret Scripture."[53]

Since the majority of κοινων- words in the New Testament appear in the apostle Paul's letters, that is where I chose to concentrate. The themes of fellowship and *koinonia* were widely seen to be at the heart of his letter to the Philippians, so I began my theological reflection there. I traced the theme of *koinonia* in Paul's letter to the Philippians isagogically and made an exegetical study of the New Testament verses where the word κοινωνία or its cognates appear.

The Wauwatosa theologians emphasized the analogy of faith as a key to interpreting the Bible. Simply put, the analogy of faith means that Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture. For that reason, I cast my net wider than just the κοινων- words, looking for parallel terms and concepts, especially in the New Testament. That included a look at some of the many συν-compound words, the picture of the body of Christ, and the "one another" passages. Finally, I drew six key takeaways from the reflection and demonstrated how they culminate in the concept of "paracletic *koinonia*."

Part Three—Missiological Implications

In the third part of my study, I synthesized the findings from the reflective ethnographic description and the theological reflection to produce missiological

[53] Donald Patterson, "Wauwatosa Theology and Its Impact on Pastoral Study, Preaching and Teaching" (Presented at the South Central District (WELS) Pastors Conference, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2007), accessed January 24, 2024, https://scdwels.files.wordpress.com/2009/07/2007-10-patterson.pdf.

implications. The summary thoughts from the theological reflection resulted in six key takeaways. I examined the details of the ethnographic description in the light of these takeaways. My focus was on paracletic and pastoral implications of *koinonia* for relational-focused church fellowship and partnership with Lutheran missions in India, although there are general principles that suggest applications for other fields as well.

Collection of Data

I collected data for the reflective ethnographic description from notes, reports, essays and papers which were available to me electronically through shared databases online, both from the WELS world missions website and the essay collection of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. My own personal observations were taken from personal notes collected and stored electronically or recollection of conversations and events. I shared my findings from these resources with other individuals involved in WELS world missions to identify my own personal biases. Ideally, the ethnographic data would have been also shared with representatives from the national church to help identify and address additional WELS expat biases. I chose not to do so, however, because of the sensitive nature of the topic and my concern for causing offense to our brothers and partners in India. My hope is that our church body may be guided by the missiological implications of this paper to create an atmosphere in which healthier dialogue may take place in the future.

For the theological reflection, I collected data from my study of the Bible both in English and in the original languages using Logos software and from a variety of other printed and electronic materials. I consulted a wide range of commentaries, and not exclusively from confessional Lutheran authors. My own personal observations and an

outline of my thoughts I recorded in a note-taking application called Obsidian (http://obsidian.md). This web app allowed for ideas and concepts to be connected and networked across disciplines. Bibliographic information was collected and stored in Zotero.

Conclusion

The first part of the study was a reflective ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries, which is a mission field of the Wisconsin Synod in India. This ethnographic description combines archival research and personal observations from my years as a missionary on and off the field. This answered the first research question: "What is an ethnographic description of the Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod?"

The second part of the study was a theological reflection, tracing the relational and transformative themes of *koinonia* throughout the New Testament, using the "historical-grammatical-exegetical" hermeneutic approach of the Wauwatosa Theologians. From this I arrived at an answer to the second research question: "What can be learned from scriptural/theological study on paracletic *koinonia*?"

Finally, in the third part of my study I synthesized the findings of my theological reflection with the observations from the ethnographic description, to give answer to the third research question: "What are the missiological implications for promoting paracletic *koinonia* between WELS and its Indian mission field?"

CHAPTER 4

ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE WELS' MISSION IN INDIA

In this chapter, I provide a reflective ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM), a confessional Lutheran church based in Guntur, India. CELM was originally formed as a mission of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and continues to operate in partnership with the WELS. In particular, my focus is on the pastors, gospel workers, and seminary students of CELM, as they are the group that primarily interacts WELS missionaries.

In this description, I look at the history, mission, challenges, and future prospects of CELM, through the lens of a Lutheran missionary that has worked with them for six years. I examine the organization's background, its relationship with the WELS, and the socio-political context of Christianity in India. This serves as the background and context for the missiological implications.

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod World Missions

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) is a confessional Lutheran church body of 335,600 members in 1,243 congregations.

WELS World Missions conducts gospel outreach in 45 foreign countries and is exploring outreach opportunities in 19 additional countries. WELS world missions "brings the light of God's Word to the world through evangelism efforts, church planting,

training national workers for ministry, and providing religious materials." [54] Forty-six world missionaries partner with over 400 national pastors to conduct outreach and train more than 380 students for service in Christ's kingdom. The WELS "Asia One Team" (AOT) currently consists of 19 called workers (primarily missionaries, "friendly counselors," and professors) and a volunteer Administrative Committee, serving missions and mission partners in 14 Asian countries.

The missiological approach of WELS world missions has been "to establish independent national churches that are self-administering, self-disciplining, self-propagating, and self-supporting church bodies within their own culture."[55] The "WELS World Missions Handbook" describes their approach this way:

> Wherever the board conducts mission work it will seek to plant national churches that will grow up into their own identity and stand with us doctrinally and confessionally. World missions have sometimes been established with the assumptions that the sending church would provide permanent funding and that the expatriate missionary would be indefinitely responsible for the pastoral, teaching, preaching, and evangelism work. Strategies more recently developed by missionaries and their parent bodies seek to establish independent national churches that are self-administering, self-disciplining, self-propagating, and self-supporting church bodies within their own culture. We are fully aware that no specific mission formula is mandated in the scriptures. While methods themselves do not unite souls together in Christ's church, it is appropriate that each WELS world mission pastor work toward the same goals with similar aims.[56]

WELS Mission Work in India

Initial connections between WELS and India were made in the late 1960's by a pastor from Madras who followed up on an address stamped in the front of a New

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[54] WELS, "Missions."

[55] WELS, "World Missions Handbook," March 2008, sec. 4.

[56] WELS, "World Missions Handbook," 4.

Testament Bible.[57] Other Lutheran individuals later contacted the WELS as well, often frustrated with the increasingly liberal directions of the ten Lutheran church bodies in India that formed the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in India and held membership in the Lutheran World Federation. Over the next three decades, WELS found itself collaborating with three small, independent groups of pastors and congregations, providing "assistance with worker training and a small amount of financial aid."[58] With time, however, most of these partnerships broke down. In 1982 the WELS Executive Committee for Southeast Asian Missions visited the field and reported: "Unless and until we can get expatriates into the country,… it appears we will have to content ourselves with a marginal presence."[59]

From 1999 to 2022, WELS deployed resident missionaries, also referred to as Friendly Counselors, to develop the mission in India and collaborate with the national church. Their focus was on training pastors and evangelists and offering administrative and pastoral guidance to the national leaders. There were at most three WELS Friendly Counselors called to the field at any one time. By the time of pandemic in 2020, the remaining WELS missionary was no longer able to reside in the country permanently due to increasing surveillance by the Indian government.

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[57] Theodore A. Sauer, *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People: A Century of WELS World Missions.* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 276–277.

[58] David J. Valleskey, "WELS Work in India," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 93, no. 1 (1996): 39.

[59] Sauer, *To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, and People*, 278.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries and Its Seminary

Initially, CELM functioned as a mission of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Early visits by WELS representatives from the USA had uncovered a great desire for increased Bible training from those who had been ministering to congregations but with little to no theological education. In 2001, WELS missionaries founded the CELM Seminary in Guntur with the goal of providing such training. While the role of principal has been filled by a WELS missionary, and numerous WELS pastors and professors have come as guest instructors over the years, two CELM pastors also regularly help with instruction of seminary courses and classroom interpretation for non-English speakers.

Students come from a variety of religious backgrounds, including Pentecostals and even recent Christian converts from Hinduism. The majority are from the Telugu-speaking states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. In most cases, they are already serving congregations or preaching stations even before they enroll. This brings an added challenge: when formerly Pentecostal preachers “turn Lutheran” during their years of seminary instruction, do they bring their still Pentecostal-leaning congregation with them?

Those students that complete three years of “pre-seminary” instruction may stop at that point and serve as evangelists or “Bible workers.” Others, upon approval, are encouraged to continue to their studies for four more years. Graduates may be ordained as pastors after a period of observation and evaluation by the seminary faculty and other CELM leaders. As of 2023, the seminary has had 80 graduates.

Until now, students have received a subsidy which gradually increases over the years they remain enrolled and then continues for a few years after they graduate. The purpose of the subsidy is to help them focus on their studies and to give them time to establish a congregation that can support them with their offerings. To this point, WELS has covered the students' subsidies as well as all other seminary expenses: rent for a classroom building and dormitory, all meals while the students are on campus, books and materials and other supplies, and other expenses. The WELS also employs two CELM pastors as instructors and interpreters in the classroom.

The CELM Seminary in Guntur is not accredited but offers a sturdy foundation in biblical theology as well as practical training in homiletics, education, and pastoral theology. Hermeneutics plays a key role in the curriculum, as it equips the students to approach the Scriptures as the verbally inspired Word of God, to interpret it confidently using a historical-grammatical exegetical approach, to apply it faithfully to the people they serve, and to carefully identify and defend against false teachings.

In 2003, Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) registered in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) "Academic Institution" with the "key issues" of "children, education, and literacy."[60] The founding members, all Lutheran pastors or seminary students, felt it was necessary to register the organization in this way due to the Indian federal government's reluctance to otherwise approve the

[60] "NGO Details of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries," Registration Details (Registrar of Societies, June 11, 2021), accessed April 12, 2023, https://ngodarpan.gov.in/.

registration of new church bodies. It also provided a cover for bringing funds into India from foreign donors.[61]

Figure 2. CELM seminary students



Challenges in Maintaining Lutheran Teaching and Identity

Even with the solid foundation in Lutheran teaching and practice that CELM seminary graduates receive, in the villages where they serve, they often find themselves surrounded by pastors and churches of other Christian denominations – predominantly Pentecostal, but also Baptist and Roman Catholic. It can be a challenge for the CELM pastors to maintain their confessional Lutheran teachings and identity, and so, out of self-preservation, many join local pastors' associations. When a pastor or congregation faces oppression from the local government or more radical *Hindutva*[62] groups, fellow pastors

[61] Lawrence Olson, *Reflections after a Field Visit to India*, Field Report (WELS Asia One Team, April 11, 2023).

[62] Sam Thompson, "Hindutva Nationalism and Civil Government in India: Towards a Theology of Engagement from Luther's Two Realm Perspective" (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Concordia Seminary, 2016), 2, https://scholar.csl.edu/phd/24. "*Hindutva* is an ideology involving ethnic/cultural nationalism which seeks to create a Hindu nationhood in India…. In *Hindutva* schema, State/government has an important role to play towards the realization of a Hindu nationhood. The purpose of the state is to

in the association, regardless of denominational affiliation, provide assistance and protection. The CELM congregations are often too far from each other geographically to offer mutual support and encouragement. The result is that many CELM pastors lean on Christians from other denominations, rather than their CELM brothers and sisters, despite the considerable doctrinal differences between them.

Congregations and Demographics

At the end of 2022, CELM pastors served approximately 50 established congregations and another 70 preaching stations. Most are found in villages in the Telugu-speaking states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, with a much smaller number in Hindi-speaking Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Most congregation members come from poor backgrounds, working as day-laborers and earning less than $5/day on average. As of 2020, CELM congregations had around 5,500 members, one-third of them children. Fewer than 70 baptisms were recorded that year.

The growth of CELM churches has stagnated for the last several years. Pastors and Bible workers express apprehension about evangelizing due to the rise of anti-conversion laws in many Indian states. The pandemic further accelerated membership decline as people stopped attending worship and other gatherings during the 18-month lockdown. Many believers lost the habit of participating in public worship and did not return after the pandemic's end. Instead, they increasingly sought spiritual guidance on social media platforms such as YouTube and WhatsApp, where popular Pentecostal preachers expanded their online presence. CELM pastors are at a loss for how to regain

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defend and establish Hindu Dharma and to actively use various power structures and channels available to translate its homogenizing religiocultural agenda into a reality."

these straying members. They report feeling unsupported and lacking the gifts to effectively attract new converts. Some attribute the problem to Lutheran doctrine. Feeling embarrassed about their faith, they resort to altering their message in an attempt to gain a larger audience. Others, however, have also turned to social media themselves and bring a strong message of law and gospel. They faithfully preach what they have heard and trust the Holy Spirit to strengthen the believers' faith.

Figure 3. Worshippers in front of a CELM church



Navigating Political and Social Challenges

Christians in India face challenges due to their lower caste and limited options for employment, as well as potential persecution and family ostracization upon conversion from Hinduism. The predominantly pro-Hindu Indian government has made it challenging for Christian churches like CELM to operate and grow. Christian

congregations often find themselves unable to construct places of worship. Even when they have enough money for both land and construction costs, the local village elders may not always give their permission for Christians to construct a church. An increasing number of Indian states have recently passed anti-conversion laws which further impede evangelism.

One approach to maintain and expand their gospel presence has been for CELM to undertake numerous humanitarian aid projects, including digging borewells, purchasing medical equipment for hospitals, and operating children's homes (or hostels) and a Christian elementary school. These projects not only demonstrate Christ's love for all people but also serve as bridges to the gospel, allowing CELM pastors and members to engage with those they serve. Oversight of the projects was provided by a combination of WELS Friendly Counselors and local CELM leadership, but to this point all funding has been provided by WELS donors.

Christians in the “10/40 window” have a special need for fellowship with fellow believers. They are usually a religious minority, which means that there is little access to God’s Word or to other Christians. Feelings of isolation are a common experience for these Christians, despite living in the most populous region of the world. They tend to be among the poorest in their communities, which means that they have few resources to disseminate the gospel themselves. Even though this region is the birthplace of many of the world’s “most tolerant” religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.), Christians are far more likely to be persecuted there. Finally, converts to Christianity in this region suffer greatly from ostracism as a result of leaving their former religion behind—a fate which is particularly difficult for those who live in a collectivistic society.

Relationship between CELM and WELS

The relationship between the WELS missionaries and the CELM pastors largely followed the pattern of patron-client relationships common in South Asia.[63] The WELS has provided all the financial resources for the seminary and humanitarian aid projects. They also have given a stipend or subsidy to the CELM pastors and gospel workers, although congregations are encouraged to provide for the men they call to serve them. The WELS has given money to construct churches, but the local congregation has had to pay for half of the construction expenses. Only limited, local ministries are funded by the local congregations. The patron-client relationship is also seen in the decision-making process. Historically, all plans and projects funded by WELS needed to be approved by the Friendly Counselors. The CELM by-laws specify that the objectives of the society include the following:

> 2) To remain affiliated exclusively with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) and with the other church bodies in fellowship with WELS, and to be guided by its recommendations and policies in administrative and financial matters;
>
> 3) To willingly submit itself, then, to the doctrine, practice and decision-making process of the WELS in all matters including matters of real property, budget and finance, unless they violate the Holy Scriptures or the Lutheran Confessions;[64]

Recent WELS visitors to the field characterized the relationship between American missionaries and Indian leaders as one of "permission," patriarchal, and not particularly paracletic. AOT missionary Peter Janke observed: "Even after 8 years of schooling, they lacked the ability or confidence to create their own Bible studies, etc..

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[63] Olson, *Reflections*.

[64] "By-Laws of the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries" (Guntur, India, n.d.).

The only answer was coming from the outside."[65] Admittedly, however, "the Indian nationals themselves do not always demonstrate paracletic *koinonia* among themselves."[66] Expat missionaries and visiting Administrative Committee members have too frequently heard private complaints lodged by CELM leaders against one another.

The power-distance culture of India has been a challenge for many WELS missionaries to adapt to and successfully navigate. WELS One Team Counselor Paul Nitz commented after visiting the field: "It is difficult for us egalitarian Americans who are offended at being put in a position of master, almost as much as we would being put in the position of servant."[67]

Personal Perspective and Observations

I arrived in India in March, 2016, having most recently served as a parish pastor in California. My call from the WELS Board for World Missions was to serve the field as a "friendly counselor," teaching in CELM's worker training program, and eventually taking on the role of principal of the school. Responsibilities would include teaching between 20-40 hours each month during the school year, conducting continuing education workshops for called workers and lay leaders, supervision of faculty and faculty development, discipline of students, and other administrative and coordination tasks.[68] I was informed by the WELS South Asia Administrative Committee chairman

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[65] Paul Nitz, *Conclusions from the 2023 AOT Visit to India CELM*, Field Report (WELS Asia One Team, March 2023).

[66] Olson, *Reflections*.

[67] Nitz, *Conclusions*.

[68] Mark Rieke, "Coordinator's Cover Letter," August 12, 2015.

that the mission field at the time numbered 46 churches, 56 preaching stations and 5,311 souls served by 33 national pastors and 100 gospel workers (evangelists), with 40 men studying in the seminary program.[69]

The WELS presence on the field, once my wife and I arrived, was three expat couples, all residing in Guntur. Within three years, that would be reduced to just my wife and I as the remaining WELS missionary couple on the field. The coronavirus pandemic later prohibited us from returning to India for a span of 18 months, and even when we were able to return again, it was for visits of only four to eight weeks at a time. Whatever work could be done needed to be over the Internet. Finally, I was redeployed to a new position on the WELS Asia team in December, 2022.

Observations of Fellowship between Expats and Nationals

While still deliberating the call to serve in India, I asked the Field Coordinator at the time if the missionary families participated in local worship services. He responded that it was complicated due to a lack of Telugu fluency on the part of the expats and an expectation on the part of the national congregations that a visit by Westerners implied the bringing of gifts. Still, he thought it was something they should do more of "to set a good example and to help us and them feel like we are all one in Christ."[70] Unfortunately, while we tried to change that, new factors such as the growing Hindutva movement only made visits to the local congregations increasingly complicated. Whenever we did visit a village, we expats were always given special honors, being invited to sit in the front of

[69] Richard Krause, "SA-AC Call Letter for Friendly Counselor to India," August 12, 2015.

[70] Mark Rieke, email message to the author, August 15, 2015.

the church and to speak to the congregation afterwards. True interaction and fellowship, however, was mostly limited to the pastor and his family—in part because of language barriers, but also partly because that "honor" of offering hospitality to the guests was reserved for the pastor.

The expat families met regularly for worship themselves, and on a few occasions, they invited the three CELM pastors on the seminary staff to join them. The pastors' wives and children were also invited but did not normally participate, although no explanations or excuses were given.

Observations of Fellowship in the Seminary Program

Since I arrived on the field towards the end of the school year, I spent much of the first two months in classroom observation. Already then, I noticed that the interaction between expat instructors and most of the students was limited due to language barriers. The student body itself was divided between Telugu and Hindi speakers. All too often, conversations and discussions in the classroom were held in Telugu, with the interpreter neglecting to translate into Hindi. The smaller Hindi-speaking group from northern India (about 10% of the students) mostly stayed to themselves in the classroom, dormitory, and mess hall. Those few Telugu-speakers that I observed intentionally reaching out to their Hindi-speaking brothers were well-received. I was pleased to see that the commencement worship service at the end of the year, planned and conducted by the student body, included both Telugu and Hindi elements.

The Indian students clearly differed from those that I knew in the West (including in Brazil where I had previously taught) in holding their instructors (both expat and national) at a distance due to the predominant power-distant culture in most Indian

institutions. This was demonstrated by the students' high respect for the instructors and a desire to learn from them. After a unit on witnessing Christ to Muslims, one student came to the front of the classroom, bowed to touch my feet, and said, "Thank you, sir! In my village are many Muslim neighbors, and until today I did not know how to speak with them. Now I am ready to return home and tell them about Christ."

The national instructors and some previous expat instructors leaned into that power-distance dynamic when it came to classroom management. While the average student was in his late 20's, with some in their 30's or 40's, they frequently had been disciplined as if they were younger schoolboys—no doubt brought on by what was interpreted by the expats as childish behavior: routine tardiness, rampant cheating on assignments and exams, and apparent dishonesty.[71]

Observations of Fellowship among National Leaders

Graduates of the seminary program who served as CELM pastors were invited to return for quarterly "Pastors Institutes" which consisted of continuing education classes, denominational business, and time for fellowship. I could see the genuine joy in the faces of the men as they arrived on campus, greeting their old classmates. Although the short morning devotions were led by various CELM pastors, they were chosen by the expat friendly counselors who also led the Bible studies and set most of the agenda. The closing worship service, conducted with the Telugu liturgy, included a celebration of Holy Communion.

[71] Cf. Appendix A, Overcoming Intercultural Obstacles to *Koinonia* on a Mission Field

Many of the seminary students came from non-Lutheran backgrounds, primarily Pentecostalism, often with very little theological training. Not all of them came to fully identify as Lutherans by the time they finished the training program. Even those who did see themselves as confessional Lutherans did not always consider themselves as part of CELM. Rather CELM was equated with the seminary or with the WELS. It was seen as the source of subsidy and financial aid, in addition to a source of theological education, but not always as a church body that they were in fellowship with. Consequently, these pastors also did always not see each other as partners in Christ, but all too often as competition for financial assistance. Open discussion sessions at Pastors' Institutes nearly always led to a series of complaints about the reduction in subsidy being given by CELM/WELS to the pastors.

The WELS friendly counselors held weekly planning meetings with the three CELM pastors who served on the seminary staff and/or on the CELM Executive Board. The agenda was set by the WELS field coordinator, who also led the opening devotion or Bible study. Although he encouraged open communication during the meeting, he recognized that there was a level of distrust and competition between the three national leaders. Often one or more of the three would approach him in private after the meeting to express their personal opinions which they did not feel comfortable sharing in front of the others.

Future Prospects and Conclusion

In recent years, the WELS missionaries have attempted to give CELM leadership a greater role in decision making. At the same time, they have also reduced the amount of financial aid that is being given. The desire is for the CELM pastors and leaders to take

ownership of their own church body and to become less dependent on outside funding for their ministries. This move by the WELS has been welcomed by the CELM leadership, who appreciate the increasing freedom they have. CELM leaders, however, still frequently default into the old way of approaching issues and expect the WELS to provide financial assistance for most endeavors.

As evidence that this route has been explored unsuccessfully in the past, however, here are observations from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary student William Finn who wrote about the WELS Indian mission field for a church history paper in 1998:

> We learned that the synod-to-mission relationship has to be a partnership. The synod cannot attempt to act in a dictatorial fashion to bring about quick results in the field. Nor can the synod pour in money indiscriminately in an attempt to 'finance' the Great Commission if you will. Both of these approaches have been tried by many in the past (and still today) and the result is a mission that is here today, and gone tomorrow.[72]

At the end of 2022, I, the last remaining WELS Friendly Counselor was redeployed by the WELS Asia team and will no longer serve as a resident missionary to India. In March of 2023, WELS representatives visited Guntur to talk with CELM leaders about the future of the relationship between the two church bodies. The WELS has clarified that they will greatly reduce the subsidy given to the CELM, but they will also give the CELM the freedom to make choices for their own church. For now, the seminary program has been suspended, but there is a desire to restart training soon. First, the CELM leadership must discuss their own organization and structure.[73] The WELS

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[72] William A. Finn, "Our Continuing Mission to India: The Lutheran Mission of Salvation, India" (Senior Church History Paper, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, 1998), 26, accessed February 23, 2023, http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/1441.

[73] Nitz, *Conclusions*.

currently has no intention of resending a resident missionary to India, citing "increasingly restrictive government policies" that make residing there "virtually impossible."[74] Lawrence Olson, a member of the AOT Administrative Committee notes: "One challenge, then, is practicing authentic fellowship with our fellow believers in India when our relationships with them will by necessity be maintained largely through communication technologies."[75]

[74] Olson, *Reflections*.

[75] Olson, *Reflections*. See Appendix B for some thoughts on "Virtual Vs. Face-to-Face Presence."

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON *KOINONIA*

Introduction

My second research question is, "What are the theological principles of *koinonia* that can provide guidance for a confessional Lutheran understanding and approach to missions?" In this chapter I address that question, using analyses in biblical theology.

Biblical theology is the branch of theology that studies the books of the Bible isagogically and exegetically on the basis of the original languages, within their historical context. Biblical theology traces how and what God has revealed about himself and his redemptive work through the inspired authors. In this section, I consider how biblical authors such as the apostle Paul used the Greek word κοινωνία and its related word family, as well as other parallel terms and themes. I give particular attention to Paul's letter to the Philippians, where the theme of fellowship is especially prominent. I begin by tracing the various forms in the κοιν- word family.

The Κοιν- Word Family

Κοινός

In speaking of the doctrine of church fellowship, LCMS professor Kurt E. Marquart observes that "it is beside the point to invoke a naive philologism, as though everything could be settled by studying the biblical usage of "κοινωνία" and related

words, important as these are."[76] At the same time, Marquart acknowledges, "The main linguistic contribution to the right understanding of church fellowship is the fact that the "κοινωνέω/κοινωνία/κοινωνός" word group comes from "κοινός" (common) and denotes a sharing or common participation in something (Mt. 23:30; Lk. 5:10; Rom. 15:27; I Cor. 10:16–20; II Cor. 1:7; I Tim. 5:22; I Pet. 4:13; 5:1)."[77]

As opposed to ἴδιος, which describes a thing particular to one person or a single group, an item which is κοινός may be communal, belonging simultaneously to several individuals or the entire community. Greek philosophers such as Plato held up the concept of commonly held property as a public ideal, but in practice it remained purely aspirational. In the Book of Acts, however, Luke describes the earliest believers as regarding all their possessions as communal property, εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινὰ (Luke 2:44). Friedrich Hauck, in his entry on κοινωνία for the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, wrote: "The Hellenist Luke, influenced by the Greek ideal, uses it to express the fact that the ideal which the Greeks sought with longing was achieved in the life of the primitive community."[78] In addition to property, other things shared in common with others in the New Testament include faith (κοινὴ πίστις in Titus 1:4) and salvation (κοινῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας in Jude 3).

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[76] Kurt E. Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, Kindle Electronic Edition, vol. 9, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics (Luther Academy, 2015) Kindle location 1068.

[77] Marquart, *The Church and Her Fellowship, Ministry, and Governance*, vol. 9, chap. 6 Kindle location 1068.

[78] Friedrich Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία, Συγκοινωνός, Συγκοινωνέω, Κοινωνικός, Κοινόω," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 796.

Κοινωνός

Κοινωνός has a basic meaning of "fellow" or "participant." The implication of κοινωνός is that there is a κοινός, a thing, event, or activity shared in or with someone else. F. Hainz's entry in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* defines κοινωνοὶ as "persons who stand in a relationship of community because they have a common share in something."[79] A partnership of some kind is implied in the stem, but "the participation is differently orientated from that of e.g., φίλος, where the bond is that of relationship or love, ἑταῖρος, which implies sharing a common enterprise, συνεργός (fellow-worker), or the colourless μέτοχος (participant)." [80] In a number of cases, however, κοινωνός is used almost interchangeably with these related terms. For example, in 2 Corinthians 8:23, Paul calls Titus both κοινωνὸς and συνεργός. In Luke 5:10, James and John are called Simon's κοινωνοὶ, but three verses earlier Luke refers to Simon's μετόχοις in the other boat. Extra-biblical sources indicate that in the secular Greek usage of the term "persons designated as κοινωνοί are usually understood to be tied by certain socio-economic and legal obligations, which could sometimes be brought to bear in official litigations."[81] To some extent, Paul seems to have this connotation in mind (e.g., in Phlm. 17 and 2 Cor. 8:23) in the way he "perceived some of his collaborators to be much more than mere

[79] F. Hainz, "Κοινωνία," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 304.

