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**THE NEW TESTAMENT KOINONIA
AS A MODEL FOR CONSECRATED LIFE**

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*Remember, I am with you always,
To the end of the age. (Matt 28:20)*

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	Error! Bookmark not defined.3
CHAPTER ONE: THE MEANING OF KOINΩNIA	3
Introduction	3
1. Word Analysis.....	3
2. Secular Usage of κοινωνία.....	6
3. Usage in the Septuagint (LXX).....	7
4. The Use of κοινωνία in the New Testament	8
a. Κοινωνία in Paul’s Letters	8
b. Κοινωνία in the Epistle to the Hebrew	12
c. Κοινωνία in the Acts of Apostles	12
d. κοινωνία in the 1 John.....	12
Conclusion	13
CHAPTER TWO: SHADES OF KOINΩNIA IN THE LIVES OF	14
THE EARLY CHRISTIANS	14
Introduction	14
1. Κοινωνία as God’s initiative.....	15
2. Jesus’ mission of κοινωνία.....	16
3. Κοινωνία in the Early Church.....	20
a. Apostolic Teaching.....	23
b. Community fellowship	24
c. Breaking of the bread.....	25
d. Worship and prayer	27
Conclusion	30
CHAPTER III: KOINΩNIA AS A MODEL FOR	32
CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS LIFE	32
Introduction	32
1. The Mystery of Trinity as Prototype of koinwniva.....	33
2. The Religious Community as a Paradigm of Unity and Reconciliation.....	36
3. Message of Pope Francis on the Year of Consecrated Life	40
CONCLUSION	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

INTRODUCTION

One writer says, “The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery.” I have been studying at the University of Saint Joseph for the last five years. During all these years of philosophical-theological studies, my search for knowledge and truth cannot be quenched as I am bombarded with new learning, discoveries, experiences, and realizations. I have witnessed during these five years of Christian Studies at USJ the realization of teaching minds, touching *hearts* and *transforming* lives. Yet, the more I learn, the more I experience a sense of wonder and mystery.

One theological and biblical word that has fascinated me is *κοινωνία*, richly translated in English as “fellowship,” “community,” “partnership.” It is a Greek word that has much of vibrant and rich meaning in both secular and religious milieu. In a contemporary world that is global and pluralistic, the concept of *κοινωνία* has so much insight to offer. In a society that is fragmentalized and continues to be segregated, *κοινωνία* offers a solution. The fact that the term and concept is found in the New Testament engages me to examine its usage, meaning, and significance in the lives of the early Christians.

I am interested to find the answer to how or where does *κοινωνία* begin? And how does it develop or prosper? Can the NT *κοινωνία* serve as a model for religious life for contemporary times? To provide answers to these questions, I shall examine the occurrences of the term *κοινωνία* in the books of the NT. Its usages in these passages

will be closely analyzed. At the last chapter I shall attempt to appropriate the NT concept of *κοινωνία* to contemporary religious and consecrated life.

The paper is subdivided into three parts: The first chapter examines the meaning of *κοινωνία* as found in secular and New Testament usages. The second chapter attempts at looking at the shades of *κοινωνία* in the lives of the Early Christians as reflected in the New Testament writings, beginning with the sending of Jesus Christ as God's manifestation of *κοινωνία* with humankind. The third chapter proposes *κοινωνία* as a model for Contemporary Religious Life.

The research method employed in this paper is historico-critical and descriptive analyses. The principal materials for the study are the Bible, biblical commentaries and dictionaries, journal articles on *κοινωνία* available in the University of St. Joseph Library, Dominican Priory Library in Macau, book collections of Prof. Arnold Monera, my supervisor, and online sources. All the biblical citations in this paper are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MEANING OF ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ

Introduction

The idea of community or communion is expressed in the Greek word *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*) and its cognates. The use of the word *κοινωνία*, which predates Christianity, is variously translated as “partnership,” “communion,” “fellowship.”

1. Word Analysis

The word belongs to the following word group:

(1) *Κοινό* (adjective), which means “common.” At its most basic the root of the *κοινωνία* family of terms is the adjective *κοινό* (common). For example, the NT was written in common Greek (*κοινή*) it was the Greek that spoken by the ordinary people which was considered as market Greek/ Street Greek. As in a number of languages, common can mean, ordinary, profane, and in contrast to holy or sacred, even, unclean.¹

(2) *Κοινωνό*, “partner, companion, sharer.” Common carries within the notion of something held, experienced, or practiced together with others, or something shared. Acts 2:44 speaks of the believers holding all things in common. Such persons are partners (*κοινωνό*~; plural *κοινωνοί*).² *Κοινωνία* can thus mean partnership as in business or

¹ Thomas R. Yoder, *Koinōnia: The Gift We Hold Together*, <https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/July12YoderNeufeld.pdf>, accessed on 24 July 2015.