[80] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 797.

[81] Julien M Ogereau, "A Survey of Κοινωνία and Its Cognates in Documentary Sources," *Novum Testamentum* 57, no. 3 (2015): 285.

travelling companions, but, effectively, close associates who shared in the burden of responsibilities, labour, costs, and benefits of his mission."[82]

When used in the sense of fellow, companion, or partner, κοινωνὸς may be found in the absolute or with the genitive of person. A κοινωνός may also be one who partakes in a thing (with the objective genitive), such as sufferings (2 Cor. 1:7, κοινωνοί τῶν παθημάτων), glory (1 Pet. 5:1, δόξης κοινωνός), the altar in Jerusalem (1 Cor. 10:18, κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου), or even the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4, θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως).[83] In this partaking, of course, the κοινωνός is not alone. There are always other co-participants, or συγκοινωνοὶ, even if only implied by the context. It is also important to note that such a partnership may be undesirable, such as in 1 Corinthians 10:16 where Paul warns those who join in eating sacrifices to idols that they become "participants with demons" (κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι).

Κοινωνέω

Κοινωνέω describes the action of the κοινωνός. It has the most basic meaning of "to share,"[84] or, more fully, "to share with someone (to be κοινωνός) in something which he has" or "to take part."[85] Extrapolating even further, Thayer gives two primary definitions: "a. to come into communion or fellowship, to become a sharer, be made a partner…. b. to enter into fellowship, join one's self as an associate, make one's self a

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[82] Ogereau, "A Survey of Κοινωνία and Its Cognates in Documentary Sources," 285.

[83] Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), 352.

[84] William F. Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 438.

[85] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 797.

sharer or partner."[86] Jeff Kloha makes the perhaps obvious, but still helpful observation that "it is not possible to κοινωνέω alone."[87]

Depending on who is participating together and what those people are participating in, κοινωνέω "can be a positive or negative event."[88] The New Testament gives a number of negative examples, such as in 2 John 11: "Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς). Arndt, et al., observe that "to share, participate in the deeds of others means to be equally responsible for them."[89]

The verb κοινωνέω, along with its related form συγκοινωνέω, can be found in the absolute, with an objective genitive (or dative), with a dative of person, or with both the objective genitive and dative of person.[90]

Κοινωνία

Κοινωνία is an abstract term which derives from the noun κοινωνὸς and the verb κοινωνέω. It appears 19 times in the New Testament, 13 of which are in Pauline epistles. It is variously translated as: fellowship, sharing, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse.[91] It had a rich use already before its use in the New

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[86] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 351–352.

[87] Jeff Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," *Concordia Journal* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 24. This has repercussions on the way we understand κοινωνία.

[88] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 24.

[89] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 438.

[90] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 798.

[91] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 352.

Testament, signifying anything from common business partnerships, to intimate family relationships, to "the close union and brotherly bond between men"[92] or even the close relationship between God and human beings.[93] The parallelism found in 2 Corinthians 6:14 indicates that κοινωνία and μετοχή are nearly synonymous as "a relationship involving shared purposes and activity."[94] In 2 Corinthians chapters eight and nine (as well as in Romans 15:26 and Hebrews 13:16), κοινωνία seems to take on the sense of "*a benefaction jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution*, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship" (emphasis in the original).[95]

Kloha says that a key to understanding κοινωνία in the New Testament is that it always refers to an event. "[I]t is the manifestation of the relationships that exist between people who share together in a common thing."[96] Hauck observes that the close bond denoted by κοινωνία expresses a "mutual relationship" where the emphasis "may be on either the giving or the receiving."[97] Hainz argues that Pauline usage of the term follows a unified structure: "fellowship/partnership (with someone) through (common) participation (in something)."[98]

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[92] J. Schattenmann, "Κοινωνία," ed. Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testa-ment Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 640.

[93] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 801.

[94] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 446.

[95] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 352.

[96] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 26.

[97] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 798.

[98] Hainz, "Κοινωνία," 304. "Κοινωνία is in Paul a designation for various community relationships that come into being through (common) participation and are seen in reciprocal giving and taking of a portion. Where the community relationship (common participation in something) is mediated

Grammatically, κοινωνία may be constructed in the absolute, with the objective genitive (of the thing shared), with the subjective genitive (of the person sharing), or with the objective genitive (of the person in whom there is sharing).[99] Paul frequently combines κοινωνία with prepositions such as εἰς (2 Cor. 9:13; Phil. 1:5), ἐν (Phlm. 6), πρός (2 Cor. 6:14), and μετά (1 John 1:3, 6, 7).[100]

Κοινωνικός

Appearing only in 1 Timothy 6:18, κοινωνικός describes a person who is "inclined to make others sharers in one's possessions, inclined to impart, free in giving, liberal."[101]

How the Κοινων- Words Relate to Each Other

The following diagram (Figure 3) from Jeff Kloha may be helpful in visualizing how the various words of the Κοινων- family relate to each other.

It begins at the center with κοινός, the thing in common. As an example, take Titus 1:4, where Paul and Timothy have a "common faith" that they both participate in. Next are the κοινωνοὶ, those who are participating together in the common thing. The action of participating, indicated by the arrows, is the verb κοινωνέω. Finally, κοινωνία describes the entire event of multiple κοινωνοὶ sharing in the common thing.

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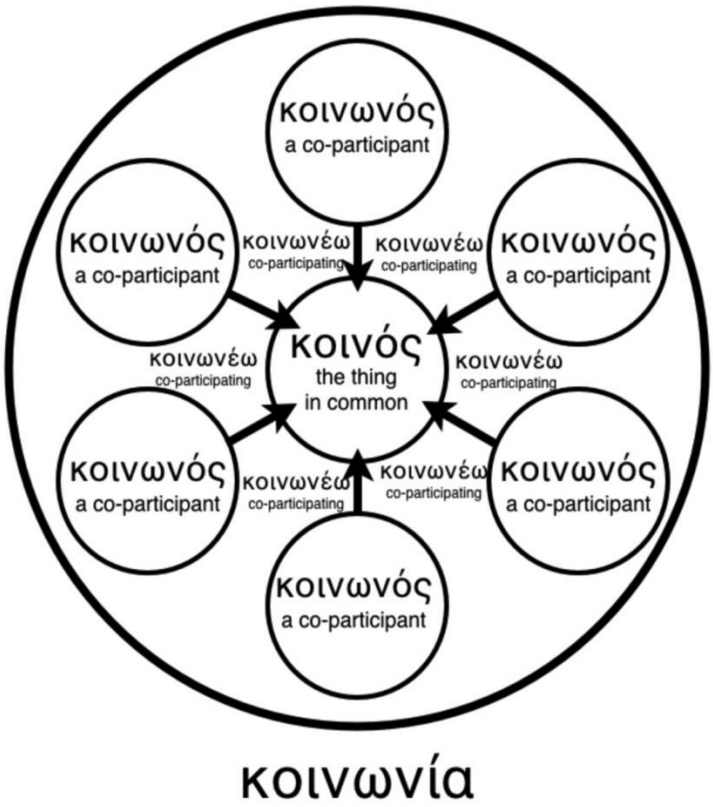
through someone (e.g., Jerusalem, apostles, teachers) an obligation comes into being that obligates the receiver to a response of giving a portion. Κοινωνοί are persons who stand in a relationship of community because they have a common share in something."

[99] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 798.

[100] Hainz, "Κοινωνία," 303.

[101] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 352.

Figure 4. The Koinων- Word Family[102]



Further Thoughts on the Κοινων- Word Family

Until recently, the growing consensus of twentieth century scholarship had been that the words in the *koinonia* family (and often in the closely related *metoche*) included the idea of both 1) a participation in a thing, as well as 2) a commonality or solidarity with the other participants. Andrew T. Lincoln, of the University of Gloucestershire, cites research by Jesuit scholar Nobert Baumert that calls that long-standing assumption into question.[103] Baumert claims "to have examined all extant references for both κοινωνειν

[102] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 26.

[103] Andrew T. Lincoln, "Communion: Some Pauline Foundations," *Ecclesiology* 5, no. 2 (2009): 139–142.

and cognates and μετέχειν and cognates from classical Greek through koiné, including early Christian usage in patristic writers up to the fifth century."[104] His conclusion was that while μετέχειν and its cognates do have a core meaning of "to have a part or share in, to participate in," that same could not be "compellingly demonstrated" for any example of κοινωνειν.[105]

As pointed out by Ogereau, however, "while many of Baumert's observations may be valid at a basic semantic level, they are much less cogent at a contextual level. From a pragmatic point of view, associating with someone often has practical implications that lead to the sharing of an object, or of the responsibilities and/or benefits of the activities pursued in common."[106] Baumert's methodology of affording equal weight to extra-biblical sources perhaps undermines the apostle Paul's ability and right to shape an otherwise-secular term for his own religious purposes. His conclusions also beg the question when applied to verses that infer a relationship of participation in Christ, for example (1 Cor. 1:9), by claiming that this is simply not what Paul had in mind when using the κοινων- word group.[107]

Κοινωνία in Paul's Letter to the Philippians

While *koinonia* appears throughout the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Philippians not only has a higher concentration of the κοινων- word family, it also

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[104] N. Baumert, *Koinonein und Metechein-synonym? Eine umfassende semantische Untersuchung* (SBB 51; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003).

[105] Lincoln, "Communion," 141.

[106] Ogereau, "A Survey of Κοινωνία and Its Cognates in Documentary Sources," 292.

[107] Lincoln, "Communion," 143.

exemplifies the concept and theme in many ways. In this section I will trace the theme of fellowship and Paul's usage of the *koinonia* terms.

Background of Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Paul had first visited Philippi on his second missionary journey following his vision of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). He and his traveling companions Silas, Timothy, and Luke, walked the twelve miles from Neapolis down the Via Ignatia "to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12). Although they found no established Jewish presence there, Paul encountered a group of women gathered by the river on the Sabbath and shared the gospel of Christ with them. Among his first converts was a woman named Lydia, apparently well-to-do, who showed great hospitality to the traveling missionaries. Their stay in Philippi was interrupted when the owners of a slave girl from whom Paul had exorcised a demon greatly objected to their loss of income and had Paul and Silas thrown in prison. The complaint lodged was that Paul and his companions were "advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice" (Acts 16:21). When Paul and Silas were to be released the next day (following a miraculous conversion of the jailer), they in turn complained of their unfair treatment, "even though we are Roman citizens" (Acts 16:37).

Together with Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, Paul's letter to the Philippians is traditionally considered one of four letters written during his imprisonment in Rome from A.D. 61-62. Alternate theories place Paul either in Caesaria during his incarceration on the way to Rome (59-60) or possibly even in Ephesus (mid-50's). The last suggestion is based on literary-theological similarities with 1 Corinthians and Galatians, but there is no mention of an imprisonment during Paul's time in Ephesus

(despite the riot described in Acts 19).[108] Mention of the palace guard (1:13) and the conversion of members of Caesar's household (4:22) indicate Rome as the most likely place of writing, although Caesaria is a reasonable option.

Regardless of location, Paul's imprisonment was connected with two motivating factors for sending this letter. First, Paul's unashamed proclamation of the gospel even while in chains (1:12-25) had resulted in at least some of members of Caesar's household professing faith in Christ (1:13; 4:22). This would be welcome news to Paul's "partners in the gospel" who themselves were also suffering for their connection with Christ. Second, the congregation in Philippi had sent a gift to Paul through one of their leaders, Epaphroditus (2:25-30; 4:10-19). Although Paul doesn't explicitly express his thanks directly to the Philippians (e.g., with the word εὐχαριστῶ or a similar explicit expression of thanks), it has been shown from papyri from that time[109] that "verbal gratitude, as a social convention, was withheld from those who were socially intimate."[110] Paul's response to the Philippians' gift was appropriate for a "letter of friendship" in the Graeco-Roman world.[111] His strong relationship with them prompted him to address three

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[108] G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 22–24.

[109] Stanley K Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 61–62.

[110] Gerald W Peterman, "'Thankless Thanks': The Epistolary Social Convention in Philippians 4:10-20," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42, no. 2 (November 1991): 262.

[111] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 11. "Of course, Paul's letter is not merely a friendly letter that fits a Hellenistic pattern. He transforms the meaning and experience of friendship by redefining each of the essential ideals of friendship given by Hellenistic essays on friendship in terms of communion with Christ and empowerment by Christ. As recipients and advocates of the gospel of Christ, Paul and his partner-friends in Philippi experience common sharing in the Spirit (2:1) and participation in the sufferings of Christ (3:10). Nevertheless, after recognizing Paul's transformation of Hellenistic patterns and concepts, we can still gain a basic understanding of the form and function of Paul's letter to the Philippians by viewing it as a letter of friendship."

concerns: problems with disunity, their attitude toward suffering, and the approaching threat of false teachers.[112] Despite those concerns, however, the letter clearly focuses on a positive celebration of the gospel of Christ and the gift of community in Christ.

Philippians 1:3-8

> *I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel (ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me (συγκοινωνούς μου τῆς χάριτος πάντας ὑμᾶς ὄντας). God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus* (NIV)

From the first lines of the epistle, Paul makes it clear that his "partnership" with the Philippian church was based first on their common relationship with God through Christ Jesus (whose name is mentioned in each of the first three verses). Paul's and Timothy's identities are found first and foremost in their being "servants of Christ" (1:1, δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). The congregation in Philippi are considered "saints" through their connection to Christ (1:2, τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). The gifts of grace and peace, more than a salutation, are theirs "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3).

Although the apostle does not explicitly thank the Philippians for the gift they had sent through Epaphroditus, he does give credit where it is most due. He repeatedly thanks God who both initiated the good work of faith in them (and consequently their partnership in the gospel) "from the first day until now" and was certain to "carry it on to

[112] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 25–30.

completion until the day of Christ Jesus." In chapter two, Paul will again remind the Philippians that their obedience and good works are to God's glory, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (2:13).

At the same time, it is not only God's activity, but also specifically the Philippians' "partnership in the gospel," that fills Paul's prayers with joy. "Here we see a chain reaction in Paul's spirituality: memory of friends leads immediately to urgent requests for their needs; these petitions prompt him to give thanks to God for his friends; thanksgiving to God lifts him to express joyful praise to God."[113] Celebration of the "horizontal" fellowship with fellow believers only strengthens our "vertical" fellowship with God, and vice versa.

The exact nature of the "partnership" that Paul celebrates here in 1:5 (and elsewhere in the New Testament) has been debated by commentators.

Julien Ogereau's "A Survey of Κοινωνία and Its Cognates in Documentary Sources" summarizes findings from a wide study of existing papyri and inscriptions from the time. He remarks on how "seldom, if ever" κοινωνία is found to have a primary connotation of "religious community/association" or "spiritual communion/fellowship" in the documentary sources. His conclusion is that "this understanding of κοινωνία is the product of a long process of theological reflection and superimposition of theological concepts upon the NT" and his recommendation is that a "more rigorous philological

[113] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 47–48.

methodology" should be employed "detached from any theological preconception or agenda."[114]

J. Paul Sampley has similarly argued that the word κοινωνία, a challenge to translate consistently, "expressed the partnership, mutuality, and reciprocity so representative of *societas* – a rather loosely defined legal contract between two or more parties in the Roman world to share profits and losses."[115] Here, John G. Nordling suggests that what Paul contributed to the compact with the Philippians was "his obligation to preach the gospel to them," "his vast experience as a missionary," and his "boundless energy" which had been converted away from persecution of the church towards energetic zeal to preach Christ where his name was otherwise unknown. The Philippians, for their part, contributed money and "sweat equity" (by which he means "nonfinancial contribution to a project in terms of labor and effort").[116]

Other commentators, however, point to the greater context of the letter to affirm that it is not appropriate to "separate the practical expression of the partnership from its theological basis."[117] Paul's references to his relationship with the Philippians in these verses are a far cry from a sterile business association: "I thank my God every time I remember you" (1:3), "In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy" (1:4), "I

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[114] Ogereau, "A Survey of Κοινωνία and Its Cognates in Documentary Sources," 293. Ogereau's final footnote reads: "Baumert is certainly correct to insist that 'theologische Implikation' pertinent to 'Ekklesiologie und Eucharistielehr' should be secondary to 'semantisch[e] Fragen.' Baumert, Koinonein, 12."

[115] John G. Nordling, "Communion at Philippi," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 82, no. 3–4 (October 2018): 182.

[116] Nordling, "Communion at Philippi," 183.

[117] Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 60.

have you in my heart" (1:7), "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus" (1:8). Hauck observes: "Since in his salutations Paul is usually thinking of the good standing of the readers in faith, the thanksgiving ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν (Phil. 1:5) refers to the inward and undisturbed (ἀπό—νῦν) participation of the Philippians in the saving message of Christ."[118]

At the same time, the reality of this spiritual bond naturally leads to practical expressions. Paul gives examples of the theological/practical link in these verses: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (1:6) and "whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me (συγκοινωνούς μου τῆς χάριτος)" (1:7). Witherington agrees with Bockmuehl in his commentary on Philippians 1:5: "The reference must not be read as merely financial or merely theological; rather, 'participation' carries distinctly financial and practical implications precisely because it is grounded in theology."[119] Roehrs and Franzmann's *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* summarizes it this way: "The Gospel entered their life and controlled it."[120]

G. Walter Hansen acknowledges that Paul drew on the various nuances of *koinonia* of his day (e.g., marriage and family relationships, friendships, business partnerships, common ownership of property, citizenship and more). At the same time,

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[118] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 804.

[119] Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Continuum, 1997), 60.

[120] Walter H. Roehrs and Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*, Electronic ed., vol. 2 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1998), 194.

throughout this letter, Paul was developing his own theology of *koinonia*. "A major purpose of this letter is to transform the experience of *koinōnia* in the light of life in Christ."[121] Hansen also criticizes pitting the practical participation against the theological:

> A false dichotomy is set up by some who interpret the phrase partnership in the gospel to mean participation in salvation, and by others who take this phrase as a reference to cooperation in the work of evangelism. For if there had not been personal appropriation of the gospel in the first place, there would not have been support for the propagation of the gospel. Their faithfulness in the work of proclaiming the gospel was evidence of the reality of their personal participation by faith in the benefits of the gospel.[122]

The Philippians' "partnership in the gospel from the first day," then, would refer both to their conversion and to Lydia's invitation to the missionaries to stay at her house. See, for example, John's encouragement to Gaius in 3 John 5-8 to continue to welcome traveling teachers: "We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth (συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ)." The Philippian believers' active participation in Paul's gospel ministry following that initial encounter took on a variety of forms: "their prayers for [Paul] in his affliction (1:19), by their own suffering for their faith in Christ in the face of opposition (1:27–30), by their radiant witness (2:15–16), by the mission of Epaphroditus on their behalf to care for Paul's needs while in prison (2:25–30), and by their regular financial support of Paul (4:10–18)."[123]

Since Paul describes their partnership as continuing from the first day "until now," we might highlight the fact that physical presence together is not strictly

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[121] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 32.

[122] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 49. For examples of the first, Hansen mentions H. Seesemann, *Der Begriff KOINŌNIA im Neuen Testament* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1933), 73–74 and F. Hauck, "κοινωνός," *TDNT* 3:805. For examples of the second, he offers Fee, 82–83; O'Brien, 60–61.

[123] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 49.

required.[124] Likewise, since he describes it as being completed "on the day of Christ Jesus," we might also celebrate with him that this relationship is not short-term, but eternal.[125]

Harlyn Kuschel describes how those "practical implications grounded in theology" continue to play out in the church today:

> The Holy Spirit's work in the Philippians' hearts through the gospel had brought them into a wonderful partnership with the apostle and with all other believers. The essence of that partnership—we sometimes also call it "fellowship"—is a mutual sharing in the blessings of forgiveness and salvation won by Christ and in the new spiritual life the Holy Spirit creates in sinners' hearts through faith in Christ.
>
> Believers who have been brought together into a gospel partnership joyfully give expression to their partnership. They do this in many ways. They worship, pray, and study God's Word together. They joyfully acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. They show to one another a special measure of helpfulness and love. They encourage one another in Christian living, and they work together to promote the cause of the gospel in the world.[126]

Clearly this partnership in gospel ministry was an act of God's grace in Christ Jesus, brought about by his creative power through the ministry of the Word, and sustained and empowered by his Spirit.[127] Paul had written to the Corinthians: "God … has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). It was Paul and Silas who spoke the message of Christ to Lydia and the other women next to the

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[124] George W Murray, "Paul's Corporate Witness in Philippians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 319.

[125] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 50–51. "The bright light of that future day filled the darkest days in Paul's Roman prison. The darkness of anxiety and doubt about the future of his *koinōnia* with the Philippians vanished in the brilliance of that *day of Christ Jesus*."

[126] Harlyn J. Kuschel, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1986), 18.

[127] Murray, "Paul's Corporate Witness in Philippians," 319. "verse 6 continues the thought of verse 5. This cooperative evangelism, then, was not primarily the idea of Paul or the Philippians; it was a good work begun and continued by God."

river, but it was God "who began a good work in you." It was Paul who was "in chains … defending and confirming the gospel," but he affirmed that the Philippians also "share in God's grace with me." Likewise, the Philippians were encouraged to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (2:12), but it was God who would "carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6). As Hansen writes: "God is the founder of every true *koinōnia* in the gospel. And God will complete the purpose of every *koinōnia* in the gospel."[128]

Drawing from Paul's letter to the Philippians as well as the rest of the New Testament, Hendriksen identifies eight aspects of this "fellowship of all believers in Christ": it is a fellowship of grace (not man-made but through Christ), of faith (by the Spirit), in prayer and thanksgiving, of believers with one another (a fellowship in love for one another), in helping each other (contributing to each other's needs), in promoting the work of the gospel, in separation (attached to each other, but detached from the world), and in warfare (struggling side by side against a common foe).[129]

The reality of this partnership in the gospel had inevitable, direct repercussions on Paul and on his very way of thinking. He describes the gratitude and joy he experienced every time he prayed for the Philippians as a result of their partnership. He longed to see all of them again "with the affection of Christ Jesus." Paul said, "It is right for me to feel this way (ἐστιν δίκαιον ἐμοὶ τοῦτο φρονεῖν) about all of you" (1:7). This entire mindset and way of thinking (φρονεῖν) about all of the believers (ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν) in Philippi,

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[128] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 50.

[129] Willian Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, vol. 5, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), 51–52.

this strong affection and emotional participation in their spiritual well-being, was only right (δίκαιον) and appropriate, based on their joint partnership in God's grace. Later in the letter (2:2; 4:2), Paul will point to this fellowship again as the reason why the Philippians should have the same way of thinking (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν).[130]

Philippians 1:27

> *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves (πολιτεύεσθε) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together (συναθλοῦντες) as one for the faith of the gospel.* (NIV)

Although this passage does not include any of the κοινων- words, I want to comment on it here for its use of three constructions related to the fellowship theme.

First is Paul's use of the imperative πολιτεύεσθε, a verb which is found in the New Testament only here and in Acts 23:1. Based on the root word πολίτης, the verb πολιτεύομαι has the basic meaning of "to be a citizen." Similar to περιπατέω[131], it may also be translated as "to live, to lead one's life," but the root brings out more of the sense of conducting oneself "with proper reference to one's obligations in relationship to others, as part of some community."[132]

Paul's choice of this word no doubt reflects his understanding of the general Philippian pride in being a colony of Rome. The owners of the slave girl healed by Paul had made much of their status as Roman citizens during his first visit there (Acts 16:21). Paul himself had alluded to his own Roman citizenship also when they beat and jailed

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[130] Cf. also Phil. 2:5; 3:15, 19; 4:2; as well as Rom. 8:5; 11:20; 1 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:10.

[131] More commonly used by Paul, e.g., Gal. 5:16; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:12; Rom. 13:13; Phil. 3:17.

[132] Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 507.

him and Silas unfairly. Later in this letter (3:20), however, Paul will point to a far greater honor: "But our citizenship (πολίτευμα) is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."[133] In effect, the Philippian Christians are "a colony of heaven on earth."[134]

Commenting, then, on the dual citizenship implied by Philippians 1:27, Hendriksen says: "It is as if the apostle were saying, 'You are Roman citizens and proud of it (and so am I, Acts 16:21, 37). But constantly bear in mind that what matters *most* is the fact that you are citizens of *the kingdom of heaven*. Continue, therefore, to exercise *that* citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (emphasis in the original).[135] The way that citizens of that kingdom reveal themselves as such (πολιτεύομαι) is through their unified cooperation with fellow citizens to point others to Christ, their king.[136]

Martin Luther described participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion "as if a citizen were given a sign, a document, or some other token to assure him that he is a

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[133] Here we take note of how Paul's statement of faith stands in opposition to Caesar's claims to be savior and lord himself.

[134] Lincoln, "Communion," 154. "The Philippian believers, then, are in effect a colony of heaven on earth, an alternative *polis* that, before the cosmic transformation of the end-times (cf. 3 :21), displays an incipient realization of life as God intends it to be." See also Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 98. "Against the colonial preoccupation with the coveted citizenship of Rome, Paul interposes a counter citizenship whose capital and seat of power are not earthly but heavenly, whose guarantor is not Nero but Christ. Philippi may be a colony enjoying the imperial patronage of Lord Caesar, but the church at Philippi is a personal colony of Christ the Lord above all (2:10–11)."

[135] Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, 5:80.

[136] Murray, "Paul's Corporate Witness in Philippians," 321. "In effect, Paul was saying that by their behaving as citizens of the gospel he would know (even if he never got back to Philippi) that they would be standing 'firm in one spirit' together for the gospel."

citizen of the city, a member of that particular community."[137] He further extended the metaphor to explain how this citizenship comes with both benefits and obligations:

> This fellowship consists in this, that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and his saints [i.e., believers] are shared with and become the common property of him who receives this sacrament. Again all sufferings and sins also become common property; and thus love engenders love in return and [mutual love] unites. To carry out our homely figure, it is like a city where every citizen shares with all the others the city's name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection, and the like, while at the same time he shares all the dangers of fire and flood, enemies and death, losses, taxes, and the like. For he who would share in the profits must also share in the costs, and ever recompense love with love.[138]

Similarly, Paul's imperative πολιτεύεσθε in Philippians 1:27 calls to mind both the benefits and the obligations of our common citizenship in heaven as motivation for a lifestyle appropriate to a Christian congregation. Both are summarized in the phrase "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." Hansen observes: "Paul does not impose a long list of rules; he presents the person of Christ. The good news of Christ, the story of Christ, is the rule for the community of believers."[139] Paul will describe that story of Christ and the accompanying attitude of humility in 2:5-11.

A second connection of Philippians 1:27 to the theme of fellowship is suggested by the participle: συναθλοῦντες. The verb συναθλέω is only used twice in the New Testament, both times in the letter to the Philippians (1:27; 4:3). The idea of the verb is that of struggling, exerting oneself, at the same time with another person. Hendriksen:

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[137] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 35: Word and Sacrament I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 51.

[138] Luther, *Luther's Works*, 35:51.

[139] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 93–94.

"side by side, like gladiators, against a common foe."[140] Hansen mentions how this described not only the believers in Philippi, literally standing together in one place, but also their partnership with the imprisoned apostle, as they shared a common struggle:

> Paul's friends in Philippi were co-partners in God's grace with Paul inasmuch as they participated with Paul in suffering for Christ by sending Epaphroditus with gifts to care for Paul in prison and by enduring the *same struggle* in their Roman colony that Paul was enduring in his Roman prison. In both places, the proclamation that Christ is Savior and Lord brought them into conflict with the Roman declaration that Caesar is Savior and Lord (emphasis in the original).[141]

It should be noted that the verb συναθλέω represents a category of syntax that Paul employs in his letter to the Philippians (and elsewhere in his writings, as we will see later) to emphasize the theme of fellowship. More than in any other letter, Paul attaches the συν- prefix "not only to verbs, such as 'strive' (1:27; 4:3), 'rejoice' (2:17, 18), 'be formed' (3:10), 'receive' (4:3) but also to nouns such as 'soul' (2:2), 'worker' (2:25; 4:3), 'soldier' (2:25), 'imitator' (3:17), 'form' (3:21) and 'yoke' (4:3)."[142] Paul even adds the συν- prefix almost redundantly to κοινωνός (1:5) and κοινωνειν (4:14). Lincoln concludes: "It would be hard to imagine how he could make his point that life worthy of the gospel is life in communion with other believers any more forcefully."[143]

A third connection between Philippians 1:27 and the theme of fellowship is found in the middle of the expression: στήκετε ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες ("you stand firm in one spirit, as one soul striving together").

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[140] Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, 5:86–87. "This struggle, moreover, is not only *against* a foe, but *for* the gospel-truth."

[141] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 55.

[142] Lincoln, "Communion," 154.

[143] Lincoln, "Communion," 154.

Most translations have πνεύματι here with a small "s" spirit, so that ἑνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ form a chiasm ("in one spirit, as one soul"), a kind of Hebraic parallelism where the second phrase is synonymous to or explanatory of the first. Gordon Fee argues that Paul more likely is thinking of the Holy Spirit here.[144] This connects with Paul's references to "in one Spirit" in Ephesians (2:18; 4:4), another Prison Epistle, along with 1 Corinthians 12:13. In all of these passages "the emphasis is on believers' common experience of the one Spirit as the basis for unity."[145] It is their unity in the one Holy Spirit, the one who brought each and every believer to faith in Christ Jesus and into fellowship with him, that allows them to strive "together as one for the faith of the gospel." The reason for this strong encouragement toward unity is found in the following verses (1:28-30): suffering for Christ in the face of opposition to the gospel.

Philippians 2:1-4

> *Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit (εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος), if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* (NIV)

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[144] Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 165. He points out that elsewhere when Paul uses the verb στήκω ("stand firm") with the preposition ἐν, "the prepositional phrase is invariably locative; that is, it defines the "sphere" in which one is to stand firm." For example, in 4:1 Paul will encourage the Philippian brothers and sisters to "stand firm in the Lord" (στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ). This construction works for standing in one the Spirit "by whom they have all been incorporated into Christ," but the translation "in one spirit" (*how* they would stand firm) would require a dative of manner, for which there is no Pauline analogy.

[145] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 165–166.

The "therefore" at the beginning of 2:1 ties what follows as a result or inference of what precedes.[146] "The result of the experience of unity with one another in the *same struggle* caused by *those who oppose* the church (1:27–30) should be an endeavor to seek unity with those who have different interests within the church (2:1–4)" (emphasis in the original).[147] Hendriksen says the key to this internal unity is "true *lowliness* of mind and *helpfulness* of disposition" (emphasis in the original).[148] Paul reminds his partners in Philippi that the humble attitude required for brotherly unity is perfectly exemplified in Christ Jesus.

Witherington thinks it is a "tremendous mistake" that these verses (2:1-4) are often glossed over in favor of the Christ-hymn in the following verses (5-11).[149] Fee agrees that the first verses of the chapter are not merely an "overture" to the Christ-hymn—"the narrative about Christ exists, on the contrary, to reinforce by ultimate example what is urged here (and in 1:27)."[150] Bockmuehl observes: "Both rhetorically and theologically, 2:5–11 shapes and illustrates 2:1–4."[151]

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[146] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 583.

[147] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 106.

[148] Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, 5:93–97.

[149] Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 117. Witherington says that the discourse that includes Paul's beautiful summary of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ "has a paraenetic function." The apostle wants Christ's attitude and disposition "imitated and followed, not merely admired or contemplated."

[150] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 176 fn. 12.

[151] Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 104.

Paul begins his appeal for resolving all divisiveness in the church with four parallel clauses, each beginning with εἴ τις / εἴ τι.[152] In the context, they should likely not be taken as conditional, as if there were any doubt ("should anyone be in Christ"), but "inclusive and indefinite"[153] ("whoever is in Christ").[154] Rather than casting a shadow on their standing with God, the apostle is building them up and affirming that this is already the reality for the believers. In fact, he builds the case for his appeal for unity on what the Philippians had already experienced in their walk with Christ.

First, Paul points them to the encouragement that was theirs as a result of being found "in Christ" (παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ). The phrase "in Christ" has a "dominating role" [155] throughout the letter, occurring in various forms twenty-one times in 104 verses (as many as in the letter to the Romans). Bockmuehl says that "to be in Christ means to be incorporated into his body, to live in relation to him and through him."[156] Kloha observes that "the individuals who live in κοινωνία relate to one another through Christ. Hence the Apostle will describe his relationship to the Corinthians as one of 'father' *in Christ* (1 Cor. 4:15), not on any other basis. The Gentiles have now been brought near to the Jews into one body *in Christ* (Eph. 2:13)."[157]

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[152] David Alan Black, "Paul and Christian Unity: A Formal Analysis of Philippians 2:1-11," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 3 (September 1985): 301.

[153] Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 104.

[154] For the grammar, see J. L. Boyer, "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 75–114.

[155] Karl P Donfried and I. Howard Marshall, *The Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 138.

[156] Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 52–53.

[157] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 31.

In his commentary on Romans 6:11, R. C. H. Lenski summarizes his understanding of how Paul uses the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ this way:

> Ἐν denotes a vital spiritual connection so that we translate: "in connection with." This connection is established objectively by the means of grace (baptism is mentioned), subjectively by faith. For this reason the Name is often mentioned, meaning the objective revelation (see 2:24): Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 4:12; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 1 John 3:23; 5:13. The connection indicated by ἐν applies to every individual Christian as such as well as to all of them as a body, for since each is "in Christ Jesus," this makes all of them one body.[158]

The encouragement that comes from our being *in Christ* is not "an unqualified and morally vacuous affirmation," but includes both the ideas of "consolation and strengthening."[159] The NIV also translates it variously as exhortation, appeal, encouragement, comfort, consolation, or preaching. In the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Otto Schmitz observes that "the wealth of meanings of παρακαλεῖν are very freely set in the service of testimony to the NT event of salvation."[160] In other words, it can represent many forms of speaking the gospel as well as many types of impact that the gospel of Christ has on those who hear it, through the power of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit.[161] This encouragement follows closely and purposefully after

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[158] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 410.

[159] Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 106.

[160] Otto Schmitz, "Παρακαλέω, Παράκλησις," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 799.

[161] Schmitz, "Παρακαλέω, Παράκλησις," 799. "If 'asking' presupposes that the salvation of God is manifested in Jesus, 'exhortation,' being effected by the Spirit, is based on the salvation already accomplished, and 'comfort' or 'consolation' takes place through the present and future act of God Himself to salvation. Hence it is hardly too much to say that, as defined by the NT act of salvation, παρακαλεῖν and παράκλησις may be traced back to the saving work of the triune God which leads those in need of help as suppliants to the Son of God, which is preached as exhortation in the power of the Spirit of God, and which carries with it already in this time the eternal comfort of God the Father."

Paul's appeal in the preceding verses—those who are united "in Christ" through faith worked by the Spirit through the gospel will find what they need to stand firm, strive together, and suffer for Christ together.

Many of the same thoughts reverberate through the second clause of 2:1: "if any comfort from his love." The undeserved love that Christ has for us brings comfort for weary souls, who in turn "comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Cor. 1:4). This attitude of affection-motivated comforting has already been on full display in the first chapter and will continue throughout Paul's letter to the Philippians. Fee sees the thrust of the apostle's appeal here as something like: "if our common experience of comfort from God's love has anything going for it at all, then express that same love toward me, by completing my joy by having the same love toward one another."[162]

Likewise, the third clause in 2:1 doesn't add a new category, but expands on the reality presented in the first two clauses: "if any common sharing in the Spirit" (εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος).

There has been some question as to whether πνεύματος is a subjective or objective genitive. Nordling writes that a subjective genitive would indicate "fellowship created by the Holy Spirit, which only this person of the Godhead can give through what Lutherans would call the means of grace."[163] Lincoln calls it "the partnership that is

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[162] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 181.

[163] Nordling, "Communion at Philippi," 189. Nordling adds in a footnote: "This understanding of the means of grace surfaces repeatedly in the Lutheran Confessions, e.g., SA III VIII 10–13, in Tappert, The Book of Concord, 313; Ep II 13, in Tappert, The Book of Concord, 471; Ep XII 22, in Tappert, The Book of Concord, 499; SD II 4, in Tappert, The Book of Concord, 520; SD XI 76–77, in Tappert, The Book of Concord, 628–629, etc."

enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit."[164] This subjective genitive reading might make sense in light of the parallel of these first three conditional clauses to the Trinitarian blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:13(14), where fellowship is seen as the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the same way that grace is the gift of the Son, and love is the gift of the Father.

Table 1. Comparison of Phil. 2:1 and 2 Cor. 13:13

Philippians 2:1	**2 Corinthians 13:13(14)**
Εἴ τις παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ	Ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης,	καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ
εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος	καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος

O'Brien writes that an objective genitive could indicate "fellowship *in* the Holy Spirit, a fellowship brought about through His indwelling presence in the congregation and the Christian's personal communion with Him."[165] Hansen has another take on the objective genitive: "To strengthen the unity of the church, Paul draws on another meaning of partnership, that of common possession. Believers in Christ are heirs to the Holy Spirit; they have common possession of the Holy Spirit. They are bound together not only by their partnership to proclaim the gospel but also by their 'common sharing in

[164] Lincoln, "Communion," 155.

[165] Peter T. O'Brien, "Fellowship Theme in Philippians," *The Reformed Theological Review* 37, no. 1 (January 1978): 16.

the Spirit' (2:1)."[166] Hendriksen refers to it as "the marvelous Spirit-fellowship" and says it "transcends both objective and subjective; one might call it adjectival."[167]

Nordling concludes that the objective genitive probably works best here: "Paul encourages the Philippians by reminding them of their 'joint stock' in the Spirit by which they are partners with him, he with them, and they jointly with one another."[168] Whether objective or subjective, O'Brien says "the phrase has to do with a new relationship with God effected in and through His Spirit" that has "corporate ramifications for the readers."[169] My conclusion is that Paul does not mean to limit his meaning to one or the other. I agree with Fee when he writes: "As in the benediction in 2 Cor 13:13 (14), the 'fellowship with the Spirit' most likely refers to the 'sharing in the Spirit' (NRSV) that believers have first with God, but by that very fact, secondly, with one another because they live and breathe by the same Spirit."[170]

While the first three "conditional" clauses in 2:1 speak of the spiritual reality of their unity with the Trinity, the fourth clause perhaps brings the horizontal element of

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[166] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 33. Hansen compares the "common possession of the Holy Spirit" to the Old Testament Levites who were not given an inheritance in the land because the Lord was their inheritance (Deut. 10:9). "God has given his Spirit to the church as their inheritance." (p. 110)

[167] Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of Philippians*, 5:98 fn. 73. "That it is a fellowship *with* the Holy Spirit, an actual participation in that Spirit and in all his benefits cannot be doubted (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 John 1:3). But Paul also here regards it as the *gift* of the Spirit, just as he here considers the *persuasive appeal* as springing from *love*, and just as in 2 Cor. 13:13 he views *grace* as being the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, *love* the gift of the Father, and *fellowship* the gift of the Holy Spirit."

[168] Nordling, "Communion at Philippi," 189.

[169] O'Brien, "Fellowship Theme in Philippians," 17.

[170] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 181. "By the Spirit, therefore, they are united to Christ, and in Christ to one another—and thus to Paul. Indeed, the Spirit is the empowering agent of all that God is currently doing among them, 'both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (2:13). Thus, just as the comfort from being 'in Christ' and the solace of experiencing God's love serves as the ground for his appeal to their unity in Christ, so too (especially) with their common 'participation in the Spirit.' "

fellowship into focus: "if any tenderness and compassion." These terms of affection (σπλάγχνα καὶ οἰκτιρμοί) are first of all attributed to God (see Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 1:3) but consequently also on display in those united to God in Christ (see Col. 3:12; Luke 6:36). So Paul says in 1:8 that he has for them the affection of Christ Jesus (ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ), but he also acknowledges the concern that the Philippians had for him (4:10). The apostle hints at these experiences as one more reason for his appeal to put divisions behind them.

Together these four clauses leading to the request in 2:2-4 parallel Paul's prayer for the Romans: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6). The blessings of unity that the believers have with the Triune God are to result in expressions of unity with their fellow believers.[171] David Black summarizes this section: "In 2:1-4 Paul sets before readers of all generations the ideal—indeed, the reality—of 'being one in Christ.' Essentially this entails a community of believers who think and act together, who live in love and kindness for the benefit of each other, who put away selfish ambition and self-valuations, and who concentrate on the needs of others at least as much as they attend to their own."[172]

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[171] Witherington: "Thus in the end it is the experience of God's Trinitarian work in their midst that is the ultimate motivator for the ethical appeals here. As Pauline scholars have long noted, the divine indicative is the ground and basis of the imperatives. The Philippians must work out what God in three persons is working in them." *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 121.

[172] Black, "Paul and Christian Unity," 308. He adds: "Although organization ecumenicity may never be achieved within the body of Christ, spiritual ecumenicity is a goal that must never be abandoned. True spiritual unity without schism of fellowship is not only the heart cry of Paul for his Philippian brethren but also the supreme badge of discipleship for Christ's Church today (John 13:35)."

As mentioned above, the primary and ultimate example of this attitude is described beautifully by Paul in his summary of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ Jesus in vv. 5-11. The Son of God, who existed from eternity in perfect union with the Father and the Spirit as one God, did not let that stand in the way of becoming one with us humans. For us and for our salvation, he willingly took on our human nature, the form of a servant (μορφὴν δούλου), and humbled himself to the point of dying in our place. All mankind, then, will confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. He has revealed and fulfilled the glory of the name of the LORD: "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exo. 34:6-7). Christ's humbly identifying with us and our lowly condition and putting our needs ahead of his own results in the salvation of many.

The apostle goes on, then, to apply this shining example of humility and sharing in our common interest to what that looks like for those who follow Christ. Paul does not begrudge "being poured out like a drink offering" (2:17) for the sake of the Philippians. Rather he is glad and encourages the Philippians to be glad and rejoice with him. Paul says that their "sacrifice and service" are evidence of their faith, which Paul had the privilege of bringing to them. Their new life in Christ, shining "like stars in the sky," justifies Paul's confidence on the day of Christ that he "did not run or labor in vain."

Likewise, Paul mentions Timothy as another example of one whose "genuine concern" for others results in their joy and encouragement. Timothy was a great help at Paul's side, and he was reluctant to part with him, but Timothy would also bring the

apostle good cheer by sending back news from the saints in Philippi. Their partnership in the gospel, gifted by the Spirit, was exercised and strengthened through such activities.

Next Paul speaks of yet another partner and example of one whose dedication to true fellowship in Christ brought joy to others. He calls Epaphroditus "my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier" (τὸν ἀδελφὸν καὶ συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην μου). This messenger of Christ had nearly worked himself to death for the sake of the gospel, risking his life to serve others. Paul saw the concern the Philippians felt for this partner in Christ, who had delivered their financial support to the apostle on their behalf, and he recognized that their anxiety would be relieved if Epaphroditus was sent to be with them again.

Philippians 3:10

> *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings (τὴν κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ), becoming like him (συμμορφιζόμενος) in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.* (NIV)

In 2:2, Paul urged the Philippian believers that they be "like-minded" (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε), "being one in spirit and purpose" (σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες). The apostle first offers Christ's humiliation as an example of that way of thinking. He further elaborates on what that φρονεῖν looks like in those who follow Christ. In contrast to the Judaizers, who put their confidence in their own works and worthiness and lived comparing themselves to others, Paul shows us a better way.

"I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing (τῆς γνώσεως) Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things" (3:8). Notice the use of γνῶσις, from the verb γινώσκω, which is more than knowing something objectively, but rather intimately, through experience. Hansen writes: "Since the desire to

know him is the goal of one who is *found in him,* this knowledge is relational and experiential. The purpose of life *in Christ* is personal, intimate knowledge of Christ."[173]

With an epexegetical καί in 3:10, Paul expands on what it means to know Christ: "to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings." With a single definite article, he joins *power* and *participation* into a single unit. "It is impossible to know the power of his resurrection without participation in his sufferings."[174] Paul's life was completely inverted on the day that he encountered the resurrected Lord Jesus on the path to Damascus. The Lord said of him to Ananias, "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:16). From the beginning of his converted life until its end, Paul knew that he was bound up with both Christ's resurrection and his sufferings. He had already referenced both the power of the resurrection (1:20-26) and the participation in the sufferings of Christ (1:29-30) in this letter.

Paul's "sharing in" the sufferings of Christ does not mean that he participates in their "expiatory quality," but rather it rises from the world's hatred of Christ extended to us because we are connected to him through faith and in our baptism.[175] John Gordon Davies writes: "To suffer is then a privilege because it is the mark of our *koinonia* with Christ, and this suffering is the ground of our certainty that each one of us shall be 'a partaker (*koinonos*) of the glory that shall be revealed' (1 Pet. 5:1)."[176] The sufferings are

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[173] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 243. Emphasis in the original.

[174] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 243.

[175] Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 842.

[176] John Gordon Davies, *Members One of Another: Aspects of Koinonia* (A. R. Mowbray, 1958), 11.

plural because they refer to "all the sufferings of Christ and not only to the final ones; they climaxed in his death."[177]

Paul repeatedly insisted that all who had a share in Christ's resurrection must also see sufferings of their own, connected to their Lord's pain and death. See, for example, Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10; Col. 1:24; Phil. 1:29; 1 Thess. 1:6; 3:2-3. The suffering experienced as a follower of Christ and on behalf of the gospel does not happen in isolation and is not "an individualistic enterprise reserved only for heroic martyrs."[178] It is part and parcel of our connection to Christ and to each other.

Not to be forgotten or overlooked is the participial phrase at the end of verse 10. In 2:10, Paul said that Christ had taken on our nature, our μορφή. Now he tells us that the aim of the follower of Christ is to become like him (συμμορφιζόμενος) in his death. Lenski writes: "We are not merely receiving the σχῆμα or outward fashion but the real form that fits the essence, so closely are we connected with Christ who is 'formed' in us (Gal. 4:19)."[179] As something "inward and far deeper," Paul understands that coming to know Christ, the power of his resurrection and the participation in his sufferings, have a life-long impact on the Christian. In contrast to the preceding four aorists, this durative participle[180] is a picture of whatever lies ahead for the apostle. Regardless of whether or not he eventually suffers martyrdom, his life and death are now caught up with Christ.

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[177] Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 842–843.

[178] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 33.

[179] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 843.

[180] Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians*, 843.

The passive voice of the participle indicates that someone other than Paul is responsible for this transformation. Through Paul's participation in the sufferings of Christ the Spirit is continually transforming Paul's own life into something of parallel (if not equal) value. Just as Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection brought redemption to the human race, so now the life of the believer in Christ brings blessings to others of his fellowship and beyond.

The final piece in Paul's desire to "know Christ" is aspirational. "And so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." Nowhere does Paul give any indication that such a glorious future is in doubt; his certainty of the resurrection at the last day is on full display in 1 Corinthians 15. This sure and certain hope motivated and equipped the apostle to give himself fully to the work of the Lord, because he knew that his labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). The only uncertainty of the "somehow" of Philippians 3:11 is the manner of his death, whether non-violent or as a martyr.

This final phrase of this sentence points also to the "now" and "not yet" of the Christian experience. Already now we are united with Christ and given citizenship in heaven, and already now we have experienced the "first resurrection" of a new life of faith in him. The full consummation of our faith, however, is still to come. Paul says we are eagerly waiting for our Savior to return from heaven, who will "transform (σύμμορφον) our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (3:21). Likewise, just as our current union with Christ will only be made complete in the eschaton, so our present-day partnership with the body of Christ is only a foretaste of the more perfect fellowship in the world to come. As Grundemann says in the TDNT:

"United with Christ, man acquires a share in what Christ is and is thus made like Him, so that God's purpose as Creator attains its goal."[181]

One final comment on this verse: Notice how Paul's use of κοινωνία and συμμορφιζόμενος in this passage demonstrates "the congruence of the κοιν- family and the συν- compounds"[182] of which I will speak more later in this theological reflection.

Philippians 4:14,15

> *Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles (*συγκοινωνήσαντές μου τῇ θλίψει*). Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving (*ἐκοινώνησεν εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως*), except you only.* (NIV)

Paul had acknowledged the Philippian Christians' partnership in the gospel with him at the beginning of the letter (1:5). It is incorrect to say that he put this "business" thought aside for other more spiritual matters only to return to it again at the close of the letter. Rather, the entire epistle is a master course on how the apostle understood *koinonia* in the context of our walk with Christ. *Koinonia* is a source of joy, a sharing in the sufferings of Christ, a mutual participation in the Spirit leading to humble service. Even now, as Paul once again returns more directly to thanking his "partners in the gospel" for the gift sent through Epaphroditus, it is undoubtedly a recognition of the financial "transaction." Even more so, however, Paul takes one more opportunity to reenforce the

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[181] Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 788.

[182] Richard D. Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice" (Presented at the WELS Dakota-Montana District, Pastoral Conference, Banff, Alberta, Canada, 1994), 4, accessed November 29, 2023, http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/201.

spiritual lesson, putting their generous action and attitude into the perspective of their relationship with each other through their common faith in Christ.

Some, such as Fee, have characterized this in terms of a "patron-client" relationship[183], or have been influenced by J. Paul Sampley's controversial writing to see a comparison with the Graeco-Roman *societas*, "a legally binding association of equal partners based on their mutual assent to a common purpose."[184] Julien Ogereau argues that "the collocation of (ἐπι)κοινωνέω with a participial phrase introduced by the telic preposition εἰς, which indicates the purpose or sphere of application of the agreed partnership" suggests a business-oriented relationship, much like missionaries who raise their own funds today. Additionally, Jack Suggs suggests that "the κοινων terminology as used here is not characteristic of the ἐκκλησία as such," especially since it is a κοινωνία in which οὐδεμία ἐκκλησία … εἰ μὴ ὑμεῖς μόνοι."[185]

Admittedly, the terminology and phrasing in these verses are the same as those used in financial transactions of the time. "Numerous examples in Greek and Jewish-Hellenistic sources attest that the phrase *giving and receiving* has both a technical meaning referring to financial transactions and a nontechnical meaning referring to the giving and receiving of gifts, services, and mutual discourse between friends."[186] The

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[183] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 444–445. Fee does note, however: "But precisely because their 'friendship' was predicated on their mutual belonging to Christ, these two expressions of 'patron-client' relationship were leveled by total mutuality and reciprocity."

[184] Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2000), 60.

[185] M. Jack Suggs, "Koinonia in The New Testament," *Mid-Stream* 23, no. 4 (1984): 354.

[186] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 318.

word λόγος (translated "matter") also referred to a ledger or the settlement of an account.[187] Some would point to ἀπέχω of v. 18 as Paul's receipt for services rendered.

However, the financially focused descriptions of the relationship between Paul and the Philippian Christians fails to take into account the context of the rest of the letter. Hansen observes: "In the entire letter and especially in the immediate context, Paul expands and transforms the terms of his partnership with the Philippians so that the financial terms become metaphors for spiritual transactions."[188] Additionally, throughout the letter the apostle has been framing their relationship not in terms of business partners nor a patron and his clients—in fact theirs was not a two-sided but triangular relationship.[189] For this reason, although Paul acknowledges the Philippians' gift with the words, "I have received full payment and even more," he quickly recharacterizes their gifts as not ultimately meant for him but for their common benefactor: "They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (4:18). Witherington further challenges the patron-client approach to this letter:

> In fact, what is going on here is that Paul is gently reminding the audience that he is not their client and does not require such kind gifts, and so is not in their debt really, precisely because he is the ambassador of their patron and benefactor Jesus, and what they are giving needs to be seen as the response to all that God in Christ has done for them. They should see it as a giving with no thought of return, not a giving that sets up a further reciprocity cycle. In such a setting it is the one who initiates the relationship that sets up its terms, and in this case that would be Christ and his apostle Paul. Paul, then, can bring that cycle to a proper conclusion if he chooses, without creating odium or shame and without violating or breaking his relationship with the audience and thus setting in motion the enmity

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[187] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 478.

[188] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 319.

[189] Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 445. "What is unique to Paul's relationship with the Philippians is that their 'partnership' with him was not so much 'one on one,' as it were, but a *three-way bond*—between him, them, and Christ (and the gospel)."

> conventions. The relationship must be seen by the Philippians as one in which they are in ongoing debt to their Savior Christ. Thus the Philippians must consider their gift a thanksgiving offering to God in response to what God has done for them by Christ and through the good efforts of Paul. In addition, it appears that Paul views their gifts as a healthy investment upon which God is prepared to pay interest.[190]

Bockmuehl sees the rhetorical effect of placing these thoughts at the end of the letter as indicating that their gift was not his main purpose for writing, "but secondary in importance to their own concord and adoption of the mind of Christ."[191] The vertical mutual relationship they had with their Savior was the source of their horizontal mutual participation in the gospel. Bockmuehl observes that "the undoubted aspects of equality and mutuality in Paul's partnership with the Philippians are underwritten by their common participation in a new identity that is constructed in Christ rather than in social or ethnic status."[192]

Key Transformational Blessings Through Koinonia in the Letter to the Philippians

In their book *Partnering in Ministry: The Direction of World Evangelism*, Luis Bush and Lorry Lutz identify seven aspects of partnership in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

- Partnering in the Gospel;
- Partnering in the Spirit;
- Unity in Partnership;
- Partners Help Each Other to Grow;

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[190] Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 270.

[191] Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 263.

[192] Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 264.

- Partnership in Suffering;
- Financial Partnership;
- Prayer Partnership.[193]

I see four key transformational blessings brought about through *koinonia* as "mutual participation" in Philippians. 1) Mutual participation in the gospel brings joy; 2) Mutual participation in the Spirit produces humble service; 3) Mutual participation in the sufferings of Christ leads us to our eternal goal; and 4) Mutual participation in Christ's kingdom moves us to think and act as one.