² Ibid.

³ Jack M. Suggs, *κοινωνία* in the New Testament, *Mid-Stream*, 23: 4 (1984) 351-362.

friendship (Luke 5:10; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phlm 17).³ Sometimes the term is strengthened by adding the prefix sun-, which means, together or with, as in συγκαινωνό, co-partner, co-participant. In addition to the instance of συγκαινωνό~, the prefix sun- serves well to capture the relationship of believers to one another in the service of the Gospel. Paul can thus call the Philippians, συγκαινωνοί of grace (Phil. 1:7), and himself a συγκαινωνό of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 9:23). John of Patmos refers to himself as a συγκαινωνό together with his readers in suffering, reign, and endurance in Jesus (cf. Rev 1:9).⁴

(3) Κοινωνέω (verb), derived from κοινωνό, means have/take a share in something where it appears with a genitive or dative objective.⁵ Rom 12:13; 15:27; 1 Tim 5:22; 1 Pet 4:13; Heb 2:14: “Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:15). “To share or participate κοινωνέω is to have someone or something in common κοινό, forming a communion or fellowship of sharer κοινωνία and making of each participant a partner companion or sharer κοινωνό/συγκαινωνό.”⁶

(4) συγκαινωνέω (verb), “To share or participate in something with somebody.” To share together with; translated “communicated with” (cf. Phil 4:14); have fellowship with (cf.

³ Jack M. Suggs, κοινωνία in the New Testament, *Mid-Stream*, 23: 4 (1984) 351-362.

⁴ Yoder R. Thomas, κοινωνία: *The Gift We Hold Together*, <https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/pastissues/July12YoderNeufeld.pdf>. Accessed on July 24, 2015

⁵ J. Hainz, “κοινωνία κτλ.” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament 3* (1993): 303

⁶ Michael Scott Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 185.

Ephesians 5:11); be... partakers of (cf. Revelation 18:4). The thought is that of sharing with others what one has, in order to meet their needs.⁷

(5) κοινωνικό (adjective), “belonging or appointed to society, generous. Liberal in sharing or giving, sharing what is one’s own.” Κοινωνικό means “to communicate.”⁸ Examples: “They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share” (1 Tim 6:18) and “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:16).

(6) κοινωνώ (verb), “To make common, to share.”

Κοινωνία, then, refers to the action of having something in common, sharing and participating in a common reality, acting together.⁹ In Christianity, κοινωνία describes a particular kind of close relationship between people created by their mutual fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Κοινωνία is a rich and vibrant word that takes us far deeper into a place of a holy relationship. Κοινωνία defines our life together in Christ’s church—our relationship to the Triune God and our relationship to one another.

In the New Testament, κοινωνία and its verb forms express deep, intimate, abiding relationships between God and human being, also deep, intimate, and abiding relationships among human being. Engaging in a brief study of ways the New Testament

⁷ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: With Topical Index* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1996), 12

⁸ Frank Damazio, and Rich Brott, *Family Finance Handbook: Discovering the Blessings of Financial Freedom* (Portland, Or: City Bible Pub, 2004), 74.

⁹ *National Council of Churches in India: National Council of Churches Review* (Nagpur, Maharashtra, 1987), 633.

speaks of κοινωνία can both deepen our understanding of Christian faith and life, and suggest broader possibilities for the life of the fellowship community.

2. Secular Usage of κοινωνία

In the ancient Greek world κοινωνία, which literally means, “a sharing in common,” was an important concept in both the secular and the religious realm. The term described the unbroken fellowship between the gods and humans.

The usage continued through Hellenistic and Roman times in a polytheistic sense regarding the sacrificial meal that became a kind of communion of the gods with humankind. In secular Greek κοινωνία was a businessman’s term for a business partner or associate. The term was also used to describe the close life partnership of marriage. The concept of κοινωνία as “sharing in common” was very important to Aristotle’s political philosophy and was integral to the nature of the πόλις (city). For Aristotle, the πόλις is an association not only of people living in the same place, but also in the sense of a shared venture in which all citizens take part. Thus, Aristotle saw no conflict between individual citizen and state. The Philosopher defines the citizen as someone for whom “it is possible to share (κοινωνέειν) in the deliberations and judgments of rule” (*Politics* III.1.1275b19-20).