First, we see that mutual participation in the gospel brings joy. Paul soon identified the people he was writing to as "partners in the gospel," and that was true in at least two ways. First, they were all of them co-recipients of God's grace: "All of you share in God's grace with me" (1:7). Even Paul, who had been "a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man" was shown mercy. All Christians shared equally in benefitting from the work of Jesus Christ who became "obedient to death—even death on the cross" to redeem sinful mankind to the holy God. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). That grace which unites all believers as one with Christ and with each other also transforms them into witnesses of that same gospel to others. So they were also "partners in the gospel" by virtue of being part of the same Great Commission. Paul acknowledges that this was true "from the first day until now," perhaps thinking of Lydia's hospitality and support of Paul's gospel ministry when he

[193] Luis Bush and Lorry Lutz, *Partnering in Ministry: The Direction of World Evangelism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 23–33.

first arrived in Macedonia (Acts 16:14-15) as well as the recent gift that the entire congregation had recently sent through Epaphroditus.

This mutual participation in the gospel brought joy to the apostle, even (or perhaps especially) while he was imprisoned. “In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership” (Phil. 1:3-5). Those who labor for the Lord do so without consideration of a reward, but God frequently rewards them by allowing them to see the fruits of their labors. Certainly Paul was encouraged to hear Epaphroditus bring the latest news from the church in Philippi. It confirmed his trust “that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6). Seeing them “hold firmly to the word of life,” Paul would be able to boast on the last day “that I did not run or labor in vain” (2:16). Even if his gospel proclamation days are nearing an end, their mutual participation in the gospel meant that the work would continue. For that, Paul says, “I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me” (2:17,18). He will repeat his encouragement to “rejoice in the Lord always” (4:4) immediately after speaking about the role of various individuals in gospel partnership in the first verses of chapter 4.

Secondly, we see from Paul’s letter to the Philippians that mutual participation in the Spirit produces humble service. God not only graciously saved his people from punishment; he saved them for a purpose, and he equips them to carry it out. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Eph. 2:10). Paul assures the Philippians that even as they continue to “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12), they can take heart that “it is God who works in you to will and to act

according to his good purpose" (2:13) and "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6).

The purpose for which the Spirit calls us and the work he gives us to do is living lives of humble service and selfless love for one another. This is what it means to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27). This pattern was laid down by Christ Jesus, the Lord's perfect Servant (cf. 2:5-11; Isa. 42:1-7; 52:13—53:12). The attitude of humility itself is a product of "fellowship with the Spirit" (2:1) which leads us to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind" (2:2). Those who have a share in Christ's love through the work of the Spirit humbly consider others better themselves, putting the needs and interests of others ahead of their own (2:3-4). Humbling oneself in such a way leads to being exalted by God. When he sent Epaphroditus back to the Philippians, Paul encouraged them to "welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ" (2:29). Christ himself was exalted "to the highest place" and given "the name that is above every name" as an acknowledgement of his supreme act of humble service.

Thirdly, we see that mutual participation in the sufferings of Christ leads us to our eternal goal. From his vantage point in prison, Paul could clearly see God's hand in all the suffering he had endured as a servant of Christ. The apostle made it clear that he was not an exception, but that it was the lot of all Christians to endure hardships for the name of Christ Jesus. "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have" (1:29,30). Paul understood that the glories of this

world and the things we choose to boast in actually take us farther away from God, rather than nearer to him. By faith, he knew that sharing in the sufferings of Jesus was worth far more than all that he could contribute towards his own salvation. “Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ…. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him” (3:7-9). Gaining Christ and being found in him included participating in the sufferings of the one who paid our debt with his innocent death. Ultimately, however, since we are on the same path as Christ, our suffering in his name also ends in our being glorified with him in the resurrection. “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead” (3:10,11). This is the goal towards which Paul continued to press (3:12-14), even while also trusting that his citizenship in heaven was certain (3:20) and his salvation was solidly in the hands of his eternal Savior (3:21; 1:6; 1:21).

Finally, mutual participation in Christ’s kingdom moves us to think and act as one. At the beginning of the second chapter, Paul made clear that the unity that believers have with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit is to have a profound impact on the way that we interact with each other (2:1-3). Their relationships with each other were to flow from the same mindset as Christ Jesus who willingly laid aside his “rights” as the Son of God in order to bring about the redemption of mankind (2:5-11). Conducting themselves in a manner worthy of this good news meant for Paul that they would “stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel” (1:27,28).

When Paul described his single-minded focus to “take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (3:12), he was not trying to stand out from the crowd, but

to set the model for all other disciples of Christ to follow. “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν). And if on some point you think differently (εἴ τι ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε), that too God will make clear to you” (3:15). The apostle warns them against those who do have a different message. Their mind is on earthly things (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες). Paul identifies them as “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18-20), in contrast to the believers whose citizenship is in heaven. Because of this, he encourages the church in Philippi to “join together in following my example,” keeping him, Timothy and Epaphroditus as a model for all to follow (3:17).

The apostle specifically calls out by name some in the congregation who had not been living in such unity of purpose (e.g., Euodia and Syntyche) and calls on others to help them to that end (e.g., Clement and Syzygus?). Importantly, Paul grounds this encouragement to unified thinking and acting on their relationship with Christ by repeatedly referring to them as “brothers and sisters” (ἀδελφοί): e.g., Phil. 1:12, 14; 2:25; 3:1, 13, 17; 4:1, 8, 21.

Paul’s Use of Κοινωνία in Other Epistles

In this section I will trace Paul’s use of the κοινων- word family in his writings outside of his letter to the Philippians.

1 Corinthians 1:9

I don’t believe it was purely coincidental that the apostle used words from the κοινων- family half a dozen times in each of his two letters to the Corinthians. Clearly, the congregation in Corinth wrestled with a wide range of theological issues in both doctrine and practice. The first of these that Paul addresses is the Corinthian believers’ lack of unity amongst themselves. After receiving a concerning report from a believer

named Chloe that there were ongoing quarrels in the church, the apostle wrote in strong words: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1:10). The following two chapters expand on the dangers of this spiritual disunity and the reasons for leaving it behind.

Before this section, however, the apostle opens his epistle with an appeal to the Corinthian believers' identity in Christ. Paul calls them "the church of God in Corinth," "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy" (1 Cor. 1:2). He has reason to give thanks to God for them "because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus" (1:4), the result of the apostle's preaching the gospel among them (1:6). Despite the concerning news regarding their spiritual struggles, Paul is still confident that they will stand "blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8). The basis for his confidence? God is faithful (πιστὸς ὁ θεός), and he is the one "who has called you (δι' οὗ ἐκλήθητε) into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν)" (1:9).

Fellowship with God's Son, then, is more than a "vague relationship with Christ."[194] It is the very foundation of the believer's faith and provides certainty of salvation, even in the face of struggles with sin. On the last day, when all appear before the judgment seat of God, those sinners called into fellowship with Christ through faith will stand strong and blameless. The blessed verdict which the believer can expect on the

[194] Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2000), 37. "This fellowship (κοινωνία, "communion") involved far more than some kind of vague relationship with Christ. It meant, rather, an actual participation in him, a union with him through faith and Baptism into his body, so that their bodies were now in a mysterious way members of his body (6:15; 12:13)."

last day is as certain as God is faithful. The life-saving fellowship we have with God's Son was through God's calling (δι' οὗ ἐκλήθητε): it was *his* idea, *his* working, *his* promise and commitment.[195]

In the meantime, this passage and its context shows that "*[k]oinōnia* with the Son has a present (already) and an eschatological ('not-yet') implication."[196] While we await this consummation of our faith, believers are brought into and retained in this fellowship with Christ through the gospel. God "calls" sinners into this fellowship through the gospel invitation to "repent and believe the good news." In turn, believers give evidence of our participation in Christ through a life of love and a striving together in unity with the body of Christ.[197] Hays observes: "In Paul's understanding, these two realities are inseparable. To be 'in Christ' *is* to be in the fellowship of the church."[198]

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[195] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 29. "Clarifying the 'event word' entailments of each occurrence of κοινωνία results in an important implication: κοινωνία is not *created* by the participants, nor by the act of participating. It is the inevitable result of the collocation—one might even say the collision—of people, actions, and a common thing. In the context of 1 Corinthians, the church does not create κοινωνία when she participates together in Christ, but κοινωνία is thrust upon her because all are in Christ. This is seen most clearly by looking closely at the subjects of the verb in 1:9: God called you (all), all who have been called are brought into relationship with Christ, and in this collision of people and the Christ in whom all participate, there is κοινωνία. Christ does not create κοινωνία, we do not create κοινωνία, God does, by connecting us all to Christ."

[196] George Panikulam, *Koinōnia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life*, vol. 85, Analecta Biblica (Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 15.

[197] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 35–36. "In this life our communion with Christ is mediated on his part by Word and sacrament, in and through which he comes to us, in and by which he makes his abode with us and dwells in us. There is no fellowship of Christ with us apart from his Word and sacrament. On our part this communion with Christ is mediated by faith. Love, devotion, worship, and all works by which we serve him are never independent but spring forth as the fruits of faith. Take away faith, and the communion ceases forthwith. It is as pure and intense as our faith is pure and intense. Everything else indicates only the character and the degree of our faith."

[198] Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching First Corinthians* (John Knox Press, 1997), 19.

This, then, is the basis for Paul's strongly worded in appeal for unity in the following verses of 1 Corinthians 1. Leon Morris points out that the word *koinonia* "is the direct opposite of 'divisions' in v. 10. It is fellowship with (and in) Christ to which we are called, not divisions from one another."[199] Lockwood comments that "Paul would have no time for the modern attitude that 'my Christianity is something between me and my God.'"[200] Our communion with Christ leaves no room for "factionalism and individualism" between members of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:23

Following up on his exhortation to not let the exercise of freedom in Christ become "a stumbling block to the weak" (1 Cor. 8:9ff.), in chapter 9 Paul gives as an example the sacrifice of his own rights as an apostle for the sake of winning the lost for Christ. "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (9:19). Paul is willing and able to make those personal sacrifices, because he knows two much greater things are at stake. First: "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (9:22). Paul understands the urgency of the gospel in saving sinners and accepts his ministerial role in God's bringing that about.

Paul's second motive for being willing to abandon his rights as an apostle, however, is just as important in his mind: "I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (ἵνα συγκοινωνὸς αὐτοῦ γένωμαι)" (9:23). Literally, Paul says

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[199] Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 7, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 44.

[200] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 38.

that his desire is to "become a fellow (συν) participant or sharer (κοινωνὸς) in the gospel"—that is, in the blessings which are promised in that gospel.[201] Even while he was responsible for bringing the life-giving message of Christ to countless others, Paul knew he was just as much in need of the promised grace as any one of his many hearers. Together, he and those who heard and accepted his message mutually participated in Christ. The implication for the Corinthians, then, is that their lack of consideration for the needs of fellow believers had no place in the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:16-21

Throughout Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle points to one evidence after another of the congregation's disunity and lack of love for one another. At the same time, however, he frequently shows how the problems in their horizontal relationships (between fellow believers) stem from problems with their vertical relationship (between a believer and God). An example of this is found in chapter 10. Before getting into the matter of offence given to another believer's conscience by the decision to eat meat sacrificed to idols, Paul puts the practice in terms of who they are connecting to (vertically) through participation in religious meals. In these verses, Paul refers to three such meals: the sacrament of Holy Communion instituted by Christ (10:16-17), the Old Testament fellowship sacrifices (10:18), and meals offered to the public in pagan temples (10:19-21). In all three cases, the one eating the meal is physically participating or partnering with a spiritual entity. Lockwood comments: "The vertical dimension is paramount. That the Corinthians' relationship to the supernatural—to

[201] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians,* 311. Cf. also Hauck, "κοινωνός," TDNT 3:804, n. 52. "By faithful work for the Gospel Paul here hopes to be a partaker of the blessings of salvation which it promises."

demons and to God—is Paul's chief concern is spelled out by the succeeding verses (1 Cor 10:20–21). Above all, the Corinthians are not to tempt the Lord (10:22; cf. 10:9)."[202]

Lutherans have long observed that the fellowship that communicants enjoy with Christ in the sacrament is more than "warm fuzzy feelings." Rather, "through the sacramental bread and wine there is direct oral reception of the Lord's crucified and glorified body and blood."[203] Lockwood's commentary on these verses has a footnote with an important observation from Martin Chemnitz:

> M. Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper,* 138, observes: "The gifts of charity … collected for the poor saints … are called a κοινωνία in Rom. 15:26 and 2 Cor. 8:4. Does this mean that not the substance of these gifts but only something abstract was given and sent to the poor?" In this connection Chemnitz compares Paul's terminology in Rom 8:9 and 1 Cor. 6:19, where he says "the Holy Spirit dwells in you," with 2 Cor 13:14, where he speaks of "the communion of the Spirit." Chemnitz continues: "Are we going to say … that the Holy Spirit does not dwell in the believers with His essence, that His essence is far removed from us, and that in His place only something drawn from the substance of the Spirit, namely, His gifts and powers, is present in us?"[204]

In addition to the very real and eternally beneficial gifts we receive through this communion with Christ, the believing communicants also are blessed to be united to each other as co-participants in the body and blood of Christ. "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17). Once again, our horizontal fellowship is founded on and flows from our vertical fellowship with God through Christ. Kloha comments: "The Lord's Supper is not a means to create κοινωνία, it is an expression or manifestation of the already existing unity (the church)

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[202] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians,* 344.

[203] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians,* 341.

[204] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians,* 341, fn. 21.

that has been created by God, through faith in Christ. The necessary corollary to this is that it is impossible for an individual who is not called by God to 'participate together in the blood and body of Christ.' "[205] Davies points out that this joint participation with each other continues after the Eucharist, as the believers return to their homes and lives after their worship gathering: "If through union with our Head we become members one of another, we are still members one of another in our daily life and in our social relations—with all that that implies in terms of mutual service."[206]

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Just as he did in 1 Corinthians 10, in these verses the apostle Paul once again contrasts the blessed fellowship believers have with God and his family with an inappropriate participation (ἑτεροζυγοῦντες) in the work of God's enemies. While it is possible that Paul has in mind an admonition to avoid sinful behaviors and false beliefs in general, the context of 2 Corinthians leads me to believe that in 6:14—7:1 he is "ramping up the rhetoric" against the false teachers regarding whom he has been warning the Corinthians. "Paul warns the Corinthians of the danger of being intimately connected to the false teaching of the counterfeit apostles, which can only destroy their relationship to Jesus and to one another."[207] To be in communion with one means to be separate from the other.

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[205] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 30.

[206] Davies, *Members One of Another*, 23.

[207] Edward A. Engelbrecht, *The Lutheran Study Bible* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 1989.

In these verses, the apostle uses five rhetorical questions to drive home his point. The parallelism employed in these questions also helps us expand our understanding of what fellowship includes and implies. In addition to the straightforward words μετοχὴ and κοινωνία, Paul also compares this partnership to being yoked together, albeit unequally in this case (ἑτεροζυγοῦντες). Then he speaks of συμφώνησις (6:15), a word unused elsewhere in the New Testament, but which alludes to harmony or agreement. In the next question, Paul refers to the μερὶς, a share or portion, apportioned from an inheritance, for example.[208] The final question refers to συγκατάθεσις, another word with the idea of agreement or perhaps consensus.[209] From these successive, parallel questions, Paul paints a fuller picture of fellowship as including the idea of sharing a common yoke, working towards a common goal and sharing in the results together, speaking as one voice, and coming together in consensus and agreement. We may add to these parameters a conclusion from Paul's ultimate point in this passage, which is that fellowship with one often necessitates a separation from another.

As is customary with Paul, his strong warning against improper behavior is conveyed within the context of the gospel. He motivates his readers to choose the better path by pointing out what is at stake. "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (6:14) is an allusion to Deuteronomy 22:10: "Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together." Besides the fact that one animal was clean and the other unclean, the inevitable

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[208] Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 409. For more of this "Hebraizing manner of expression" cf. Ps 49:18 LXX; Matt 24:51; John 13:8. Cf. also Col. 1:12.

[209] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 773.

result of such a mismatched pair is erratic and dangerous driving which will likely cause injury to the weaker animal.[210] The connotation here is that the believer who participates in and supports the work of a false teacher allows his soul to be steered in the wrong direction.[211] In contrast, the Christian believer has the invitation of Christ himself who said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Our *koinonia* in Christ brings rest while partnership with the enemies of the cross brings destruction.

God's words which Paul quotes in v. 16 can be seen as a description of being in fellowship with God: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." This was a common theme and promise throughout the Old Testament (cf. Lev. 26:12; Jer. 32:38; Ezek. 37:27; Zech. 2:10). In Christ, who is Immanuel, "God with us," we have the partial fulfillment of this promise (cf. John 1:14). Its ultimate fulfillment is announced at the end of the Scriptures with the return of Christ on the Last Day (cf. Rev. 21:3, 22:3-5).

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[210] Engelbrecht, *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 312, 1989.

[211] Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1078. "The reference is to Deut. 22:10 which forbade harnessing an ox and an ass, a clean and an unclean beast, together to a plow. Paul uses this passage in a figurative way: the believer has been cleansed, the unbeliever has refused to be cleansed. What business have they under the same yoke? It will always be the unbeliever's yoke, namely his unbelief. For never would the unbeliever take the believer's yoke of faith; it is always the other way. The unbeliever would laugh at the suggestion of his taking on faith's yoke; yet, strange to say, instead of equally scorning unbelief's yoke, many a believer accepts it upon his neck and even imagines that he can still retain faith's yoke."

Finally, in connection with this passage we might observe that in the following chapters of this letter (chapters 7-9 in particular) the apostle describes important aspects of fellowship among believers: mutual encouragement and generosity. Once again, the horizontal fellowship between believers is seen to flow naturally from their vertical fellowship with God.

2 Corinthians 8 & 9

In chapters 8 and 9 of this second letter to the Corinthians, the apostle takes up the topic of the collection being gathered by many churches on behalf of the believers in Judea who were facing financial hardships due to famine. He mentions the same in Romans 15:25-29. The focus of his motivation, however, was not on the amount to be given, but on the attitude by which it was offered. The word translated "generosity" in both 2 Cor. 8:2 and 9:13 (ἁπλότης) normally has the sense of *singleness, simplicity, sincerity.*[212] BAGD says that the sense of *generosity* is in dispute and suggests the meaning of *sincere concern* in this context.[213] Lenski suggests *single-mindedness*.[214] The main thrust is that the collection was to be an expression of "the solidarity of the churches with each other."[215] At the end of this section, Paul writes: "Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that

[212] Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 57.

[213] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 86.

[214] Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1127.

[215] Hainz, "Κοινωνία," 30.

accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else" (9:13).

To spur on the Corinthian believers to display their love and unity with the body of Christ, Paul shares with them the example of the Macedonian churches. He writes:

> In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity [ἁπλότης]. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people [τὴν χάριν καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους]. And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us. (2 Cor. 8:2-5)

With the context given above, I see no reason to invent a new meaning for *koinonia* here, as some have translated it as "collection" or "common offering." Rather, its usual sense of *fellowship, mutual participation,* or *sharing,* work perfectly well in this context as well. The apostle Paul is pointing out to the Corinthians that their brothers and sisters to the north in Macedonia saw the gathering of assistance as participating in a unified effort by fellow believers for fellow believers. Hainz sees here and in Romans 15:26 a "demonstration of partnership,"[216] but this is not just a sign of fellowship. It is actual participation in a common cause or ministry. Note that in verse 5 Paul says that the Macedonian believers "gave themselves first of all to the Lord"—not just an offering, but themselves they shared.[217]

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[216] Hainz, "Κοινωνία," 30.

[217] David J. Valleskey, *2 Corinthians*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1992), 134. Valleskey notes: "In the original Greek, the word *themselves* is placed in an emphatic position. Paul says, "Themselves they gave first to the Lord and then to us."

2 Corinthians 13:13(14)

We have already spoken about this verse in connection with Philippians 2:1, where Paul also speaks of "the fellowship of the [Holy] Spirit" in the context of a possible allusion to the gifts of the Trinity. Regarding both passages there has been much discussion on whether πνεύματος is a subjective or an objective genitive. Although the first two elements of the triad in this verse are clearly subjective, the third could be reasonably interpreted either way. The sense of a subjective genitive would be "the fellowship with one another that is engendered by the Spirit" or "the participation granted by the Spirit in himself."[218] This sense is paralleled in Ephesians 4:3: "Make every effort to keep the unity of [engendered by] the Spirit (ἑνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος) through the bond of peace." An objective genitive could be translated as a "participation in the Holy Spirit" or "communion with the Holy Spirit" and might also refer to a partaking in the life, power, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which have been Paul's prayer for the Corinthian congregation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7; 12:7; 14:1).[219] A parallel might be found in Hebrews 6:4, where believers are described as those "who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in [μετόχους] the Holy Spirit."[220]

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[218] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 939.

[219] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 939.

[220] Davies writes on Heb. 6:4: "We participate in the Spirit when we enter into the *koinonia* of all believers. The Spirit's presence is never an individual possession to be enjoyed in isolation, but the bond of unity of the Body of Christ through whom the faithful are united to one another and to Christ…. Should a Christian separate himself from the *koinonia*, he cannot take away the Spirit as if He belonged to him alone or was at his disposal; instead he ceases to be a partner, he ceases to be a partaker of the Spirit who indwells the *koinonia*" (Davies, *Members One of Another*, 14-15).

Once again, we may be inclined to allow Paul to imply both objective and subjective senses simultaneously. Wallace calls this a "plenary" genitive.[221] Garland observes: "Paul wishes for the Corinthians a deepening of their participation in the Holy Spirit; he also wishes for the unity which the Holy Spirit gives to the community."[222] Harris points out "a close conceptual parallel to this phrase" in 1 Corinthians 12:13: "After speaking of an outward "immersion in the Spirit," the verse speaks of an inward participation in the Spirit. 'For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink.'"[223]

Romans 11:17

In his discussion of the place of the Gentiles in God's saving plan which began with the chosen people of Israel, Paul compares these Gentile believers to "a wild olive shoot" which has been grafted in among the others and now shares in (συγκοινωνὸς) the nourishing sap from the olive root. The point is clear from the context that it is not simply that the Gentile believers receive their spiritual life and nourishment from the same source as the Jewish believers (cf. Rom. 10:12, 17; John 15:5). Rather, this common source of life that they now share in Christ brings them into a new relationship with one another (cf. Rom. 15:27). This is made clear in the following chapter, where Paul repeats his admonition here against arrogant boasting (cf. 11:18, 20, 25) in the context of the picture of all believers as members of the one body of Christ (cf. Rom 12:3).

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[221] D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 119–21.

[222] David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 556.

[223] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 940.

Romans 12:13

Chapter 12 of Paul's letter to the Romans initiates a shift in focus from the previous chapters. In verse 1, Paul writes: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." With the words "therefore" and "in view of God's mercy," the apostle shows how the good news of the sinner being justified by grace through faith in Christ Jesus (the focus of the first chapters of the letter) now bears the natural fruit of sanctified living in those brought to faith through the gospel. Those now found in Christ are called to a transformed way of living, patterned after the will of God which was revealed in his Son.

The first way that Paul mentions in which believers are to "offer their bodies as living sacrifices" is in taking on an attitude of humility and grace in their relationships with others (cf. 12:3). Collectively, all believers are the body of Christ, Paul says. Each one a member of that body with its own function and strengths which are to be employed "in accordance with your faith," "generously," "diligently," and "cheerfully" (cf. 12:6-8). Those in Christ are to be devoted to one another in sincere love, honoring each other, and serving the Lord (cf. 12:9-11).

In verse 13, Paul gives the admonition: "Share with the Lord's people who are in need (ταῖς χρείαις τῶν ἁγίων κοινωνοῦντες)." The ESV translates this as "Contribute to the needs of the saints." Middendorf interprets the phrase as "giving a share" to those in need,[224] Lincoln sees in it a deeper demonstration of "common cause or solidarity with

[224] Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 9–16*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe and Curtis P. Giese, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 1255.

others in their practical and material need and not simply where there is something to be gained."[225] Hainz comments on this verse: "Thus the relationship in community, which has come into existence between the believers, obliges them to give reciprocal assistance."[226]

Romans 15:26-27

While in the context of chapter 12, Paul was encouraging a general, ongoing sharing in the needs of fellow believers, here in 15:26-27 the apostle has a specific opportunity in mind. He refers to the collection being gathered among the (predominantly Gentile) congregations of Macedonia and Achaia on behalf of the (predominantly Jewish) believers in Jerusalem who were experiencing financial hardship (cf. Acts 20:1-5; 2 Cor. 8-9).

In both cases, however—whether as a general attitude or in this specific case—Paul uses the same gospel motivation for this κοινωνίαν εἰς τοὺς πτωχοὺς. The exhortation in chapter 12 came on the heels of Paul's analogy of the Gentiles as "wild olive shoots" grafted into the olive root where the Jews had been "natural branches," but all of them receiving the same "nourishing sap" (11:17). Here in chapter 15, Paul says the Gentiles have a natural obligation to the Jewish believers: "For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings (τοῖς πνευματικοῖς αὐτῶν ἐκοινώνησαν), they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (15:27). Once again, it is the

[225] Lincoln, "Communion," 149.

[226] Hainz, "Κοινωνία," 304.

vertical communion that believers have with God that overflows with blessings into the horizontal communion between believers.

With this context, it seems appropriate to take the κοινωνίαν of verse 26 in terms of BDAG's "abstract for the concrete" third definition: "sign of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity, even gift, contribution."[227] As Middendorf says, "The final option, 'contribution,' is the specific referent of the '[sign of] fellowship' here."[228]

Galatians 2:9

In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul gives a vehement defense of his gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. In this line of argument, he felt it necessary to establish the legitimacy of his apostleship and its relation to the other apostles in Jerusalem. In chapter 2, he describes an important conference that took place between them, some years after Paul had already been serving in his ministry to the Gentiles, as Christ had called him to do. These "pillars" of the church, James, Cephas (Peter), and John, recognized how God had graciously called Paul into this office and had blessed his gospel work among the Gentiles with visible fruits (2:7-9).

As a result, Paul recalls, they "gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship" (δεξιὰς ἔδωκαν ἐμοὶ καὶ Βαρναβᾷ κοινωνίας). Paul positions κοινωνίας at the end of the phrase to define the purpose (ἵνα) of their arrangement: "that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised."[229] Fellowship in Christ, fellowship in the

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[227] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 439.

[228] Middendorf, *Romans 9–16*, 1523.

[229] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 88.

Spirit through a common faith, already existed by the work of the Spirit through the gospel in all of them. The apostles in Jerusalem had recognized that. Now they entered into an agreement on how they would share the work that was given to all of them by Christ's commission. Hainz writes: "The handshake was meant to confirm the partnership by a sign and express the willingness for partnership. The partnership thus sealed had its basis in the shared proclamation of the one gospel — at least in principle."[230] In principle, that is, because in the very next verses (2:11-14) Paul describes how the greater spiritual fellowship they shared was jeopardized by Peter and others when they acted at odds with the gospel (cf. 2:14-16). Consequently, in this passage we can see that fellowship in Christ can only be *recognized*, not *created*, by man, but it can be *severed* by man's actions, and when that happens, it should be publicly *recognized* by fellow Christians.

Philemon 6

The exact intended sense of κοινωνία in this verse may be one of the more challenging cases in Pauline writings. Paul is writing to his "dear friend and fellow worker" regarding the situation of the runaway slave Onesimus. As he commonly does, Paul shares with the recipient of his letter exactly what he is praying for on their behalf. In Philemon's case: that the "fellowshipping" of your faith may be active or effective (ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργὴς γένηται). Once again, there is the question of whether to take this as a subjective or objective genitive. Adding to the confusion this time is how to understand what is referred to by "faith" (τῆς πίστεως) and where the possessive "your" (σου) belongs. That is, "faith" may be *fides qua creditur*, "the faith by which he

[230] Hainz, "Κοινωνία," 305. Hainz adds that the collection for the poor was meant to be visible expression of this partnership (cf. 2:10).

believes," or *fides quae creditur*, "the faith that is believed" by all Christians. Here are some of the ways the phrase has been translated:

- "the sharing of your faith" (ESV, RSV)
- "your partnership with us in the faith" (NIV 2011)
- "active in sharing your faith" (NIV 1984)
- "the fellowship of thy faith" (ASV)
- "the communication of thy faith" (KJV)
- "kindly deeds of charity which spring from your faith" (Lightfoot)[231]
- "your faith imparting its virtue through your deeds of love" (Vincent)[232]

In his commentary on Philemon, John G. Nordling has a helpful section on the various elements of this phrase which I won't try to summarize here.[233] I do believe he has a strong case, however, for his translation: "your [Philemon's] *participation* in the *faith*."[234] He takes the genitive as objective and "faith" (πίστις) as the *fides qua creditor*, "that which is believed, *body of faith* or *belief, doctrine.*"[235] With this, then, the interpretation of the verse is that Paul prayed:

> that *the faith* (the Gospel, God's Word, or Christian doctrine) by which Philemon (and each Christian member of his household) had been converted and by which he was now sustained as a Christian might remain in him and even become more *effective* (ἐνεργής) through his more thorough *realization* (ἐπίγνωσις) or

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[231] Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, 335. As cited by John G. Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2004), 206

[232] Vincent, *Philippians and Philemon*, 180. As cited by Nordling, *Philemon*, 206

[233] John G. Nordling, *Philemon*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 2004), 205–208. "What Do the Words ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου (v 6a) Mean?"

[234] Nordling, *Philemon*, 206. Emphasis in the original.

[235] Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 664.

> understanding of the Gospel—in spite of ongoing problems caused by Onesimus' theft and flight.[236]

For our purposes here, note that the implication is that one who has come to believe the gospel now has an obligation to participate in the corporate life of the entire body of Christ. In his lectures on this verse, Martin Luther wrote: "This *sharing* is not spiritual, as some say; but it means that everyone has [what everyone else has], that he has the body which you have, which even I have. Here he speaks of faith, which is a thing distributed among many; that is, the body is something distributed in that bread which you and I have."[237]

Κοινωνία Elsewhere in the New Testament

While the apostle Paul made the most extensive use of the word *koinonia*, some of the more helpful passages are found outside the Pauline writings. Here I trace its usage in a few other New Testament passages.

Acts 2:42

While the apostle Paul made frequent use of the word κοινωνία and its family, his companion Luke uses it just the one time here in all of his New Testament writings. The passage is descriptive of the early Christian church being gathered by the apostles in the time following Pentecost. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." There is some question as to how many activities are described here (four, three, or two), depending on how κοινωνία is to

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[236] Nordling, *Philemon*, 207. Emphasis in the original.

[237] Martin Luther, *Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 29, Luther's Works (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 96.

be translated. Some suggest that "in fact only two things are really mentioned here, teaching and κοινωνία, with the latter further defined as involving the breaking of bread and prayer."[238] Again, the "breaking of bread" may be in reference to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, a tendency of the early believers to eat their meals together, or a combination of both (cf. the *agape* meal described in 1 Cor. 11:17-34).

Witherington observes: "The social significance of this portrait needs to be stressed. The early Christians met in homes and treated each other as family, sharing meals and possessions as well as more spiritual and verbal fare."[239] Lenski comments on this passage: "They were one spiritual body, inwardly one by faith in Christ, inwardly and outwardly one by confessing Christ and by adhering to the one doctrine of Christ that was taught by the apostles. And so they kept together as one body and treated each other accordingly. One faith and one teaching, and thus one body in one fellowship. No parties, schisms, inwardly."[240] Balge adds: "They shared their joys and woes, their needs and opportunities."[241] One century later, church father Tertullian would paint a similar picture of the church of his day:

> We are a body knit together as such by a common religious profession, by unity of discipline, and by the bond of a common hope. We meet together as an assembly and congregation, that, offering up prayer to God as with united force, we may wrestle with Him in our supplications…. We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the

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[238] Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 160. Here Witherington references Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (1–12), p. 130

[239] Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 161, fn 115.

[240] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 116.

[241] Richard D. Balge, *Acts*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1988), 36.

> prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation. We assemble to read our sacred writings, if any peculiarity of the times makes either forewarning or reminiscence needful. However it be in that respect, with the sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast.[242]

The context of Acts 2 sheds some light on how individuals came to be part of this fellowship, and that it is "not a mere external association of voluntary adherents to a society or institution."[243] Luke records for us: "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.... The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:41,47). Balge observes:

> The passive in verse 41 and the active in verse 47 correspond to one another. Believers, "those who accepted (Peter's) message were baptized." In that way they "were added to" the church. They did not "join the church," choose to be part of the fellowship. They became part of the church by being added. The One who added them was the Lord. He did it by Word and Sacrament. They were passive; he was active. The church is the number of those who are being saved.[244]

Hebrews 2:14

The author of the letter to the Hebrews observed that all children born to human parents "share in the common mortality (flesh and blood) of man" (τὰ παιδία κεκοινώνηκεν αἵματος καὶ σαρκός). Christ, however, "acquired a share" in our humanity (μετέσχεν, a synonym for κοινωνέω) for the purpose of vanquishing death and the devil on our behalf.[245] The two parallel verbs κοινωνέω and μετέχω imply more than an

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[242] Tertullian, "The Apology," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexandeer Roberts and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 46.

[243] Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 7.

[244] Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 7.

[245] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 804.

outward partnership, but a mutual participation in a shared thing. John Kleinig comments on this verse: "He did not take on their humanity just to identify himself with them and their sufferings but also to offer himself physically for them by dying on their behalf to consecrate them. He shared in their flesh and blood, so that through his death he could give them a share in his own flesh and blood."[246]

Christ's participation in our humanity continues until today (and into eternity). The verb κεκοινώνηκεν is an intensive perfect which is used to "emphasize the results or present state produced by a past action."[247] Our Savior and Substitute who took our place upon the cross to cancel the curse of sin for us continues to identify with us and to be one of us. He continues to share in our flesh and blood, which he then in turns shares with us in the Sacrament.

Davies wrote that Hebrews 2:14 touches on "the very heart of the meaning of *koinonia*, of which the Incarnation is itself both the foundation and the primary expression."[248] It is important to observe here that before any human could participate in Christ through faith, Christ had to participate in mankind through his incarnation. Fellowship between God and man is completely due to divine initiative.[249]

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[246] John W. Kleinig, *Hebrews*, ed. Curtis P. Giese, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 137.

[247] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 574.

[248] Davies, *Members One of Another*, 7. Davies writes about the difference made by the incarnation: "Henceforth 'nothing is unclean (*lit.* common) of itself' (Rom. 14:14); all food taboos are done away; all barriers broken down; everything is drawn into the orbit of Christ's redeeming work. The dichotomy between the holy and the profane, the sacred and the secular, has been brought to an end, for the holy has come down to the level of the profane so that that which is common may be elevated to the level of the holy. In other words: God became man."

[249] Davies, *Members One of Another*, 7. Cf. also 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

The Athanasian Creed borrows from this verse (among others) to describe the incarnation: "not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh but by the assumption of the humanity into God." Christ Jesus is one person with two natures: "one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person." Davies infers from this: "Thus *koinonia* involves organic unity and to interpret it merely in terms of 'fellowship' is misleading. The *koinonia* of Christ is the participation in the very being of the God-man, and it involves sharing His life. To partake of Christ is indeed to partake of His life."[250]

Hebrews 10:33

The aim of the letter to the Hebrews seems to be "to counteract the defection from Christianity which had set in among the Jewish Christian readers."[251] Because of the increased persecutions under Nero and the treatment of Christianity by some authorities as a *religio illicita*, there was a great temptation for these Jewish followers of Christ to abandon their gatherings with other Christians (whether in public or in private) and return to the relative safety of the Jewish synagogues. The author of the letter carefully and methodically spells out exactly what these apostates stand to lose by turning their backs on Jesus Christ. He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies and the only Savior who can open the way to heaven for sinners.

In chapter 10, the author begins to expound on the impact that these gospel truths should have on the life of the believer:

> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the

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[250] Davies, *Members One of Another*, 9.

[251] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and of the Epistle of James* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938), 354.

> curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:19-25).

Holding on to God's promises in Christ is not only a matter of an individual's faith, but is clearly related to the believers' connection to each other. Throughout this passage, the author uses the first person plural to describe the believers' faith-life as a shared activity. "Brothers and sisters," he says, "let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess," "and let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together," "but encouraging one another." Once again, we see the horizontal relationships between believers flowing naturally from their vertical relationship to God in Christ. David A. deSilva writes regarding this passage: "As the author urges them to take advantage of their access to God by drawing near to him in assembling themselves together for worship, he establishes the Christian assembly as the hub or center of their lives in this world. Motion away from this hub (i.e., defection or "shrinking back") signals motion away from the divine center of the cosmos."[252] Lauersdorf writes: "Standing alongside and helping one another where needed was far better than giving up meeting with one another. Giving and receiving strength when

[252] David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 333.

tempted, urging and being urged when wavering, comforting and being comforted when sorrowing are pluses to be found in gathering around the Word."[253]

The verb translated as 'encourage' here (παρακαλοῦντες) is related to the title Jesus gave to the Holy Spirit (ὁ παράκλητος; cf. John 14:16, 26; 15:26 16:7), as someone "summoned" or called alongside to over succor of some sort. The verb παρακαλεῖν may have a variety of meanings in Pauline writings, depending on the context: admonish, comfort, console, encourage. This comforting is often seen as an act of God accomplished through human agents (cf. 1 Cor. 1:3ff; Rom. 1:12).[254] The same Holy Spirit who gathers believers into the body of Christ through the gospel, uses that same gospel spoken by believers to bring about mutual encouragement and support as they gather together.

Kleinig traces the theme of eschatological encouragement in the LXX and throughout the letter to the Hebrews and concludes: "So the threat of individual apostasy is best undone by mutual encouragement in the Divine Service."[255] Of course, deSilva would not limit the benefits of mutual encouragement to the Divine Service. He adds: "As common recipients of divine encouragement they can encourage one another 'every day' (3:13) because they are God's house (3:6) and they live in God's 'Today' (3:7, 13, 15)."[256] We note that the two participles in this verse are in the customary or habitual

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[253] Richard E. Lauersdorf, *Hebrews*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Pub. House, 1986), 121.

[254] Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 5:798.

[255] Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 197.

[256] deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 197. "The teacher urges his hearers to encourage one another to make the most of the God-given opportunity they now have. Since they belong to the messianic age, the age when God would comfort his people as he had promised, they have "strong encouragement"

present tense: "not [habitually] forsaking the assembly..., but [continually] encouraging one another."[257] In his exposition on the Lord's Supper in the Large Catechism (LC V 44), Luther also recognized that the mutual encouragement which is found in the Divine Service and in the Sacrament is meant to be a daily occurrence among believers.

> In other matters applying to faith, love, and patience, it is not enough to teach and instruct alone. There is also need for daily encouragement [Hebrews 10:24–25]. So here also there is need for us to continue to preach so that people may not become weary and disgusted. For we know and feel how the devil always opposes this and every Christian exercise. He drives and deters people from them as much as he can.[258]

Following a strong exhortation regarding the disastrous consequences of apostasy in 10:26-31, the author asks his readers to reflect on how they had lived according to the encouragement of 10:24,25 in the past. He reminds them that they had not only endured suffering, insult, and persecution themselves, they had also "stood side by side" with others (κοινωνοὶ τῶν οὕτως ἀναστρεφομένων γενηθέντες) who suffered the same mistreatment for their faith (Heb 10:33). They may have been "mutual partners" (κοινωνοὶ) with those who were publicly persecuted in the sense that they "had suffered by association" (συνεπαθήσατε) with them by the mere act of supporting them through visits, care packages, and support for their families.[259] In many cases, their solidarity

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(ἰσχυρὰν παράκλησιν, 6:18) from their access to God through Jesus, their High Priest. As common recipients of divine encouragement they can encourage one another "every day" (3:13) because they are God's house (3:6) and they live in God's "Today" (3:7, 13, 15). By meeting regularly for worship, they encourage one another to approach God in faith with a good conscience, to hope in his promises, and to love one another fraternally (10:25). In this way they counter the negative impact of sin on each of them, for hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. It deceives them by tempting them with the fleeting pleasures of this world (11:25) and discounting the value of their membership in God's house. So the threat of individual apostasy is best undone by mutual encouragement in the Divine Service."

[257] Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 522.

[258] McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 436.

[259] Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 531.

with the imprisoned may have been what caused them to have their own property confiscated as well (10:34). Kleinig observes: "So their suffering did not divide the community, as intended by their opponents, but consolidated it because it was shared by all alike."[260]

1 John 1

This section is best understood within the context of what John wrote in his Gospel. The apostle John is the only Evangelist who records for us Jesus' "High priestly prayer," in chapter 17 of his Gospel. To lift up his disciples and prepare them for his coming Passion in the hours ahead, Jesus prayed aloud to the Father within earshot of the Twelve. He prayed that they would be protected and sanctified during the persecution that lay ahead of them. That protection and sanctification came by way of their connection to the Name given to Christ by God the Father (17:11)—which is another way of referring to the revealed Word of God (17:17). Their common sharing in the Name of Christ would unite them: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (17:11).

Jesus said that this prayer was not for the Twelve alone: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (17:20,21). The reason prayed this message in their hearing was "so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them" (17:13).

[260] Kleinig, *Hebrews*, 531–532.

It is not difficult to draw a straight line from these words of Christ our High Priest, ready to lay down his life on the cross within hours of speaking, to the opening verses of the apostle's first epistle: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship (κοινωνίαν ἔχητε) with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete" (1 John 1:3-4). John repeats what he learned from his Lord: it is through the proclamation of the gospel and the faith produced by that message that believers are united to each other through a common faith in Jesus Christ. Κοινωνία in John's first epistle, then, is parallel to "being one" with the Father and the Son in John 17. This mutual participation in God through the gospel of Christ makes the believers' joy "complete" (πεπληρωμένη). Balge comments on this verse: "Where the apostolic message is heard and received, there that fellowship is a fact. I am not a Christian all by myself. I share with others in the fellowship with God."[261]

A parallel passage in John's third epistle confirms the connection between true gospel preaching and fellowship: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 Jn 4). All three of his letters contain strong warnings against false teachers. All deviations from the message of Christ (whether in confession or in action) separate us from the saving truth, and consequently from God himself, as well as from the rest of the body of Christ.[262] "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in

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[261] Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 7.

[262] Bruce G. Schuchard, *1–3 John*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2012), 132. "The upholding of an authentic 'fellowship' across the disparate sociocultural lines that separated the many peoples and ethnic persuasions of the Greco-Roman world of the first century 'would have been exceedingly rare,' and such fellowship 'is still far from universal.' And yet, for John, it is 'unthinkable that one could have fellowship with God and be alienated from the community' that the secessionists have abandoned. Fellowship with God cannot be had apart from

the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth" (1 John 1:6). In his second letter, John writes that those who support such false teachers "fellowship" with them ("shares in their wicked work," κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς), rather than with the body of Christ (2 John 11; cf. also 1 Tim. 5:22).

By God's grace, however, all those who cling to the truth of the gospel of Christ have "mutual participation" in his redeeming work. "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1:7). Schuchard writes regarding the apostle's efforts in these letters: "He upholds, he exhorts, so that all might know the stakes of abiding or not abiding in the fellowship of God's blood-bought people, the community that the secessionists have abandoned."[263] Augustine of Hippo laid it out even more starkly in a sermon on this passage: "There is no salvation save in the fellowship of God."[264] Thornton writes:

> So too in 1 John the *koinonia* is inseparable from the abiding fact of our cleansing through the blood of Jesus. The *koinonia* is sacrificial; and, in its human aspect, it exists solely by virtue of the sacrificial life of Jesus circulating as the life-blood of that fellowship which St. Paul called the Body. By this, especially, we see that the *koinonia* is a new thing effecting in us a new creation. For the common life of the people of God was transformed by the death of Jesus, as surely as the very meaning of sacrifice was transformed by that event.[265]

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fellowship with Jesus (1:3). Fellowship with Jesus cannot be had apart from fellowship with the apostles, with John and those with whom and on whose behalf John speaks (1:1–4). Fellowship with John and the eyewitnesses cannot be had apart from the community that is the fellowship of the light."

[263] Schuchard, *1–3 John*, 133.

[264] Augustine of Hippo, "Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John," in *St. Augustin: Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies*, ed. H. Schaff Philip, Browne and Joseph H. Myers, vol. 7, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Christian Literature Company, 1888), 463.

[265] L. S. (Lionel Spencer) Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ* (London: Dacre Press, 1950), 169, accessed March 14, 2023, http://archive.org/details/commonlifeinbody0000thor.

Parallel Terms and Themes in Scripture

The concept of fellowship or "mutual participation" and its implications are to be found throughout the Scriptures, even where the word *koinonia* does not appear. In this section I will trace what I believe to be key parallel terms and related themes, such as the use of the prepositions σύν and μετά (and especially the use of the σύν- compound verbs), the picture of the church as "the body of Christ," and the many "one another" passages.

Σύν and μετά

In his entry in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Walter Grundmann helpfully traces the use of the prepositions σύν and μετά and their connection to the theme of fellowship—in particular, the vertical relationship between God and man.[266]

Throughout the Old Testament and into the New, one of the most comforting statements that God could give to an individual or a group is that he was with them. God first made this promise of self-committal to Abraham (Gen. 17:4) but repeated it to Isaac (26:3) and many times to Jacob (28:15; 31:3,13; 32:24-29; 35:13-15; 46:4). Moses, Joshua, Gideon, and David all heard the same commitment that the Lord would be with them with his guidance and protection. God also extended that promise of his presence to all of his chosen people, as for example in Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will

[266] Walter Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive, Συναποθνήσκω, Συσταυρόω, Συνθάπτω, Σύμφυτος, Συνεγείρω, Συζάω, Συζωοποιέω, Συμπάσχω, Συνδοξάζω," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 775–797.

uphold you with my righteous right hand." Mary is the first in the New Testament, with Gideon's unexpected greeting, "The Lord is with you" (Lk. 1:28). And Paul is comforted and encouraged in a precarious situation when the Lord tells him not to be afraid to speak "for I am with you" (Ac. 18:9).[267]

The fulfillment of that promise in Christ Jesus is especially clear in Matthew's Gospel, where Jesus is immediately introduced as Immanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23; cf. Is. 7:14). At the very end of the Gospel, before giving his disciples their great commission, Jesus assures them, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Between those two bookends, we find the Lord Jesus' promise to all those who gather in his name that he would be "among them."[268]

The apostle John also highlights this view of Christ as the God who is with us and expands on it to include all three persons of the Trinity. Jesus tells us in John 10:30 that "I and the Father are one," but he also expresses this unity in terms of fellowship with the Father: "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him" (8:29). As branches intimately joined to the vine, the disciples are to remain in Jesus, as he remains in them, by remaining in his word (15:1-7). Although their Lord was going to be taken from them soon, the disciples would not be left as orphans. Jesus promised to send the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, to be with them (14:16; 14:25,26; 15:26; 16:7-11). Regarding that Spirit, the Paraclete, Jesus told his disciples, "You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:17).

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[267] Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 775.

[268] Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 776. Grundmann observes that "the ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν corresponds materially to a μεθ' ὑμῶν."

The "mutual participation" of blessings in and with the Trinity echoes through passages like John 16:14-15: "He [the Spirit] will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you." Finally, Jesus assures them that in the end, "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (14:3). John himself received a vision of that fulfillment in Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"[269]

The apostle Paul was inspired to incorporate this comforting promise of God's abiding presence with his people frequently at the end of his letters. "The Lord be with all of you," he writes to the Thessalonians (2 Thes. 3:16). Sometimes he includes the blessings that the Lord's presence brings to the believer, as in 2 Corinthians 13:11: "And the God of love and peace will be with you." Grundmann comments: "In place of God we find His gift, especially His grace. This means that God Himself is present in His gift; in His gift He gives Himself."[270] We might also note that all of this is in the context of the community of believers gathered around God's Word (for example, gathered to hear Paul's letters read aloud to the congregation), where the Spirit actively and powerfully

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[269] Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 776.

[270] Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 778. Grundmann adds: "From these sayings there developed in the first or second century A.D. the liturgical formula in which the minister at divine worship greets the congregation: 'The Lord be with you,' and the congregation answers: 'And with thy spirit.' This rests on the awareness that the Lord is present with His gifts in the congregation assembled for worship and also on the insight that He equips leading men in the congregation to declare His word and will to it with due authority. It is to be seen against the background of the fact that the gift of the Spirit, in which the Lord Himself is present, is given to the community."

works through their ministering to and with each other. We've already noted that the apostle John told his readers that the goal of proclaiming Christ to them was "so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete" (1 John 1:3-4).

"Σὺν Χριστῷ" and Σύν- Compound Verbs

The phrase "with Christ" (σὺν Χριστῷ) is found 12 times in Paul's letters.[271] It can refer to the believer being in the presence of Christ (e.g., Phil. 1:23, where Paul says he desires to depart and "be with Christ, which is better by far"), or it can refer to the believer's identity with Christ and participation in his redemption (cf. Rom. 6:8: "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him"). This latter verse is an example of what is sometimes called "a fellowship of destiny."[272] Both the believer's present and future are caught up in his or her connection to Christ. His lot is ours.

Paul uses a number of compound verbs beginning with συν- to describe the various ways in which the life of the Christian is caught up with what Christ has done, is doing, and will do.[273] All this is through faith in him. [274] First, Paul tells us, we died with

[271] Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 782.

[272] Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 784.

[273] Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), accessed March 7, 2023, https://www.scribd.com/book/258983031/Paul-and-Union-with-Christ-An-Exegetical-and-Theological-Study. "While they are capable of other functions, both σύν-compound and noncompound expressions share the fundamental tenor of participation: believers partake with Christ in his death, burial, resurrection, ascension, glorification, and session in heaven."

[274] Hauck, "Κοινός, Κοινωνός, Κοινωνέω, Κοινωνία," 804. "The σύν verbs, which are peculiar to Paul (cf. R. 8:17: συμπάσχειν—συνδοξασθῆναι), develop the content of this fellowship with Christ as regards both present and future. Since there is no question of mystical absorption into Christ, this participation in Christ and fellowship with Him arise only through faith, which implies the identification of our life with His. By the very nature of the case this participation in the Son is a present possession of the

Christ (συναποθνήσκω), our sinful nature has been crucified with him (συσταυρόω), and we have been buried with him (συνθάπτω). What Peter claimed he was willing to do physically (Mk. 14:31), God brought about spiritually—but no less consequentially—in our baptism. Our participation in his death means that the penalty for our sin has been paid in full (Rom. 6:3-7).

Already now, through faith, we have been raised up with Christ (συνεγείρω; cf. Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12; 3:1) and we now live with him (συζάω; Rom. 6:8; 2 Tim. 2:11). Although we once were dead in our sins, we have been made alive with him (συζωοποιέω; cf. Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13) in a new life of sanctification. In the meantime, we suffer with Christ (συμπάσχω; cf. Rom 8:17), but we do not lose hope. We know that we have been made co-heirs with Christ (συγκληρονόμος; cf. Rom. 8:17) who will one day share in his glory (συνδοξάζω; cf. Rom. 8:17). Jesus had assured his disciples, "Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you" (John 14:19-20).[275] So the apostle Peter encourages his readers to "rejoice inasmuch as you participate [κοινωνεῖτε] in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:13). Notice how the parallelism between that passage and 2 Tim. 2:11,12 "demonstrates the congruence of the κοιν- family and the συν- compounds."[276]

Christian to salvation. Yet it is to be consummated in the future (1 Th. 4:17: σὺν κυρίῳ). As there is personal participation in Christ, so there is participation in the Gospel (1 C. 9:23) or in faith."

[275] This picture of being with Christ is common in John's Revelation also, although John uses μετά instead of Paul's σύν Χριστῷ. Cf. Rev. 3:4; 3:21; 14:1; 17:14. The 144,000 are "οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί". (Grundmann, "Σύν - Μετά with the Genitive," 795.)

[276] Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 4.

Table 2. σὺν Χριστῷ in Paul's Letters[277]

The Believer's Connection with Christ	Greek Word	Bible References
Dying with Christ	συναποθνήσκω	Rom. 6:8; Col. 2:20; 2 Tim. 2:11; cf. Rom. 6:5
Crucified with Christ	συναποθνήσκω	Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:19
Buried with Christ	συνθάπτω	Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12
Raised with Christ	συνεγείρω	Eph. 2:6; Col. 2:12; 3:1
Coming to life with Christ	συζωοποιέω	Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13
Being seated with Christ above	συγκαθίζω	Eph. 2:6
Being with Christ in this life	(various words)	Rom. 8:17, 29; Phil. 3:10; Col. 3:3; 2 Cor. 13:4
Eventual deliverance with Christ	(various words)	Rom. 6:5, 8; 8:17, 32; 2 Cor. 4:14; Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:10; 2 Tim. 2:11
Being with Christ after death/the Parousia	(various words)	1 Thess. 4:17; Phil. 1:23

The fact that every believer is with Christ and in Christ[278] signifies that we are consequentially united with each other as mutual participants in this new identity and reality. Once again, the apostle Paul employs a variety of σύν- compound words to express this truth and its wide range of significance to the members of the body of Christ.

[277] Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe and Curtis P. Giese, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 470.

[278] Although I have chosen not to explore here the related phrases ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ and ἐν κυρίῳ, the preposition ἐν is just as valuable as σύν in illustrating the relationship between the believer and Christ. See especially Paul's extensive repetition of "ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ" and "ἐν ᾧ" in Ephesians 1:1-14 as he lays out the many blessings which the believer has in Christ, in preparation for his exposition on the blessings of fellowship σύν Χριστῷ and with fellow believers in the following chapters (Eph. 2—4). Likewise, there is much that could be unpacked in other prepositional phrases such as εἰς Χριστὸν (cf. Rom. 6:3; 2 Cor. 1:21; Eph. 4:15) and διὰ Χριστοῦ (cf. Rom 5:1; 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 1:5; Php. 1:11), both of which especially accentuate the transformational consequences of our relationship with Christ.