In Platonism κοινωνία acquires its greatest systematic significance. Κοινωνία is the basis of σωτηρία (“salvation”),¹⁰ the preservation not only for individuals, but of the whole cosmos, which includes both man and gods. The idea of an unbroken

¹⁰ William E. Wenstrom, Jr. Bible Ministries: κοινωνία, http://wenstrom.org/downloads/written/word_studies/greek/koinonia.pdf. Accessed on, 24/7/2015

relationship of fellowship between God and man is thought to be completely Greek. Greek philosophers Plato lifts the thought of divine fellowship above the cultic experience and extol it as the highest and most felicitous form of fellowship.

Summarizing the secular ancient usage of *κοινωνία*, William Barclay identifies three distinctive meanings¹¹: (1) It means very commonly a “business partnership.” In a papyrus announcement a man speaks of his brother “with whom I have no *κοινωνία*,” which means no business connection. (2) It is used specially of “marriage.” Two people enter into marriage in order to have “*κοινωνία* of life,” that is to say, to live together a life in which everything is shared. (3) It is used of human's “relationship with God.” Epictetus, for instance, speaks of religion as “aiming to have *κοινωνία* with Zeus.”

Thus, in secular Greek *κοινωνία* is used basically to express a close and intimate relationship into which people enter. It has the sense of brotherhood. It expresses a two-side relation. The word itself, then, had cultural and religious roots that enabled it to move forward in Christian writings to express important aspects of the Christian life.

3. Usage in the Septuagint (LXX)

The word *κοινωνία* is found only three times in the LXX. Of these one is canonical. But surprisingly the word was not used to denote the relationship between God and humans.¹² In Hosea 4:17 *κοινωνία* was even used in the negative sense

¹¹ See William Barclay, *New Testament Words, Combining A New Testament Wordbook and More New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press 194), 27

¹² Friedrich Hauck, “*κοινός* κτλ.,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3 (1965; repr. 1989): 789-809, esp. 801.

describing fellowship with idols, i.e., demons. The most significant point is that neither in Hebrew *chaver* nor is *koinon* used for the relation to God, as so often in the Greek world.

Similarly, in the LXX, even though this is influenced by Greek usage and thinking, we never find *κοινωνία* for the relation between God and man. This is a surprising fact. For there can be little doubt in ancient Israel sacrifice, or the sacrificial meal, was widely regarded as sacral fellowship between God and man. In Israel, too, the common meal implies a close relationship, which binds the participants to one another. This applies not merely to the men who partake of it; it is equally true of the believed participation of God.

4. The Use of *κοινωνία* in the New Testament

As a noun, or in its adjectival or verbal forms, it is found in 43 verses of the New Testament. The abstract form *κοινωνία*, however, appears nineteen times in the NT, predominantly in Paul.

a. *Κοινωνία* in Paul's Letters

Κοινωνία is found thirteen (13) times in Paul's genuine letters. *Κοινωνία* was Paul's favorite word to describe a believer's relationship with the risen Lord and the benefits of salvation which come through Him. The Apostle basically uses the word in the following senses¹³:

¹³ John R. Kohlenberger III, Edward W. Grodric, James A. Swanson, *The Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 433.

- (1) fellowship – five times [1 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 2:9; Phil 2:1];
- (2) contribution – once [Rom 15:26];
- (3) Sharing – thrice [2 Cor 8:4; 2 Cor 9:13; Phlm 6]
- (4) Partnership – once [Phil 1:5]
- (5) Fellowship of sharing – once (Phil 3:10)

J. Hainz explains, “Only the usage in Paul and writings influenced by Paul has a specific character, while the rest of NT usage corresponds to general Greek usage.”¹⁴ What is that specific character? “Paul uses κοινωνία for the religious fellowship (participation) of the believer in Christ and Christian blessings, and for the mutual fellowship of believers.”¹⁵ For instance, Paul in 1 Corinthians states that Christians are called to fellowship (participation) with the Son: “God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship κοινωνία of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). Clearly here Paul sets as the target of Christian vocation κοινωνία with the Son. For Paul, this calling is both present and future. Georg Panikulam writes, “It is present because it begins and grows with this life; it still remains a future reality inasmuch as a complete fellowship with the Son will have only at the parousia.”¹⁶

Besides fellowship with Christ/God, the other occurrences of κοινωνία in the letters of Paul involve: κοινωνία in faith (Phlm 6), κοινωνία in the gospel (Phil 1:5), κοινωνία in the collections (2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Rom 12:13; 15:26), κοινωνία in the Spirit (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1), κοινωνία in the Eucharist (1 Cor 10:16), κοινωνία in the

¹⁴ J. Hainz, “κοινωνία κτλ.,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 3 (1991): 303-305, esp. 303.