For more on these four prepositional phrases which illustrate the believer's connection to Christ, see Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*. Campbell summarizes the apostle's views on union with Christ with the words "union, participation, identification, incorporation."

In Ephesians 2:5-6, Paul had proclaimed the good news that we were made alive with Christ (συνεζωοποίησεν), raised up with him (συνήγειρεν), and seated with him (συνεκάθισεν) in the heavenly realms. Later in that chapter, he now describes the consequences of that fellowship with Christ on those who previously had been divided:

> Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with [συμπολῖται] God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together [συναρμολογουμένη] and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together [συνοικοδομεῖσθε] to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22)

In the next chapter, he explains that the gospel reveals a new reality and identity for those who are in Christ: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together [συγκληρονόμα] with Israel, members together of one body [σύσσωμα], and sharers together [συμμέτοχα] in the promise in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:6).

Finally, in chapter 4 of this epistle, the apostle describes the end goal of this vertical and horizontal fellowship: that the body of Christ may be built up, all its members reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Christ (4:13). "From him the whole body, joined [συναρμολογούμενον] and held together [συμβιβαζόμενον] by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (4:16).

This concept was not merely hypothetical to Paul. He frequently refers to ways in which believers use their fellowship in Christ to build each other up. For example, he wrote to the Romans of his desire to visit them: "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged [συμπαρακληθῆναι] by each other's faith" (Rom. 1:11,12). Near the close of

the same letter, he repeats his desire to physically visit them: "so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed [συναναπαύσωμαι]" (15:32).

The apostle refers to other believers with terms such as "fellow workers" (συνεργοῦντες, 2 Cor 6:1) or "yoke fellow" (σύζυγε, Php. 4:3), and sees them as engaging together in the same spiritual warfare as they struggle with him (συναγωνίσασθαί) in prayer (Rom. 15:30; 2 Cor. 1:11) and share in (συγκοινωνήσαντές) his troubles (Php. 4:14). He specifically asks his protégé Timothy to join with him in suffering (συγκακοπάθησον) for the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8) and to endure hardship with (συγκακοπάθησον) Paul and the other "soldiers of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3). In the same way, he expects the believers in Philippi to strive together as one (συναθλοῦντες, Php. 1:27) for the faith of the gospel which unites them.[279]

In the end, however, the believers' fellowship in suffering here on earth will culminate with shared eternal blessings in heaven with Christ. For this reason, Paul can write: "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with [συγχαίρω] all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with [συγχαίρετέ] me" (Php. 2:17,18).

We might note (unsurprisingly) that Paul also uses συν- compound words to specifically describe the Holy Spirit coming alongside us as the Paraclete. "The Spirit himself testifies with [συμμαρτυρεῖ] our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16). "In the same way, the Spirit helps [συναντιλαμβάνεται] us in our weakness. We do not

[279] The writer of the letter to the Hebrews employs similar language when he describes how the believers sympathized with those in prison (συνεπαθήσατε, Heb. 10:34), considering themselves as fellow prisoners (συνδεδεμένοι, 13:3), following the example of Moses who "chose to be mistreated along with (συγκακουχεῖσθαι) the people of God" (11:25).

know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26). Of course, it is the Spirit who is responsible for all of the unity (both vertical and horizontal) described above.

Finally, on the other side of the fellowship coin, Paul also uses συν- compound verbs in describing false unity, or examples of joint participation that are to be avoided by believers. We are no longer to conform to (συσχηματίζεσθε) the pattern of this world (Rom 12:2). When believers encounter others within the church that do conform to that pattern through continually giving themselves to immorality or false teachings, Paul warns his readers that they must not associate with them (συναναμίγνυσθαι, 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thess. 3:14), having nothing to do with (συγκοινωνεῖτε) the fruitless deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11), but rather exposing them.

In summary, Paul frequently uses both the standalone prepositional phrase σὺν Χριστῷ and a number of σὺν- compound verbs to refer to the believer's participation in Christ's work of redemption or our new identity and status through fellowship with him. This vertical relationship consequently results horizontally in a shared reality and purpose with fellow believers, which is expressed colorfully by the apostle in additional σὺν- compound words linking all believers in Christ together. This is the very definition of Christian community according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this. Whether it be a brief, single

encounter or the daily community of many years, Christian community is solely this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ."[280]

The Church as the Body of Christ

Paul uses the analogy of all believers as the body of Christ in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. In both cases, the context and content of these sections show a similar purpose for the illustration. The apostle wanted to encourage believers of both congregations not to let differences divide them, but rather to respond to God's gift of grace to them all in Christ with a humble attitude which shows itself in selfless service to others. In both cases, also, the picture[281] of the body of Christ is closely connected with the variety of gifts given to believers by the Holy Spirit.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul had written much in the previous two chapters about the place of both Jews and Gentiles in God's plan of salvation, despite their very different backgrounds and the timing of their being brought into God's kingdom. This was also the subject of the first chapters of his letter to the Ephesians. While Paul also addressed the differences between Jews and Gentiles in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, that perhaps was not the primary source of divisiveness that threatened the unity of believers in Corinth.

Despite the outward appearance of diversity and heterogeneity, Paul reminds the Roman believers that they have been made one in Christ. "For just as each of us has one

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[280] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, ed. Gerhard Ludwig Müller et al., vol. 5, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Fortress Press, 1996), 31.

[281] We may call it a picture or a metaphor, but it is more than that. Balge: "In a way 'body' and 'members' are metaphors, but the body is a reality and the unity is a fact. It is not an ideal of which we dream or for which we strive. It is not a thing of the past, lost perhaps in the church's second generation. Rather, it is a blessed reality." (Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 8)

body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:4-5). Likewise, he writes to the Corinthians: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many" (1 Cor. 12:12–14).

Luther expands on this truth in his explanation of the Third Article:

> I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the first step in entering it. Before we had advanced this far, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. Until the last day the Holy Spirit remains with the holy community or Christian people. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases sanctification, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in the fruits of the Spirit (LC 2, 51-53). [282]

In both letters, Romans and 1 Corinthians, the appeal to a unified spirit and humble service is based on the unifying work already done in them by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. For example, Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same

[282] Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press, 1959), 417.

Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor. 12:3-6).

It becomes clear with a study of these passages that the diversity of members and their gifts within the church is not accidental. The Holy Spirit of God has distributed his unique gifts among them according to his will and in line with his purpose. "We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us" (Rom. 12:6). "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines" (1 Cor. 12:11). Each and every member of the body of Christ is gifted by the Spirit and placed "strategically" so that his or her gifts might be of use to the rest. "But in fact God has placed [ἔθετο] the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Cor. 12:18). Shreve points out that this is the same verb used by Christ in connection with the disciples being appointed to bear fruit, as branches connected to the vine.[283] These many acts of mutual service on the part of believers are, then, a "manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:7), as he works through them to carry out his work as Paraclete.

Paul writes to the Romans that each member has its "function" (Ro 12:4). According to Louw and Nida, the word πρᾶξις is defined as "a function, implying sustained activity and/or responsibility."[284] To be a believer is to be part of the body of Christ, and to be a member of the body means that you have been uniquely gifted for the

[283] Kenneth Shreve, *Partnership Theology in Creative Access Regions* (Langham Global Library, 2017), 162, https://www.scribd.com/read/344226967/Partnership-Theology-in-Creative-Access-Regions#.

[284] Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 510.

purpose of building up others in that body (as well as those without).[285] The implication of this truth for believers, then, is: "There is no gift which does not bring with it a special responsibility for service to others."[286] Together, in Christ, this body of believers uses their own particular gifts and callings to participate in the paracletic work of the Spirit: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16).

The comparison of the church to the body of Christ brings out the "flip side" of the *koinonia* coin. The many disparate believers all equally participate in the person and work of Christ Jesus. Like the workers in the vineyard who arrived at different times and contributed different amounts to the labor of the day, every believer receives the exact same reward of grace. They are one by virtue of what they have in common, despite their many differences. At the same time, and as a desired outcome of that unity, the individual strengths and uniqueness of each one also become common to all. Each believer is enjoined by the apostle to utilize his or her distinctive gifts in a way that brings blessings to the rest of the body, rather than to their own advantage. As Davies writes:

> The spiritual gifts are therefore to be understood in terms of the *koinonia*, i.e. in terms of the fellowship of believers who share in the Spirit—the Spirit's presence being revealed by the gifts of which He is the source: the gifts, in their turn, being bestowed in order that the *koinonia* might develop to its maturity, its members

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[285] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 427–428.

[286] Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, 427. "Paul primarily uses the metaphor of building up or edifying the body of Christ as a plea for unity and harmony within the church, instead of the factionalism which threatened to tear it apart. But the expressions for edification (οἰκοδομή and οἰκοδομέω) refer in broad terms to the way the Word of God promotes and strengthens both the individual and the whole church in the life of faith. Where there is internal health and harmony, "when each part is working properly," external growth is more likely to occur (see Eph 4:16). Thus the wholesome use of the edifying word of prophecy serves not only to strengthen believers but also to win the unbelieving outsider for Christ (1 Cor 14:24–25)." See also οἰκοδομέω and οἰκοδομή in 1 Cor. 8:1, 10; 10:23; 14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26.

> being thereby more closely knit the one to the other and progressively refashioned in Christlikeness.[287]

"One Another" Passages

The collaborative nature of the body of Christ and the mutuality of its members has many implications for the way that we interact with each other. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (4:25). This is seen also in the New Testament's frequent use of phrases which include a form of the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων (*each another*, or *one another*).[288] In Romans 12:5, Paul writes: "so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others [τὸ δὲ καθ' εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη]." Consequently, the apostle does not hesitate to give frequent encouragement for believers to be reciprocal in their attitudes and actions within the body of Christ. In this, of course, he is following the pattern of Christ himself who said to his disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another [ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους]. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Jesus repeated that command multiple times that last evening with his disciples (15:12, 17) and it echoes throughout the New Testament (cf. Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thes. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5).[289]

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[287] Davies, *Members One of Another*, 19.

[288] Of the 100 times this reciprocal pronoun is used in the New Testament, 59 of them are some form of command having to do with the way that believers relate to one another.

[289] John Stott, *One People: Helping Your Church Become a Caring Community*, Expanded and Updated. (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1982), 90.

As John Stott writes, "all the remaining 'one another' verses of the New Testament are the outworking—negative and positive—of this mutual love."[290] Naturally, if believers truly love one another, they will not lie to (Col. 3:9) or judge each other (Rom. 14:13), grumble or speak evil against each other (Jam. 5:9; 4:11), bite, devour, provoke, or envy one another (Gal 5:15,26). Rather, the love of Christ which they share will create in them a desire to build one another up (Rom. 14:19) in a variety of ways. Considering others better than themselves (Phil. 2:3), they will be devoted to each other (Rom. 12:10), patiently forgiving each other (Eph. 4:2), being kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32), offering comfort and encouragement (1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11). This they do, again, as agents of the Holy Spirit, who works through believers as they teach (Col. 3:16), exhort (Heb. 3:13), and even admonish one another (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16), using God's Word to speak the truth in love to each other (Eph. 4:15, 25), often with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). The body of Christ is built up spiritually as they confess their faults to one another (Jam. 5:16), forgiving one another even as they have been forgiven in Christ (Eph 4:2, 32; Col. 3:13). They are cared for physically also, as they serve one another (Gal. 5:13), carry each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), and show hospitality to one another (1 Pet. 4:9). They practice true fellowship when they gather, greeting one another warmly (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14), praying for each other (Jam. 5:16), and stirring each other up to love and good works as together they await the return of their Lord and Savior (Heb. 10:24, 25).

Believers in Christ do all this for each other because of and through their connection to each other in Christ through his redeeming Word. The Third Article of the

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[290] Stott, *One People*, 90.

Apostles' Creed closely connects the Spirit's working through the gospel with "the holy Christian church, the communion of saints." Since, as Luther explains, "by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ," "the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel." He does the same for others as he "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."[291] Bonhoeffer describes how and why the Holy Spirit uses fellow believers to build each other up with the gospel of Christ:

> Christians live entirely by the truth of God's Word in Jesus Christ. If they are asked "where is your salvation, your blessedness, your righteousness?," they can never point to themselves. Instead, they point to the Word of God in Jesus Christ that grants them salvation, blessedness, and righteousness. They watch for this Word wherever they can. Because they daily hunger and thirst for righteousness, they long for the redeeming Word again and again. It can only come from the outside. In themselves they are destitute and dead. Help must come from the outside; and it has come and comes daily and anew in the Word of Jesus Christ, bringing us redemption, righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. But God put this Word into the mouth of human beings so that it may be passed on to others. When people are deeply affected by the Word, they tell it to other people. God has willed that we should seek and find God's living Word in the testimony of other Christians, in the mouths of human beings. Therefore, Christians need other Christians who speak God's Word to them. They need them again and again when they become uncertain and disheartened because, living by their own resources, they cannot help themselves without cheating themselves out of the truth. They need other Christians as bearers and proclaimers of the divine word of salvation. They need them solely for the sake of Jesus Christ. The Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their own hearts are uncertain; those of their brothers and sisters are sure. At the same time, this also clarifies that the goal of all Christian community is to encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God allows Christians to come together and grants them community. Their community is based only on Jesus Christ and this "alien righteousness." Therefore, we may now say that the community of Christians springs solely from the biblical and reformation message of the justification of human beings through grace alone. The longing of Christians for one another is based solely on this message.[292]

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[291] Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 345.

[292] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, 5:32.

Key Findings from Theological Reflection

I must emphasize once again that this was not meant to be a study of the doctrine of church fellowship. What I set out to do with this theological section was to reflect on the New Testament concept of *koinonia* along with its related words and themes. While there is a great deal of overlap between the two, they are not completely synonymous.[293] The doctrine and practice of church fellowship in confessional Lutheranism typically[294] begins with a brief celebration of the glorious and gracious reality of the *Una Sancta* before quickly focusing on the practical side of *acknowledging* and *exercising* church fellowship when there are so many conflicting confessions of faith among Christians and Christian denominations. My reflection on *koinonia*, however, lingers on the richness and the purpose of this joint participation that all believers have in Christ and with each other. A picture of this relational, mutually transformational aspect of *koinonia* is found in WELS President Mark Schroeder's description of the Emmaus disciples after having interacted with the resurrected Christ:

> And so, with the Word of the living Christ ringing in their ears and still working in their hearts, they returned to Jerusalem to do what believers do. They yearned to share their joy and faith in the living Savior with others who were now joined as members of one body, by faith in the one Head of that body…. Together they

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[293] John Braun, "Church Fellowship: Our Term, God's Teaching," September 19, 1977, 3, http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/707/BraunChurch.pdf. "The term Church Fellowship is used to apply to the uniting with fellow Christians and the avoiding of false teachers. The use of the term reflects the injunctions found in the Scriptures. It reflects the '*koinonia*' of the '*una sancta*' but it is not exactly that '*koinonia*.' It surely is a Scriptural principle as the above and following demonstrate. It is our term—a term used by the church throughout its history. It gives us a grasp of a teaching of the Scriptures which asks us to be selective and discriminating when we come to join with others as Christians or when we are called upon to refuse joining.

[294] I don't want to over-generalize, but a scanning of the essays and books on church fellowship in my Synod's seminary library seems to confirm the trend. There are, of course, notable exceptions, such as Richard Balge's "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice" among others.

> wanted to be strengthened in their faith, and together they wanted to respond to what God had done in worship, in prayer, in Christian love for one another.[295]

I do not mean to downplay the serious matter of how false doctrine divides the body of Christ. In fact, my hope is that this reflection on the reality and the many blessings of *koinonia* might serve as a reminder of just how much can be lost when the church is not centered on Christ and firmly committed to agreement on all of his revealed Word. "Begotten by the will and word of the same Father, redeemed by the blood of the same Son, indwelt by the presence of the same Spirit—this is our *koinonia*, the 'common salvation' in which we have all come by grace through faith to share."[296]

The key findings from my theological reflection for the purposes of this study can be summed up in these seven statements found in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Summary of Key Findings from Study on *Koinonia*

Component	Key Finding
Foundation	"*Koinonia* is christological at core."
Orientation/Priority	Horizontal fellowship is contingent on vertical fellowship.
Source	The Holy Spirit is the creator and orchestrator of all *koinonia* in Christ.
Means	*Koinonia* in Christ is created and sustained by means of the gospel of Christ.
Goal/Purpose	The goal/purpose of *koinonia* is to build up the body of Christ.
Manifestation	*Koinonia* in Christ finds its expression in mutual and reciprocal love.
Context/Inclusiveness	*Koinonia* in Christ celebrates unity in diversity.

[295] Mark G. Schroeder, "Walking Together with Jesus: Church Fellowship and Its Implications for Confessional Lutherans" (Presented at the Emmaus Conference, Tacoma, WA, May 6, 2011), 4, http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/3003.

[296] Stott, *One People*, 86.

1. "*Koinonia* Is Christological at Core."

This statement is taken from John G. Nordling. While admitting that the Greek word κοινωνία had "thoroughly financial—and even secular—applications" in Paul's world, in the apostle's inspired writings it came to have a much deeper theological meaning: "Indeed, as I have come to see, κοινωνία is christological at core—expressive of nothing less than the relationship between God and man in Christ Jesus."[297]

We have seen how the writer to the Hebrews described the incarnation of Christ in 2:14: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in (κεκοινώνηκεν) their humanity." Davies wrote that this verse touches on "the very heart of the meaning of *koinonia,* of which the Incarnation is itself both the foundation and the primary expression."[298] As the church confesses in the Athanasian Creed, Christ is one "not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person." This unity of the two natures in Christ is what Davies refers to as an "organic unity" as opposed to a "moral unity" or a "unity of will," even though these two factors are also involved. It is in the singular person of Christ that we find unity between God and man.

The implication is that *koinonia* includes organic unity, and therefore to simply translate it as 'fellowship' is misleading. As Davies says, "The *koinonia* of Christ is the participation in the very being of the God-man, and it involves sharing His life. To partake of Christ is indeed to partake of His life." [299] As the study of the many σὺν-

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[297] Nordling, "Communion at Philippi," 194.

[298] Davies, *Members One of Another,* 7.

[299] Davies, *Members One of Another,* 9.

compound verbs showed, the life of the believer is completely caught up in the life, death, resurrection, and final revealing of Christ's glory. *Koinonia* with Christ is consequently far more than 'fellowship' or indeed any other equivalent human relationship. There is, rather, a kind of reciprocity that happens in symbiotic organisms. As Paul wrote: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). This great exchange has ramifications in both our vertical and horizontal relationships:

> For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Cor. 5:14-17).

2. Horizontal Fellowship Is Contingent on Vertical Fellowship.

Consequently, believers are connected to each other through Christ, rather than directly to each other. Συγκοινωνοὶ cannot exist without a κοινός that the participants share in. As Kloha writes: "So also in the Body of Christ our relationships to each other are defined not socially, economically, racially, or on any other basis than Christ. As a result, the individuals who live in κοινωνία relate to one another through Christ."[300] This makes the bonds between them stronger rather than weaker, for example when Paul calls himself the father of the Corinthian believers "in Christ" (1 Cor. 4:15). We've seen also how the apostle exhorted the Philippians to be like-minded and unselfish toward each

[300] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 31.

other, based on the unity they already enjoyed with Christ. As Davies writes: "The *koinonia* has a horizontal reference simply and solely because it has a vertical one."[301]

The apostle John in his first epistle made it clear that it is not possible to have fellowship with God apart from fellowship with the body of Christ, and vice versa. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Any so-called "fellowship" declared between individuals that is not based on a common faith in Christ is a mere human arrangement and not the blessed *koinonia* promised in the Scriptures.[302] As Kloha writes: "Christ does not create κοινωνία, we do not create κοινωνία, God does, by connecting us all to Christ."[303]

Likewise, according to the apostle, we cannot claim fellowship with God while simultaneously refusing to live in harmony with God's people. "This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister" (1 John 3:10). Balge comments in his Bible study of *koinonia*: "In virtually all the

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[301] Davies, *Members One of Another*, 8.

[302] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, 5:34. "Therefore, the other who comes face to face with me earnestly and devoutly seeking community is not the brother or sister with whom I am to relate in the community. My brother or sister is instead that other person who has been redeemed by Christ, absolved from sin, and called to faith and eternal life. What persons are in themselves as Christians, in their inwardness and piety, cannot constitute the basis of our community, which is determined by what those persons are in terms of Christ. Our community consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. That not only is true at the beginning, as if in the course of time something else were to be added to our community, but also remains so for all the future and into all eternity. I have community with others and will continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we really do have one another. We have one another completely and for all eternity."

[303] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 29.

passages we have touched on thus far, and in virtually all passages of the New Testament which treat of our fellowship with God, the personal pronouns and verb forms are plural. It is 'we,' 'us,' 'our.' It is 'your' in the plural sense. I am never alone in this relationship with God, in isolation from all other beings."[304]

We might say, then, that there is really just one *koinonia* that encompasses both vertical and horizontal dimensions. To participate in Christ by definition means to participate together with all other believers in Christ. Blessings from the one flow into the other. Thornton writes: "Fellowship between man and man is upon the same basis as fellowship between man and God. The interchanges of riches in the common life are unlimited in both directions, horizontally and vertically. We know this truth only in Christ and in his Body, in the incarnate Lord and in redeemed humanity. For in both there is one law of life, one pattern of fellowship."[305] Bonhoeffer reminds us: "Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. Everything the Scriptures provide in the way of directions and rules for Christians' life together rests on this presupposition."[306]

3. The Holy Spirit Is the Creator and Orchestrator of All *Koinonia* in Christ.

The Holy Spirit of God, the giver of life, is responsible for bringing us into this blessed *koinonia* in Christ.[307] Twice in his letters the apostle Paul refers to "the

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[304] Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 7.

[305] Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ*, 30.

[306] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, 5:33.

[307] Here I explicitly mention *koinonia* "in Christ" because the Scriptures refer to a *koinonia* that is inappropriate for believers (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-16; 1 Tim. 5:22; 2 John 11; Eph. 5:11; Rev. 18:4).

fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:13; Phil. 2:1). Similarly, he refers to keeping "the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds the believers that it was God "who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). That calling, however, is the work of the Holy Spirit, since "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). The Spirit does this through the Means of Grace, as Paul writes later in that same chapter: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13). Martin Luther described this work of the Spirit in his Large Catechism:

> I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought to it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the first step in entering it. (LC III:51-52)[308]

This work of calling, gathering, and enlightening is not done haphazardly, but with the Spirit's specific goals in mind. The Holy Spirit is the "orchestrator" of *koinonia* in Christ in that he arranges and directs this "event" to produce a desired effect. Kloha writes: "Every genuine expression of κοινωνία in the church is God's creation. When it happens among us, we praise the God who makes us one. If it is not happening among us, the first question each of us must ask is this: What am I doing that is preventing me from living κοινωνία with those whom God has called into this life together with me?"[309]

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[308] Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, 417.

[309] Kloha, "Koinonia and Life Together in the New Testament," 31.

Notice again in the apostle Paul's description of *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 both the agency and the intentional activity of the Spirit[310] in distributing those gifts. The gifts are God's "working" in all believers (v. 6). They are the "manifestation of the Spirit" (v. 7) or in other words, a way to visibly observe the Holy Spirit's working through and among the body of Christ. The same Spirit "distributes [διαιροῦν] them to each one, just as he determines [βούλεται]" (v. 11). One of the reasons the apostle Paul spent so much time in this epistle addressing spiritual gifts is because the Corinthians did not value and employ the gifts in line with the Spirit's intended purpose for distribution as he gathered and gifted each of them (1 Cor. 12:27-31). Paul writes later: "Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church" (1 Cor. 14:12).

4. *Koinonia* in Christ is created and sustained by means of the gospel of Christ.

The apostle John recorded for us Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" in chapter 17 of his Gospel. Throughout the prayer, two main themes are seen: 1) Christ has united the disciples to himself and to the Father by revealing the gospel to them; and 2) that gospel will protect and keep all believers as one, with the Triune God and with each other. For example, Jesus says in verse 11: "Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one." He goes on to pray for future believers:

> My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you

[310] Paul's references in vv. 4-6 to "the same Spirit … the same Lord … the same God" likely indicates that all three Persons of the Trinity are active here, but the apostle refers to "τὸ πνεῦμα" seven times in these eight verses.

> have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

The apostle understood his role in that continuing process of adding to the fellowship of believers through proclaiming the gospel of Christ. In his first epistle, John wrote: "The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:2,3) It was through faith in the apostolic message of Christ crucified and risen (i.e., the gospel), that others came to have fellowship with God and with his Church. We might say that the ontological reality of our being in fellowship with God is the result of the epistemological reality of the message of Christ being declared to us.[311]

Departure from that gospel, or rejection of it, likewise led to a severing of that *koinonia*. John warned his readers in the following verses: "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:6,7). Christian fellowship can only come to exist and continue to endure through the gospel of Christ.

The "unity of the Spirit" that the apostle Paul urges us to keep (Eph. 4:3) can only be maintained in the same way that it was created: by the power of the Holy Spirit

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[311] Enoch Wan and Jace Cloud, *Doxological Missiology: Theory, Motivation, and Practice* (Western Academic Publishers, 2022), 30.

working through the gospel. Paul wrote: "There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." The hope that unifies us is the common faith we have in God's promises presented to us in the gospel of Christ.

The apostle was aware that false teachings would threaten the unity of the body of Christ. This is why he reminded the Ephesian church of the purpose of the public ministry of the gospel: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). As the word of Christ is preached and taught and witnessed to, it strengthens the "unity of the Spirit" by bringing the believers closer to Christ and consequently to each other.

5. The Purpose of *Koinonia* Is to Build up the Body of Christ.

In the first chapter of that same epistle, Paul had addressed the disunity and division that existed among the Corinthians Christians. He begins by sharing with them the content of his recurring prayer for them:

> I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge—God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:4-9)

Note how Paul reminds them of their already existing *koinonia* with Christ. Through their mutual participation in Christ Jesus, they have also been "enriched in every

way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge" and "do not lack any spiritual gift." It is through this connection to Christ and by means of their mutual edification in the Word that God will "keep you firm to the end" and "you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The report that reached the apostle, however, showed that this was not taking place among them. For that reason, he encourages them "that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1:10). They were to unite around the "foolish" message of the cross of Christ rather than boasting in their own wisdom (1:18, 25, 31). Because of their factionalism, Paul's teaching work among them was hindered (3:1-3); he was meant to be building them up into God's temple, through preaching which brought them to Christ Jesus, the one foundation (3:10-16). As was mentioned earlier, they themselves were gifted by the Spirit "to build up the church" (1 Cor. 14:12).

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul also emphasizes God's gift of unity in the church and how that *koinonia* in Christ was meant to build up the whole body of Christ. This joint participation began when they were brought to faith through the gospel of Christ and received the Holy Spirit as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Eph. 1:13-14). Prior to that blessed transformation, the one thing we all had in common was being "dead in transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1). God, however, made us alive with Christ (συνεζωοποίησεν), raised us up with him (συνήγειρεν), and seated us with him (συνεκάθισεν) in the heavenly realms (2:5,6). The result is that we (notice Paul's use of the first-person plural throughout this chapter) are saved by grace through faith—and that

we are revealed to be “God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (2:10).

The apostle tips his hand regarding what the nature and purpose of those “good works” might be when he continues by reminding his Gentile (and Jewish) readers that they are all now one in Christ Jesus. Together, they are God’s people, members of his household, being built into a “holy temple in the Lord” (2:19-22). For this reason, Paul prays that they may be strengthened in their faith, established in love, and growing together in grasping the immensity of the love of Christ that they “may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (3:14-19).

This, then, leads to the culmination of this theme of unity in Ephesians: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (4:3-6). To accomplish this goal, Christ “apportioned” grace to each believer, especially the gifts of preaching and teaching “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:12-13). This prevents the body from unduly suffering the effects of false teaching, which divides the church. “Instead, by speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (4:15-16). Fellowship, then, is sometimes

restated as "working together for the truth."[312] Stott puts it this way: "But fellowship is more than what we share in together. There is also, and secondly, what we share out together. For *koinonia* in the New Testament concerns not only what we possess but what we do together, not only our common inheritance but also our common service."[313]

Building up the body of Christ is measured both qualitatively and quantitatively. The Spirit gathers and gifts believers to strengthen one another, but also to give witness to the world and bring them to know their Savior. The apostle Peter wrote: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9,10). Peter would know this well, as Jesus had told him, "From now on you will fish for people" (Luke 5:10). Stott writes: "It is perhaps, therefore, not too fanciful to regard the church as a great fellowship of fishermen, *koinonoi*, partners with Jesus Christ and with one another in the business of catching men."[314]

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[312] John F. Brug, "Love the Brotherhood of Believers: Preserving and Extending the Unity of the Church," June 9, 1997, 2, accessed November 29, 2023, http://essays.wisluthsem.org:8080/handle/123456789/853.

In a celebration of the blessings of church fellowship, Brug comments on the second and third epistles of John: "John gives one of the most beautiful definitions of church fellowship when he states that the goal of his letters is that he and his readers may 'work together for the truth' (ἵνα συνεργοὶ γινώμεθα τῇ ἀληθείᾳ) (3 John 8). John's description of church fellowship is especially important because it shows that church fellowship is first of all a positive concept. Church fellowship is 'working together.'"

[313] Stott, *One People*, 87.

[314] Stott, *One People*, 87. "Thus *koinonia* seems to express as much our joint-communication of, as our joint-participation in, the blessings of the Gospel."

6. *Koinonia* in Christ Finds Its Expression in Mutual and Reciprocal Love.

Before departing from his disciples for his crucifixion, Jesus assured them of his abiding presence with them and that of the Paraclete. Closely tied to that promise was the "new" command he gave them: "Love one another [ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους]. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34,35). This love is "mutual" in that it is shared by all believers. Love for Christ, being loved by Christ, and love for another is a defining feature of all Christian believers. This love is also "reciprocal," meaning that involves both giving and receiving. Rarely is it one directional, and even then only for a time.

The depth and richness of this love is shown in the variety of Paul's use of the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλους in his epistles (e.g., "forgive one another," "carry each other's burdens," "encourage one another," etc.). Almost all of them are meant to be expressions of *koinonia* in Christ, flowing naturally from the love of Christ. Balge writes: "To say that fellowship finds expression is virtually the same as saying faith produces fruit. 'We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers' (1 Jn 3:14). Not everything done in love is an expression of fellowship in Christ's church, but every true expression of fellowship is an act of love."[315]

Brug's essay mentioned above offers the following activities of church fellowship that exemplify building each other up in love:

- Sharing the means of grace;
- Praying for each other;
- Expressing our love;

[315] Balge, "Christian Fellowship in Principle and Practice," 14.

- Helping with the material needs of our brothers and sisters;
- Building up the church's defenses;
- Training sound pastors and teachers;
- Supporting orthodox pastors;
- Warning against sin;
- Avoiding false teachers and impenitent sinners;
- Working to win those who have separated from us;
- Welcoming back the repentant;
- Avoiding personal strife;
- Spreading the gospel.[316]

While some of those activities may seem more obviously "acts of love" than others (such as "helping with material needs" compared to "warning against sin"), it is of vital importance that all these activities be carried out—and that they be carried out with love. The apostle Paul predicated our spiritual maturity as the body of Christ on "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). The apostle Peter also traces the connection between love for the truth and love for fellow believers in Christ: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22). Peter says that the "living and enduring word" has transformed believers so that now, expressing love for each other, we build each other up in our mutual faith in Christ: "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure

[316] Brug, "Love the Brotherhood of Believers."

spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

An important aspect of this mutual love in Christ is its reciprocity. Fellowship is never meant to be one-sided, but the blessings of joint participation in Christ are to flow freely horizontally, just as they do vertically. Again, the many uses of the reciprocal ἀλλήλους demonstrate this give and take throughout the body of Christ. The early church in Jerusalem expressed this reciprocal love in this way: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32).

The apostle Paul appealed to this understanding when encouraging Christians to participate in the collection being gathered for the poor in Jerusalem: "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution [κοινωνίαν τινὰ ποιήσασθαι] for the poor among the Lord's people in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in [ἐκοινώνησαν] the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings" (Rom. 15:26,27). Again, writing to the Corinthians about this collection: "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality" (2 Cor. 8:13,14).

7. *Koinonia* in Christ Celebrates Unity in Diversity.

See 1 Cor. 12:4-11 again. The allusion to all three Persons of the Trinity in vv. 4-6 reminds us of this unity in diversity. Engelbrecht observes in *The Lutheran Study Bible*: "The varieties of service are united by the one God, who gives them. Just as the Lord is

triune but not divided, so the ministry is various but not divided."[317] Unity in the church is not the result of each believer contributing equally, nor of a balanced partnership in which each does its part. Rather, unity results from their mutual participation in the one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:4-5) that is given as a gift to all in Christ.

Within that unity, however, the Spirit not only accepts diversity but creates and celebrates it. Paul wrote to the Galatians of the unifying effect of the gospel: "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26-28). At the same time, believers do not cease to be Jews or Gentiles, male or female. They all bring their own unique experiences, personalities, and strengths with them into the body. This diversity is further enhanced as the Spirit distributes his gifts among them according to his will. All of them to be used for the common good.

Even when there is an appearance of inequality in the body of Christ, the eye benefits from the hand, and vice versa. The body does not suffer from comprising a diversity of members, rather it is all the richer for the variety of strengths. "God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:24-26).

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[317] Engelbrecht, *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 1966.

Paracletic *Koinonia*

These key takeaways are encapsulated in a single phrase: "paracletic *koinonia*." By the word "paracletic," I mean to include three aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, whom Jesus promised to send (John 14:16, 25; 15:26; 16:7): 1) coming alongside; 2) pointing to Christ; 3) bringing spiritual transformation. The same Holy Spirit who calls people to faith and unites them as the body of Christ is the one who continues to build up that body, working transformation in and through all believers. He accomplishes that through the mutual encouragement and edification which believers offer each other. As they minister to each other with God's law and gospel, using the gifts distributed among them by the Spirit, the Paraclete works to accomplish his purposes: convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11), guide the disciples into all truth (John 16:13), and ultimately glorify Christ (John 16:14). Through the gospel of Christ spoken by believers to each other, the Holy Spirit gives them strength (Eph. 3:16), produces his fruit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23), and transforms them into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

"Paracletic *koinonia*," then, is the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in, among, and through believers, who participate jointly in Christ through faith and consequently express that unity in mutual love for one another. It is a divine gift which is 1) centered in the person and work of Christ, 2) values reciprocal relationships throughout the body of Christ, and 3) pursues mutual transformation through the Word of Christ.

Figure 6 illustrates and defines each of the terms: *koinonia*, *paracletic*, and *paracletic koinonia*.

Figure 6. Understanding the Terms: *Koinonia*, Paracletic, and Paracletic *Koinonia*

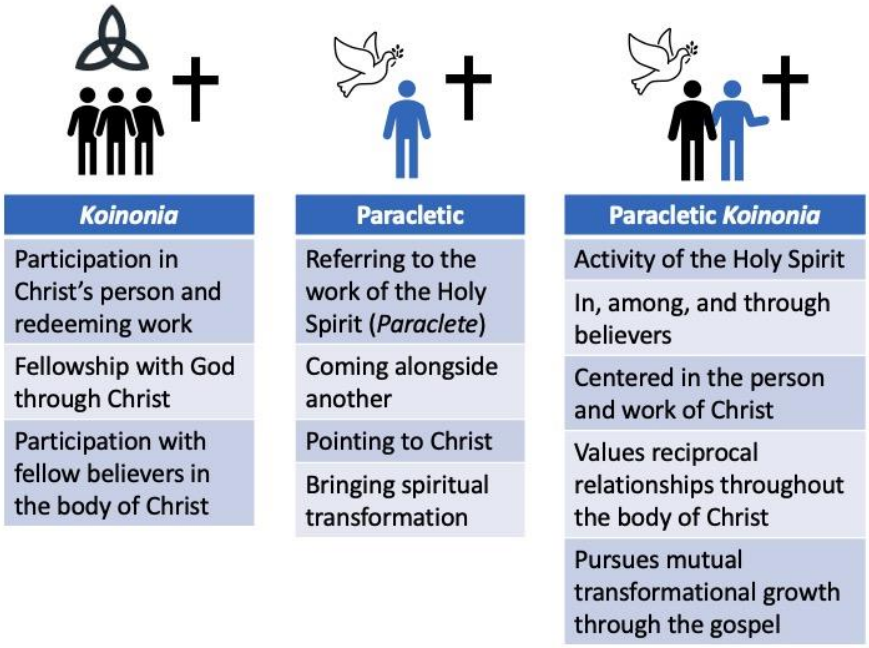


Figure 7 below illustrates the process of paracletic *koinonia*. Individual human beings, born as enemies of God and separated from each other by sin, are called by the Holy Spirit through the gospel into fellowship with Christ. Each believer participates in Christ through faith and receives a new status before God and a renewed relationship with the Trinity (*being*). Consequently, since each believer is united with Christ, all believers also have fellowship with each other. They belong to the body of Christ, which means they belong to each other (*belonging*). As the body of Christ, believers are called and equipped to minister to each other with the transforming Word of God. The Holy Spirit, the *Paraclete*, works through believers as they come alongside one another, individually and corporally as the church, building up the body of Christ through his gospel (*becoming*).

Figure 7. The Process of Paracletic *Koinonia*

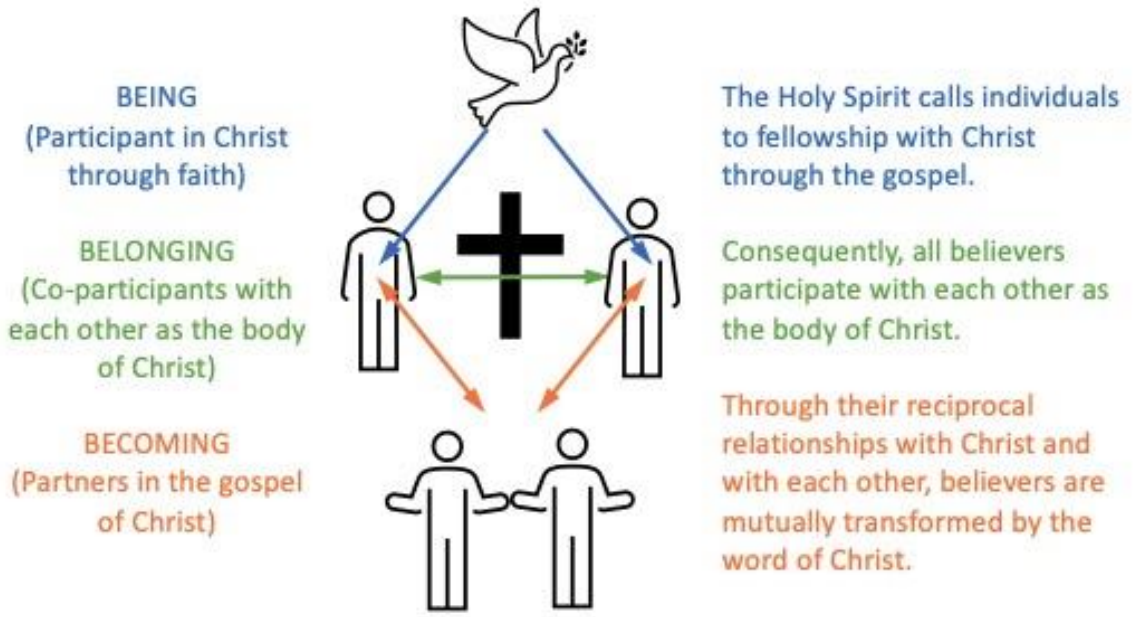


Figure 8 below illustrates the primary elements of paracletic *koinonia*, as it is practiced among believers as partners in the gospel: mutuality, reciprocity, movement toward Christ, harmony despite diversity, and doxological witness.

Mutuality refers to the relationship between believers which is brought about by their sharing in a common Savior Jesus Christ. This mutuality is expressed by the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:26-28: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Luke tells us about the early believers' dedication to their joint participation in Christ, as evidenced by their devotion to the apostles' teaching and to Holy Communion, and their sharing of possessions and time with one another. The result was that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

Reciprocity indicates that the exchange of blessings is bidirectional, where both sides benefit from one another. We see this reflected in the New Testament's frequent use commands using the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων ("one another" or "each other"), all of which are variations on Christ's command to his disciples: "Love one another." The apostle Paul exemplified that attitude of reciprocity when he wrote to the Romans: "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Rom. 1:11-12).

Since it portrays the ongoing work of the Paraclete in and through the Church, paracletic *koinonia* includes the element of *movement toward Christ*. Jesus assured his disciples before his death that he would not leave them as orphans. Rather, the Holy Spirit would bring them comfort and encouragement by reminding them of what Christ had said and done (John 14:26). That same Paraclete calls and gathers believers into the body of Christ, so that he might conduct his paracletic work of pointing to Christ through them and for each other. As Paul wrote to the believers in Colosse: "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:15,16). Similarly, the writer to the Hebrews wrote: "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first" (Heb 3:13,14). Paul exemplified this aspect of paracletic *koinonia* when he wrote to the Corinthians: "We are therefore

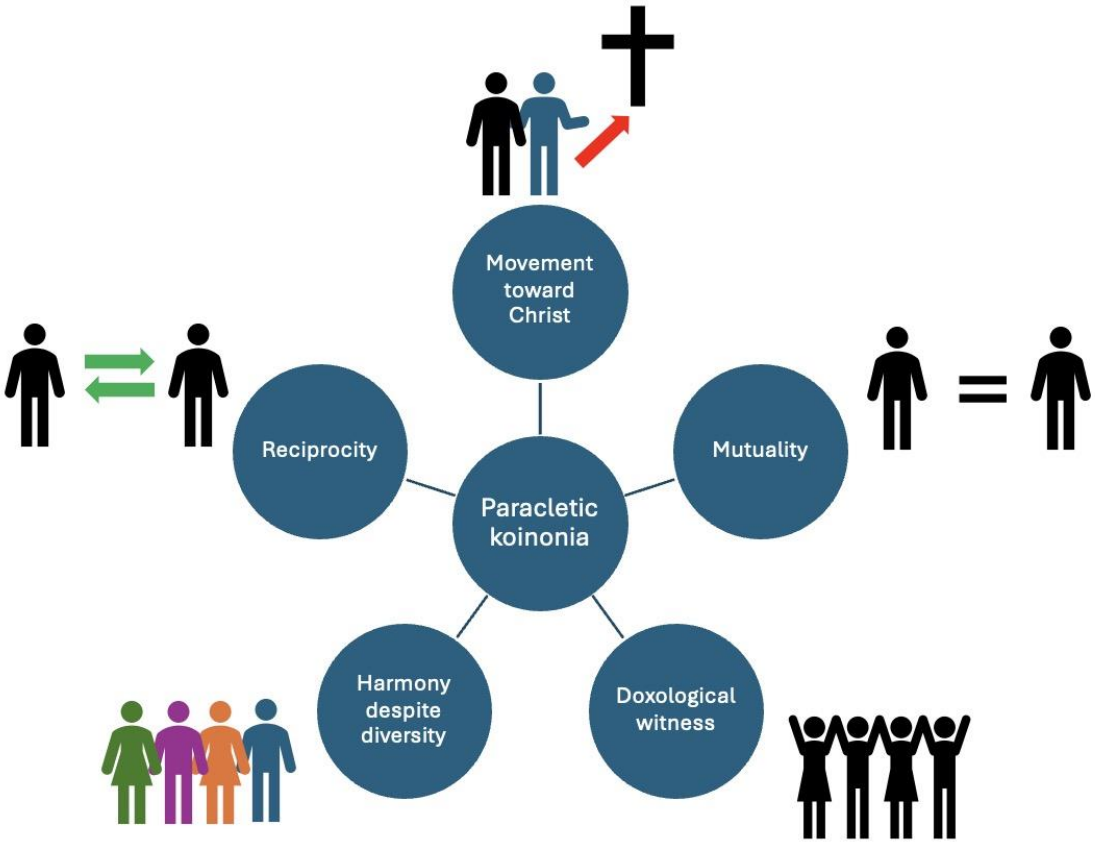
Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

Another element of paracletic *koinonia* is *harmony despite diversity*. It recognizes that the Spirit is gathering believers "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9) and meanwhile distributes among them a diversity of gifts to be used for the common good (1 Cor. 12:4-7). Diversity here does not refer to conflicting teachings or beliefs, but to the wide variety of almost every other characteristic among those who belong to Christ. These diversified believers form one multifaceted body that is designed to function as a unit, with Christ Jesus as their head.

This, then, leads to the final element of paracletic *koinonia*, which is *doxological witness*. Just as the members of a four-part SATB choir blend their voices to sing in beautiful harmony, so those believers of every nation, tribe, people and language will one day praise the Lamb on his throne as a single sanctified choir (Rev 7:10). Already now, the fellowship of believers on earth gives testimony to the one true God who has united them. It is the believers' mutual love for one another that marks them as his disciples (John 13:35). The apostle Peter reminds us that reason believers have been unified as a single, chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God is "that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). It is to the glory of his grace that we who "were not a people" now "are the people of God" (1 Pet. 2:10). Christ's prayer for his followers reveals the close connection between our fellowship with him and his glory which he will share with us: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world

know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:22-24).

Figure 8. Elements of Paracletic *Koinonia*



CHAPTER 6

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In this section, I offer some missiological implications for the continued partnership between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries of India. These implications are the result of analyzing the intersection of the ethnographic description of the CELM and my theological reflection on paracletic *koinonia*. The implications especially flow from these summary thoughts of that section:

1. "Koinonia is Christological at Core."
2. Horizontal fellowship is contingent on vertical fellowship.
3. The Holy Spirit is the creator and orchestrator of all *koinonia* in Christ.
4. *Koinonia* in Christ is created and sustained by means of the gospel of Christ.
5. The goal/purpose of *koinonia* is to build up the body of Christ.
6. *Koinonia* in Christ finds its expression in mutual and reciprocal love.
7. *Koinonia* in Christ celebrates unity in diversity.

Implication #1: Prioritizing Vertical Fellowship Will Strengthen the Horizontal

There is only one *koinonia* in Christ, which is first vertical (believers united to God) and then horizontal (believers united with each other) through faith in Christ Jesus (cf. 1 John 1:3). The implication here is that both CELM and WELS must prioritize their

vertical relationship with God—but their horizontal relationship to each other will become even stronger if they can increase their opportunities to do so together.

The believer's relationship to God in Christ is strengthened as he or she spends time in Bible study, prayer, and worship. Both CELM and WELS organizations have a strong understanding of the importance of the means of grace for creating and strengthening faith. During the years of missionary presence on the field, there were plenty of opportunities for CELM students and faculty to be in God's Word together with WELS instructors, primarily in daily devotions and formal study of the Bible in the classroom. WELS counselors would sometimes visit various villages on Sunday mornings during worship, but true fellowship with the local congregation was hampered by the fact that most American visitors knew little to no Telugu. It was also a missed opportunity that the families of the CELM seminary faculty in Guntur and the WELS missionaries did not establish a regular pattern of worshipping together when classes were not in session.

The current absence of any WELS missionaries in India makes nurturing vertical fellowship all the more crucial. Both organizations can use modern tools of technology to maintain regular communication with each other that includes elements of prayer and Bible study. Growing together spiritually will equip both sides to deal with the challenges of partnership and to work together effectively for the gospel.

Implication #2: See *Koinonia* as a Divine Gift and Guiding of the Spirit

Luther writes in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles Creed:

> I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same

> way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.[318]

It is the Holy Spirit who does what is impossible for those who are born under God's wrath and at enmity with each other—he calls each and every believer to unity in Christ through the gospel. The Spirit adds new members to the body of Christ by working through the rest of the body. He always does so through their preaching and teaching of the gospel, but at the times and in the places of his choosing. As the Spirit moves believers to witness boldly to others, he uses their testimony of God's faithful love to work saving faith in many who hear that message. New believers consequently add their own voice and witness to those who brought them to faith, and together they continue to bring the gospel light to others still in darkness.

An implication for all Christians is that we must see *koinonia* as a divine gift, a spiritual reality in Christ, rather than as a human agreement. The practice of church fellowship is an attempt to reflect that spiritual reality in tangible terms, based on spoken and active evidence of unity in Christ. Meanwhile, partnerships among church bodies and mission agencies are temporary human arrangements, limited to their practical and mutual goals.

Interactions between WELS and CELM should reflect the Spirit's creating and creative role in bringing them together. The Holy Spirit brought them into fellowship with Christ through the gospel (*being*); he united them in the body of Christ through that same gospel (*belonging*); and he promises to bring transformational growth to both

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[318] McCain, *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 330.

members of both CELM and WELS as they build each other up in Christ (*becoming*). [See Figure 7.]

WELS and CELM leaders would do well to remain open to the Spirit's leading in developing new approaches to their partnership in the gospel. It was God's providence that brought about the circumstances that led to the WELS sending and later withdrawing missionaries from the India field. Rather than lamenting the loss, both CELM and WELS might rather look for God's hand in these developments and recognize that the Holy Spirit often brings unexpected opportunities and solutions even in challenging circumstances. The church throughout the world still belongs to him, and it is still his desire to bring the elect from every nation to faith in Christ. He gives us the privilege of participating in that ministry of reconciliation.

Implication #3: Pursue Mutual Transformation through the Word of Christ

Wan, Hedinger, and Raibley developed the interdisciplinary narrative framework of Relational Interactionism which traces the practical considerations of the dynamic interaction of beings (human, divine, and angelic) with each other as they form realistic relational networks in multiple contexts.[319] They observe that whenever people (or beings) interact, they influence each other to change. That change can be positive, as when we lead one another to become more like Christ. This is 'transformational growth.' Change can also be negative, however, such as leading others away from closeness and

[319] Enoch Wan, Mark Hedinger, and Jon Raibley, *Transformational Growth: Intercultural Leadership/Discipleship/Mentorship (Relational)*, Kindle edition. (Western Academic Publishers, 2023), 14.

obedience to God. This type of change they call 'transgressional decline.'[320] The Apostle Paul refers to the two opposing influences in Romans 12:2: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Table 3 lists examples of transgressional decline contrasted with transformational growth.

Table 3. Examples of Transgressional and Transformational Changes[321]

Examples / Domain	Transgressional (Conformed to World)	Transformational (Renewing of Your Mind)
Cognitive	Harmful stereotypes and thinking patterns	Faith, transformed mind, right thinking
Affective	Prejudice, pride, fear	Humility, trust, unity
Behavioral	Discrimination, injustice	Love, service

The process of transformational growth, as Wan describes it, begins with our *being* in a relationship with the Triune God, in the context of *belonging* (both to him and, consequentially, to fellow believers in the body of Christ), with the result of *becoming* new beings with new behavior.[322] All credit for this transformational growth belongs to God as he works in us (*being*), among us (*belonging*), and through us (*becoming*).

The Apostle Paul's letters to the Corinthians and the Ephesians especially highlight how the believers' joint participation in Christ results in the entire body of Christ being built up and strengthened. This is what I have called *paracletic koinonia*, which I earlier defined as "the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in, among, and through believers, who participate jointly in Christ through faith and consequently express that

[320] Wan, Hedinger, and Raibley, *Transformational Growth*, 27.

[321] Wan, Hedinger, and Raibley, *Transformational Growth*, 29.

[322] Wan, Hedinger, and Raibley, *Transformational Growth*, 23.

unity in mutual love for one another." This paracletic *koinonia* "pursues mutual transformation through the word of Christ."

CELM and WELS leaders have long had the practice of beginning all their meetings together with a devotion and ending them with prayer for the church and for each other. This pattern recognizes that our unity comes from our common faith and that our spiritual life together depends on our connection to God through his Word.

An improvement on this custom would be that CELM leaders are more frequently invited to lead those devotional moments. While the WELS friendly counselors no doubt had it in their mind that we were modeling a ministry form for their CELM students, and that they were fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities as pastors, we perhaps failed to recognize the full value of reversing roles during those moments. A key aspect of paracletic *koinonia* is that it brings *mutual* transformation through ministering to each other. As long as the friendly counselors held on to that ministerial role of leading devotions, the unstated implication was that spiritual transformation was unilateral and one-directional. *We* were there to help *them* grow. In a sense, it was self-serving and therefore "relationally transgressive." (See Table 4 below.) Even when CELM leaders were given opportunities to lead worship or preach a sermon, it too often took the form of a performance evaluation. I confess that in those situations where a CELM pastor led a devotion, I often listened professionally, critically, making a list in my mind of suggestions for improvement to be shared afterwards, rather than listening humbly, hungrily, waiting for the Spirit to speak through my brother in ways that would build me up personally. The WELS mission team that interacts with our India field should be encouraged to take on the role of listener far more often. This communicates respect to

our CELM brothers as equal partners in Christ who have also been gifted by the Spirit for service.

A by-product of our instructor-disciple relationship with CELM leaders even in our devotional time together was that we did not model for the CELM pastors an attitude that would likewise help them build up the body of Christ in the congregations they served. Feedback from congregational elders was frequently given that their pastors lorded it over them, acting as Christian versions of the Hindu gurus and swamis who claimed to have exclusive enlightenment. How much more enlightened is the church that has one Head, which is Christ, and where the rest of the body learns from him through each other! The Holy Spirit has distributed his gifts throughout the body of Christ, both clergy and laity, and the growth of the church is impeded when those gifts are not shared for the common good. Discipleship workshops, lay leadership development, and mentoring programs which aim to build up the entire body of Christ could all serve the purpose of encouraging and enabling mutual transformation.

The following table contrasts relationally transgressive and relationally transformative approaches to leadership.