¹⁵ Hauck, “κοινός κτλ.,” 804.

¹⁶ Georg Panikulam, *κοινωνία in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 5.

sufferings (Phil 3:10). All these serve as concrete modes of responding to this call to κοινωνία with the Son.¹⁷ It is interesting to note that Paul never employs κοινωνία for the individual sharing or participation of someone in Christ. It is always someone's sharing / participation in Christ with others. It is a participation in something with someone. It connotes oneness. This is best expressed in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing (κοινωνία) in the gospel from the first day until now. (Phil 1:5)

In using the word κοινωνία here in Phil 1:5, Paul is bringing to his reader's minds a sort of "oneness" together in the gospel. It entails then that for Paul κοινωνία has a strict communitarian sense. Fellowship with Christ is salvation, and fellowship with one another in Christ is for Paul the ideal Christian community. The Pauline use of κοινωνία has an obvious Christocentric and also an ecclesiological emphasis. Again Panikulam aptly notes, "The soteriology and ecclesiology of Paul thus could be brought to a κοινωνία. For him fellowship with Christ is for salvation, and fellowship with one another in Christ is for him the ideal Christian community."¹⁸

For Paul, κοινωνία is not simply an ideal, abstract, spiritual quality. Fellowship / Participation / Sharing have to be concrete. Hence, Paul specifically uses the same word κοινωνία for the financial contribution or collection that the Gentile churches in Greece

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

had shared for the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:26). In the ideal Christian fellowship or community, the strong ought to put up with the weaknesses of the weak (see Rom 15:1). Such generosity of sharing financial contribution exemplifies bearing the weak. The collection of the Gentile churches was an expression of solidarity with the other churches, especially with the mother church in Jerusalem. It was a gesture of shared participation (κοινωνία) in the mission of the church and the proclamation of the gospel.

In short, according to Hainz, κοινωνία in Paul is “a designation for various community relationships that come into being through (common) participation and are seen in reciprocal giving and taking of a portion.”¹⁹ He uses the word for various common relationships of Christians with each other. But the decisive expression of participation of Christians is “partnership” (κοινωνία) in the body of Christ effected at the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing (κοινωνία) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break is it not a sharing (κοινωνία) in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). The partakers of the meal though many have become one body, for they all partakers of the one bread (1 Cor 10:17). “One Bread” symbolizes the unity of the “one body”.

For Paul, κοινωνία is not only expressed in the participation in his body (and blood), but also “partnership or sharing (κοινωνία) in his sufferings” (Phil 3:10). This entails partnership / sharing with Christ in his sufferings. Those who participate in Christ’s sufferings will likewise participate in his glory (see 1 Pet 5:1). As Paul would

¹⁹ Hainz, “κοινωνία,” *EDNT* 2, 304.

say to the Corinthians, “Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share (κοινωνίου) in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation” (2 Cor 1:7).

b. Κοινωνία in the Epistle to the Hebrew

The term κοινωνία in the letter to the Hebrews occurs once only. As used in the epistle, the word refers to sharing. “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God” (Heb 13:16). The phrase “share what you have” means, “Do not neglect generosity”. It is a pastoral advice to a community on how to stay together and pull together in the face of very difficult issues.

c. Κοινωνία in the Acts of Apostles

The only appearance of κοινωνία in Acts is found in 2:42: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship (κοινωνία), to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Κοινωνία is presented as one of the four characteristics of an idyllic Christian community. Here the word “entails both spiritual communion and the sharing of possessions.”²⁰

d. Κοινωνία in the 1 John

In the First Letter of John, the word κοινωνία appears four (4) times: twice in 1:3; 1:6; 1:17. In all of these occurrences, both NRSV and NAB render κοινωνία as fellowship, while NJB translates as union; NEB uses sharing. Clearly the usage of κοινωνία 1 John seeks to strengthen community (*fellowship*) between the writer and the readers. The

²⁰ Barbara E. Reid, “The Acts of the Apostles,” *The New Interpreter’s Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1961.

congregation (or congregations) to whom the letter was addressed has suffered a division among its members. In the letter the author wishes to reassure readers that they are the faithful ones because of their spiritual fellowship with God the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, with one another in the community.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the word *κοινωνία* both in its secular and religious usages. We have seen that the word had religious roots even in its secular usage and that made it easy to enter the usage in the New Testament. As used in the New Testament, especially in the letters of Paul, *κοινωνία* denotes fellowship or partnership. Fellowship is basically a relationship, sharing together in common life.