Table 4. Relationally Transgressive and Transformational Leadership[323]

Element	Relationally Transgressive	Relationally Transformative
Goal	A form of godliness that denies the power of the Cross: seeks self-directed righteousness and/or self-serving pleasure	Christian transformative change (first vertical then horizontal)
Focus	Licentiousness or a Law-based series of rules	God's kingdom of grace in Christ
Strategy	Self-focused and self-pleasing	Interactive and personal Process: inspiration → initiative → implementation → influence (chain of transformative change)
Measure of success	Protection of pride, riches, pleasures	1st faithfulness to God vertically and 2nd fruitfulness by God's empowerment and provision horizontally

Implication #4: Overcome Challenges Due to Distance

Another implication is that WELS World Missions should find new ways to continue to build up CELM workers spiritually, even while withdrawing missionaries and reducing financial support. For more than twenty years, WELS mission counselors had seen their role on the field as paracletic.[324] Living in India, they were able to provide regular guidance and encouragement to CELM leaders and students in ways that were not possible for the mission board that previously had served the Indian field from the U.S.A. That has changed as of the end of 2022, and WELS has no near-term plans to send another resident missionary to walk alongside CELM. The WELS Asia Team will have to

[323] Adapted from Wan, Hedinger, and Raibley, *Transformational Growth*, 62.

[324] Even though they rarely used that particular term, their title of "counselor" is a common translation of παράκλητος.

consider creative use of technology and other resources. In Appendix B, I share some thoughts on virtual vs. face-to-face presence and implications for paracletic *koinonia* on the mission field.

Implication #5: Rebuking as Paracletic Ministry

Confessional Lutherans are accustomed to speaking of spiritual transformation as being empowered exclusively by the gospel. The good news of what God has done for us in Christ makes believers in that message of salvation by grace into "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Eph. 2:10). The apostle Paul explained his motivation for bringing that message of reconciliation to others: "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

The Bible, however, also speaks of the "strange work" of God (cf. Isa. 28:21), the *opus alienum Dei*, which is the "mortification of the flesh" through the preaching of the law. In a sermon that first laid out what later became his "theology of the cross," Luther preached:

> God's alien work, therefore, is the suffering of Christ and sufferings in Christ, the crucifixion of the old man and the mortification of Adam. God's proper work, however, is the resurrection of Christ, justification in the Spirit, and the vivification of the new man, as Rom. 4 [:25] says: Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification. Thus, conformity with the image of the Son of God [cf. Rom. 8:29] includes both of these works.[325]

Jesus also linked this work to what he would send the Paraclete to do:

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[325] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 51: Sermons I*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 19.

> Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:7-11)

Even after repentance and conversion, however, believers in Christ continue to carry their cross as they follow him. They require both law and gospel, for continued spiritual transformation. Paul wrote to Timothy of the saving transformation of the gospel: "from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Those same Scriptures, however, also bring the tool of God's law to bear on our hearts: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

The implication for the relationship between CELM and WELS, then, is the importance of humbling ourselves before God and before each other, allowing ourselves to be rebuked by the other when necessary. The Spirit uses us in those moments to do his "alien work," pointing out sin where it manifests itself and calling the sinner to repentance so that the "proper work" of the gospel may be achieved through the proclamation of forgiveness in Christ. This attitude of humility also includes many other forms of allowing our personal weaknesses (sinful or otherwise) to be exposed, called out, and tended to by one another out of love. It requires both trust that our partners in the Lord are motivated out of love for us and a sense of gratitude for the Spirit's working through them to transform us.

Implication #6: Establish a Sense of Community in Christ

A key theme of Paul's letter to the Ephesians is that "in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." "Consequently," Paul writes, "you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens [συμπολῖται] with God's people and also members of his household" (Eph. 2:13,19). Our reconciliation to God now changes our relationship to one another. We are joined together [συμπολῖται] and building built together [συμπολῖται] as a holy temple where God lives by his Spirit (Eph 2:21,22).

The apostle worked diligently not only to advance the message of the gospel of Christ but also to bring together those who accepted that message into a vibrant network, a body whose members all actively supported one another. Bosch writes of this transformation:

> Christ's work of reconciliation does not just bring two parties into the same room that they may settle their differences; it leads to a new kind of body in which human relations are being transformed. In a very real sense mission, in Paul's understanding, is saying to people from all backgrounds, "Welcome to the new community, in which all are members of one family and bound together by love."[326]

Wan says that "reconciliation is relational change initiated by God for sinners: from alienation to acceptance, from hostility to harmony, from displeasure to appeasement, and from enmity to friendship."[327] This transformational change begins with our relationship to God in Christ (*being*) and then, consequently, with one another united as the body of Christ (*belonging*), which results in Christians sent as agents of

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[326] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, loc. 4155 of 14157.

[327] Enoch Wan, "Reconciliation and Transformational Change: From the Perspectives of Narrative Framework and Relational Interactionism," March 12, 2022, 11.

God's transformative change themselves (*becoming*).[328] Figure 7 on p. 157 illustrates this process of paracletic *koinonia*.

Likewise, Niemandt writes: "The church is a living organism, a particular kind of very real body, where all members function together in a network where people learn, share experiences and serve communities and life. Themes such as being inclusive, participatory, collaborative and interdependent are well known in the biblical understanding of community."[329]

The implication for the work between CELM and WELS is that they would do well to establish a sense of community in Christ among them, much as Paul did with first-century believers and congregations, divided though they were by distance and culture. In many ways, this may be more challenging for WELS missionaries than for members of CELM, as Asian collectivism more naturally embraces the concept of community and the vital connections that exist between its members. Western expats may need to put aside their natural impatience with the slower pace and greater relationship demands that come with a stronger sense of community. Their CELM counterparts may likewise need to understand that the values of reciprocity and hospitality were not instilled in their WELS friends in the same way that they received them from their Indian culture.

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[328] Wan, "Reconciliation and Transformational Change," 15.

[329] N. Niemandt, *Missional Leadership*, vol. 7, HTS Religion & Society Series (Cape Town: AOSIS, 2019), 189, https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2019.BK108.12.

Implication #7: Encourage Healthy and Respectful Dialogues

Bracketed by themes of *koinonia*,[330] the apostle Paul's words in chapter three of his letter to the Colossians encourage healthy and God-pleasing patterns of communication among believers. There is no room for lies between believers, who have taken off their old self and put on their new self (3:9). Preconceptions and stereotypes no longer have their place for those who are in Christ: "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all" (3:11). Rather, God's chosen people are to embody the virtues of "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (3:12). More than anything, they are to love one another and extend to each other the same forgiveness that they themselves received from the Lord (3:13-14). Their conversations with each other are to be governed by peace and gratitude (3:15) and their goal is to build each other up with the word of Christ to the glory of the God who has called them (3:16-17).

CELM and WELS representatives can be encouraged to proactively seek opportunities for healthy and respectful dialogues as described by the apostle—and all the more during this time of transition. This can happen in joint planning meetings held by the leadership as well as in open forums where a greater number of CELM workers may be invited to participate. These can be constructed as shared learning opportunities, where all participants are given opportunities both to speak and to actively listen to one another. Regular work reports are already shared, but these can be expanded to include an open

[330] "Since, then, you have been raised with [συνηγέρθητε] Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things…. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all…. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." (Col. 3:1-2, 11, 15).

exchange of prayer requests and a listing of blessings and challenges that all involved are facing. Since past conflicts have not always been resolved peacefully or to everyone's satisfaction, a facilitator may be called in to present a workshop on cross-cultural conflict management.

Implication #8: Utilize Asset-mapping to Rejoice in God's Gifts

The ancient city of Corinth was as culturally diverse as any other. Romans had rebuilt over the Greek ruins, establishing a Roman colony. Army veterans, freed slaves, merchants, and tradesman all made their way to Corinth.[331] From Acts 18 we see that a good number of Jews also settled there. The nearby commercial port brought many visitors and with them a variety of world views, religions, and philosophical beliefs. In his letter to the congregation there, Paul acknowledges the differences between the believers while at the same time celebrating the unity they had in Christ: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:4–7).

In her book *We Are Not the Hero*, Jean Johnson advocates for an approach to world missions which is reproducible and sustainable by the local church. Johnson advocates using an approach called asset-based community development (ABCD), originally developed by researchers at Northwestern University, as a replacement to the

[331] Engelbrecht, *The Lutheran Study Bible*, 1945.

older needs-based approach.[332] The asset-based approach leads those in the community to first take stock of how God has already blessed them and then look for ways to utilize those strengths for the common good. She cites a thesis by Ken Stout: "If they operate out of a paradigm that believes that God has given them in their own community or region the resources they need to advance the kingdom, then they are released to use the full scope of their creativity, ingenuity, and resourcefulness to bring together the various elements to fulfill the visions and plans God has given them."[333]

WELS representatives working with CELM leadership should encourage them to implement this ABCD approach as well. Prompting them to identify the many gifts that they already have received from their heavenly Father will lead them to greater gratitude and a heightened sense of responsibility for their own ministries. It increases the likelihood that they will see themselves (and be seen by their WELS counterparts) as true partners in the work of the gospel. At the same time, WELS world missions should carefully rethink their approach to the use of subsidy in India and other fields. All too easily, our zeal for the spread of the kingdom and our overreliance on our God-given material gifts to solve any problem have led to a national church's dependence on our financial assistance. When we slow down our approach and allow the Spirit to reveal the gifts he is distributing among new Christians, we put ourselves in a better position to be

[332] Jean Johnson, *We Are Not the Hero: A Missionary's Guide to Sharing Christ, Not a Culture of Dependency* (Sisters, OR: Deep River Books, 2016), 273.

[333] Ken Stout, "Fostering Sustainability & Minimizing Dependency in Mission Finances" (An Integrative Thesis Submitted to the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2008), http://www.rts.edu/Site/Virtual/Resources/Student_Theses/Stout-Mission_Finances.pdf.

equal partners with them. Then, as true συγκοινωνοὶ in the Lord, we can work hand in hand, sharing resources and gifts more freely, as we bring the gospel to the lost in India.

Implication #9: Increase Points of Contact

Even while imprisoned at the end of his ministry, while writing perhaps his last epistle, the apostle Paul couldn't help but continue to increase the points of contact that believers had with one another. He urges his young protégé Timothy to visit him soon, bringing his winter cloak and scrolls—and also Mark, "because he is helpful to me in my ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11). The apostle quickly updates Timothy on the comings and goings of his co-workers and apprentices: Crescens, Titus, Tychicus, Erastus, and Trophimus have all gone to minister in other locations; Luke the physician remains at his side in Rome; but his former colleague Demas has abandoned him. Anxious to send off the letter, Paul still makes sure to close with another litany of greetings on behalf of friends near him to other dear ones whom Timothy will see (2 Tim. 4:19-21). All of his other letters are the same, full of greetings, introductions, and attempts to connect the congregations scattered across Asia and Europe to each other.

Jesus' analogy of the vine and branches emphasizes each believer's vital connection to him through his Word. Paul's analogy of the body, however, extends the metaphor to express how essential each believer is to every other. The more points of contact that a believer has with other members of the body, the more opportunities there are for paracletic *koinonia* and mutually transformational growth in Christ.

The implication is that Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries should be encouraged to increase their interactions with others within their fellowship. First, this takes place within their own church body, as pastors and lay members alike plan events

like retreats, conferences, workshops, joint worship, and other events where they can build each other up in Christ.

Second, while continued fellowship gatherings with WELS representatives are valuable, the brothers and sisters in India would be greatly blessed if there were more options for them to interact with others of their fellowship in Asia and around the globe. Most closely at hand are the pastors and congregations of the Lutheran Mission of Salvation-India (LMSI). CELM representatives are also invited to attend triannual conventions of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) as well as regional CELC-Asia gatherings. Beyond this, the WELS Asia One Team should create additional opportunities for members of national churches across Asia to come together for workshops and retreats which promote spiritual as well as professional growth. Introductions can be made between church leaders, instructors, lay leaders, Sunday School teachers so they can network profitably together. Young people from India, Nepal, and Pakistan can be encouraged to use social networking apps to communicate with their peers in Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, and Japan.

Summary

In this section, I offered some missiological implications for the continued partnership between the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries of India. These implications came as the result of analyzing the intersection of the ethnographic description of the CELM and my theological reflection on paracletic *koinonia*. Figure 9 below lists the implications of paracletic *koinonia* for future interactions between Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries of India and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. The components on the left correspond to

components of paracletic *koinonia* reference in Figure 5, Summary of Key Findings, above.

Figure 9. Implications of Paracletic *Koinonia* for CELM-WELS Interactions

CORRESPONDING COMPONENT	IMPLICATION
Orientation/Priority	#1. Prioritizing Vertical Fellowship Will Strengthen the Horizontal
Source	#2. See *Koinonia* as a Divine Gift and Guiding of the Spirit
Goal/Purpose; Means	#3. Pursue Mutual Transformation through the Word of Christ
Context	#4. Overcome Challenges Due to Distance
Manifestation	#5. Rebuking as Paracletic Ministry
Foundation	#6. Establish a Sense of Community in Christ
Manifestation	#7. Encourage Healthy and Respectful Dialogues
Context/Inclusiveness	#8. Utilize Asset-mapping to Rejoice in God's Gifts
Means	#9. Increase Points of Contact

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The two-fold purpose of this missiological study was primarily an attempt to engage in scriptural/theological study on paracletic koinonia based on a reflective ethnographic description of the Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and secondarily to derive missiological implications for the sake of promoting transformative relational aspects of fellowship between the WELS and its partner church in India.

The ethnographic study in chapter 4 revealed that Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries (CELM) began as a mission of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). It was formed twenty years ago as WELS missionaries began offering theological education to village pastors primarily from the state of Andhra Pradesh. CELM pastors and WELS missionaries have sometimes struggled in their partnership together due to cultural and financial disparities. CELM pastors and congregations have faced additional challenges due to government restrictions against Christian organizations and the fact that CELM congregations are frequently not close enough geographically to each other to provide adequate support for one another. Finally, WELS is no longer able to deploy a full-time resident missionary on the field, leading to further challenges to fellowship between the two groups.

In Chapter 5, I conducted a theological reflection on the word *koinonia* and its related concepts throughout the New Testament. I focused especially on the writings of the Apostle Paul for whom *koinonia* was an important element of the Christian experience. I traced Paul's usage of the κοινων- word family, starting with his letter to the Philippians. The reflection showed how the apostle uses κοινωνία in a variety of ways to express a mutual or joint participation. The primary aspect of κοινωνία is found in Christ. All believers participate in him, in his person, and in his redemptive work. Κοινωνία is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who uses the gospel to join all believers in Christ through faith in him. The same Spirit who unites believers through the gospel also equips them to serve one another with that same gospel.

The key findings from my theological reflection for the purposes of this study can be summed up in these seven statements (found in Figure 5 on p. 143):

1. "*Koinonia* is christological at core."
2. Horizontal fellowship is contingent on vertical fellowship.
3. The Holy Spirit is the creator and orchestrator of all *koinonia* in Christ.
4. Koinonia in Christ is created and sustained by means of the gospel of Christ.
5. The goal/purpose of *koinonia* is to build up the body of Christ.
6. *Koinonia* in Christ finds its expression in mutual and reciprocal love.
7. *Koinonia* in Christ celebrates unity in diversity.

These key takeaways are encapsulated in a single phrase: "paracletic *koinonia.*" By the word "paracletic," I mean to include three aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, whom Jesus promised to send (John 14:16, 25; 15:26; 16:7): 1) coming alongside; 2) pointing to Christ; 3) bringing spiritual transformation. [See Figure 6 on p.

156.] The same Holy Spirit who calls people to faith and unites them as the body of Christ is the one who continues to build up that body, working transformation in and through all believers. He accomplishes that through the mutual encouragement and edification which believers offer each other. I illustrated the process of paracletic *koinonia* in Figure 7 on p. 159.

When I applied the theological reflection findings to my ethnographic description of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Ministries, I arrived at nine missiological implications, summarized in Figure 8 on p. 176.

1. Prioritizing Vertical Fellowship Will Strengthen the Horizontal
2. See Koinonia as a Divine Gift and Guiding of the Spirit
3. Pursue Mutual Transformation through the Word of Christ
4. Overcome Challenges Due to Distance
5. Rebuking as Paracletic Ministry
6. Establish a Sense of Community in Christ
7. Encourage Healthy and Respectful Dialogues
8. Utilize Asset-mapping to Rejoice in God's Gifts
9. Increase Points of Contact

Figure 10 below summarizes the three Research Questions for this study and where to find the answers for each in this paper.

Figure 10. References for Research Question Answers

Research Question	Reference
What is an ethnographic description of the Indian mission field of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod?	Chapter 4, pp. 35-51. See esp. Conclusion, pp. 49-51
What can be learned from scriptural/theological study of paracletic koinonia?	Chapter 5, pp. 52-157 See esp. Key Findings, pp. 140-154 Paracletic Koinonia, pp. 155-157
What are the missiological implications for promoting paracletic koinonia between WELS and its Indian mission field?	Chapter 6, pp. 158-174 See esp. Summary, p 174

For Future Research

As I stated in a few places in this thesis, my aim was not to ignore or contradict the importance of establishing church fellowship on the basis of a common confession, as has been the practice of confessional Lutheran churches. Rather, I wanted to highlight the transformative relational aspects of *koinonia*, which I felt were underrepresented in Lutheran literature. Perhaps further research could be done on the relation of this aspect of *koinonia* to the doctrine and practice of church fellowship.

I delimited my study to the WELS mission work in India, as it was the only field that I had access to—and even that access was hindered during the pandemic and with my subsequent redeployment away from the field. Further study could be done to investigate whether these missiological implications hold true for other mission fields as well. Would missions in Latin America or Africa, where Christians are not religious minorities, struggle with the same issues? Would Christians in the highly collectivistic cultures of East Asia identify with what was presented here or would they have their own unique challenges to living out paracletic *koinonia* in their context?

I was not able to access my “laboratory” in India due to the pandemic, which meant that I was limited to exploring implications only. After speaking paracletically regarding this research with the CELM leadership, further research could be conducted in the form of actual application or action research, to put these implications to the test in a practical way.

APPENDIX A

OVERCOMING INTERCULTURAL OBSTACLES TO *KOINONIA* ON A MISSION FIELD

Language

Language itself is the first barrier that most missionaries will encounter, and it may very well continue to be the largest impediment to practicing fellowship interculturally even after many years. Where there is no common language, most of suggestions below may not even be possible at all. Worship, Bible study, and prayer can hardly be considered joint activities where the individuals cannot understand each other. As the apostle Paul points out to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 14), the goal of building up the body of Christ is out of reach where there is not a mutually intelligible language.

The use of interpreters can alleviate the language barrier to some degree, but the issue goes deeper than that. So many of a culture's values and perspectives are reflected in their native language that the missionary will be missing out on opportunities to fully understand and interact with his national partners if he does not work towards fluency in their language. As an added challenge for the WELS missionary to India, although Telugu is the language spoken predominantly in CELM congregations, there are also a number that speak Hindi instead. And even within the Telugu-speaking regions, there are literally dozens of different dialects. On the positive side, if he can find one or more individuals within the CELM to be his language tutor, the WELS missionary puts himself

in the role of a student, counteracting some of the large-power-distance effects (see below) and creating a relationship of mutual give and take.

Collectivism vs. Individualism

A new missionary will also quickly encounter cultural worldviews, thinking, and priorities that may differ greatly from his own. At first, these may seem to him unsurmountable barriers—as much as an unknown foreign language, but they don't need to remain so. Rather, with time and reflection, he will hopefully come to see these cultural variations as God's creative and generous gifts to the world-wide church.

As an example, in many Asian cultures, including India, collectivism tends to dominate culturally more than individualism. "Individualism assumes that a person is the essential unit of society; collectivism assumes that a group is the basic unit. Ties between individuals are loose in an individualist society, but in a collectivist society people are woven into a cohesive unit to which they give lifelong loyalty."[334] It should be quickly evident that the individualist and the collectivist will have quite different pictures of what fellowship means to them. A community that exists primarily "on paper," without defined roles and strong bonds of commitment, is not attractive to those from a collectivistic society. If "church fellowship" is seen as merely a formal agreement between two church bodies and their members, it will not have the same weight as local relationships which rely on regular commitment to each other and where each one understands their role within that community. For this reason, a tenuous "fellowship" with foreigners who are not a part of their daily patterns will easily take second place to a local pastors'

[334] A. Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Baker Academic, 2000), 485.

association, where differences in doctrine are quickly put aside in the interest of protecting members from outside persecution.

In a predominately individualistic society, people are largely free to associate and disassociate themselves from groups as they please, including religious groups. A person is generally not identified by their connection to others. Collectivistic cultures, however, tend to frown upon that kind of looseness. Entering into a new society or community group—and even more, leaving behind an old one—is a weighty matter. Giving up one's place in a community may not make sense if there is not an equally strong sense of community in the new association. Ties to their old Hindu, Pentecostal, or tribal communities may prevent a seminary student from fully identifying as a Lutheran minister if the sense of community in the CELM is lacking.

The WELS and CELM leaders would do well to develop a stronger sense of community among the students and pastors of the CELM. Recognizing and celebrating the collectivistic leanings of the Indian culture, they may see stronger loyalty to the church body and to each other, as each one comes to understand their role within the church and the obligations that come with it. The interdependence of collectivism lines up well with the theme of joint participation in Christian *koinonia*.

At the same time, the WELS missionary to India will want to help his brothers in the CELM grow in their understanding of the importance of holding to Biblical truth which alone brings us into fellowship with Christ. Standing for the truth may sometimes negatively affect our standing in earthly communities—including our own families (cf. Matt. 10:34-39). Jesus warned his disciples that fellowship with him would often mean disfellowship with others. This makes the hospitality of Christian fellowship all the more

vital (cf. Matt. 10:40-42). Finally, fellowship with God is to transcend all other relationships (cf. Matt. 10:32-33).

Power-distance

Another perceived obstacle for Westerners seeking to encourage a spirit of *koinonia* in a setting like India is the difference in preferred power distance between the two cultures. Hofstede defines power distance as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally."[335] In small-power-distance cultures such as the U.S., church members often call their pastor by his first name and feel comfortable in social gatherings with him, students don't hesitate to raise their hand (or even interrupt the teacher) when they have a question, and children are seen more or less as equals to the adults in the family. These would be largely out of place in large-power-distance cultures where social hierarchy and authority are deeply ingrained values.

WELS missionaries and other visitors from the U.S. were often initially surprised to be called "sir" both by seminary students and even leaders of the CELM. The amount of deference paid to the WELS Friendly Counselors was off-putting. Many visiting instructors sought to lessen the power distance in the classroom through socializing with the students during tea-break, for instance. Missionaries attempted similar approaches with other CELM leaders and national instructors. While this worked to some extent and for a limited time, there was often pushback from the students themselves. In Hofstede's definition, measurement of power distance in any given context is "based on the value

[335] Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, 3rd edition. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 60.

system of the *less* powerful members."[336] Regardless of the desires of the Americans for a more egalitarian atmosphere at the seminary, the Indian students and faculty themselves seemed uncomfortable with being on too familiar terms with the foreigners.

A joint study on *koinonia* might allow both Americans and Indians to reevaluate their particular cultural biases towards power-distance. The more that both groups see that their fellowship is centered in the person and work of Christ, the head of the church, the better they will understand their relationship to one another. The paracletic nature of *koinonia* also values reciprocal, mutually transformative relationships throughout the body of Christ. Every member has something to offer and to receive. Whether in the role of instructor or student, all serve Christ and all are served by one another.

[336] Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations*, 60.

APPENDIX B

VIRTUAL VS. FACE-TO-FACE PRESENCE

The apostle Paul clearly thought that being physical present with fellow believers was preferable to fellowshipping from a distance through prayers and correspondence. Whether rebuking, encouraging, teaching, or admonishing, Paul would rather meet "face to face." He was constantly planning future visits and often prayed that the Lord would keep Satan from interfering with those plans.

- "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith. I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles" (Rom 1:11-13).
- "I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits" (1 Cor. 16:6).
- "I planned to visit you first so that you might benefit twice" (2 Cor. 1:15).
- "How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!" (Gal. 4:20).
- "But brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of you intense longing we made every effort to see you.

> For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us" (1 Thess. 2:17-18).

Obviously, despite his preference for meeting together, Paul did not let that stop him from making the best use possible of the written medium in order to continue to lead, model, mentor, and discipline.

Given that it is not feasible at this time for a WELS counselor to be deployed permanently in India, communication may have to take place virtually more frequently. Fortunately, today we have communication tools via the Internet (email, WhatsApp, Zoom, etc.) that Paul could never have imagined in his day. The following table addresses three areas where conducting paracletic *koinonia* over a distance may prove challenging: a) communication, b) relationships, and c) growth. The second column lists four to five specific challenges in each of the three areas. The third column summarizes some of the approaches taken by Paul in his letters which helped to defuse each of the challenges. Finally, the fourth column offers some suggested implications and applications for those conducting mentoring with national leaders at a distance today.

Table 5. Addressing Long-distance Challenges to Transformative Mentoring

Area	Challenge	Paul's approach	Applications
Communication	Limited non-verbal communication	Careful, clear, repeated communication	No hasty emails. Use video when possible. Give extra time and thought to all communication.
	Harder to get feedback / fewer points of contact	Sent trusted co-workers to give report	Take time to listen carefully. Use multiple forms of media. Maintain contact with more than one individual on field.
	Lacking context to conversations	Spent time getting to know people	Immerse yourself in culture and language. Ask questions. Listen.
	Other local voices create interference	Warned against false teachers; pointed to his authority as apostle of Christ	Access local media (news, blogs, etc.) to keep aware of movements. Seek to understand local influences and anticipate their attraction.
Relationship	Can't "break bread"/commune together	Pointed to true unity in Christ; built up community of believers; shared greetings	Focus on gospel which unites all in Christ. Encourage fellowship opportunities. Build bridges to other nearby missions.
	Feels less personal / intimate	Open/honest communication; shared heartfelt feelings	Be contextually open and available to talk about more than "business." Invest time in getting to know them and their families, etc. Share pictures, stories, personal news.
	Local distractions for both mentor & mentee	Prayed daily; encouraged regular congregational meetings	Pray daily for them. Set daily/weekly reminders to engage them in one way or another on a regular basis.
	Hard to practice reciprocity	Acknowledged (w/gratitude) gifts received; remembered hospitality	Seek to learn from them; acknowledge when you do. Thank them for their prior hospitality.
	Hard to celebrate or grieve together	Acknowledged joy/grief in writing; prayer	Ask for prayer requests. Monthly report includes "top 3 challenges" and "top 3 blessings."
Growth	Difficult to model behavior/attitudes	Modeled in writing; reminded them of his past actions	Make sure all conversation is seasoned with salt. Point out good examples that you see in others.
	Difficult to evaluate skill progress / character formation	Received letters from some; sent co-workers for further details;	Help national leaders develop rubrics for assessing skills and character formation. Use available technology for skill/knowledge assessment.
	Difficult to address issues in a timely way	No delay in writing; counted on local leaders	Maintain regular meeting times. Utilize technology for more immediate issues: WhatsApp, etc.
	Mentor can't identify new prospects	Equipped others for identifying and training new leaders	Empower national leaders to identify gifted individuals in their midst. Trust them.

Advantages to Long-distance Transformative Mentoring

- Easier to empower others and develop interdependent partnership
- Need for vertical relationship comes into greater focus
- Greater impetus to expand community
- Expectation of future glory & full unity revealed in the eschaton

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