It is a way of life of the early believers in Jesus Christ to be in each other's company, sharing things together and helping each other. Over all in NT, the word fellowship is a relationship of inner unity among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's will on earth. Fellowship in the NT therefore is an inner unity expressed externally. It has the sense of community. In the secular usage, especially in secular Greco-Roman world, *κοινωνία* is used basically to define a partnership in business or an intimate relationship into which a man and a woman enter. In both secular and biblical terms, the meaning of *κοινωνία* is not just doing together but also being together both physically and spiritually. It is not just doing anything together but it is working together to accomplish God's will for us.

CHAPTER TWO: SHADES OF ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ IN THE LIVES OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Introduction

As we have shown in the previous chapter, the abstract noun *κοινωνία* is the Greek word which when translated in our English New Testament can have the following meanings: communion, association, fellowship, having or giving a share, contribution, and partnership. In the secular usage, the Greek *κοινωνία* was used to express various types of harmonious relationships.

In the Christian concept the term *κοινωνία* took on a religious content, which expresses the profound reality of God's relationship with his people and their relationship with one another. *Κοινωνία* "expressed a relationship of great intimacy and depth, one so rich in fact that it even became the favorite expression for the marital relationship ... the most intimate between human beings."²¹

²¹ William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, "*κοινωνία*," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 439.

1. Κοινωνία as God's initiative

The Holy Scriptures reveal that the invitation κοινωνία is God's initiative. In fact, the Triune God becomes paradigm of κοινωνία: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor 13:13). The God of the Old Testament desires to dwell and have fellowship with his people. We see in Genesis after the temptation from the garden, after the flood, and at the time of the Exodus, God telling his people, "And let them build a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them" (Exod 25:8). The Temple was considered to be God's dwelling place amongst Israel. It guarantees God's presence among his people. Ezekiel 37:27 says, "My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The chosen people of God have not always been faithful to God's indwelling and responsive to his invitation to communion. In the long and tedious history of Israel one finds a loving and just God who never gives up.

The New Testament is, thus, a continuation of God's desire to have κοινωνία with his new people of God. The Letter to the Hebrews states: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds (1:1-2). In the appointed time, "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). Jesus Christ is God's indwelling among men.

Consequently, the Indian biblical scholar Georg Panikulam has noted that κοινωνία “as the NT sees it does not originate in man but in God.”²² It is, therefore, God who calls people to κοινωνία with Himself through His Son and in Him with one another. For God, to accomplish his divine plan of κοινωνία with humankind “has sent his Son as the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). “Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

Since the Son Jesus “is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Hebrews 1:3), anyone who abides or in κοινωνία with him abides with the Father who sent him. And he who is in κοινωνία with Jesus bears much fruit, because apart from him one can do nothing (John 15:5). The Apostle Paul reminds us that this God who sent his Son to have κοινωνία with us is faithful: “God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9).

2. Jesus’ mission of κοινωνία

Κοινωνία is concretized in and through the mission of Jesus; and the mission of Jesus is the best expression of κοινωνία as divine initiative. The earthly ministry of Jesus has a dual character: invitation and response. One can claim that Jesus’ public ministry was first and foremost an invitation to κοινωνία. The central message of Jesus during his public ministry is the Reign of God. When Jesus preached about the Kingdom/Reign of God he is announcing, “God reigns as king” in the here and now. This already-present reign of God is especially symbolized in the table-fellowship that Jesus

²² Georg Panikulam, *κοινωνία in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 12.

establishes with all types of people including the marginalized and outcasts of society.²³ Jesus did not want to proclaim the good news of God's reign alone. He first gathered around himself and band of disciples to live in communion with him. When Jesus called his first disciples, he was not simply forming a society or a social organization. He called them to a fellowship with him.

His invitation to *κοινωνία* of disciples was inclusive as he called them from all walks of life. Along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” (Matt 4:18-19). A little further, he saw another two brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee, mending their nets in their boat. Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Jesus. (Matt 4:21-22). The first four disciples invited to *κοινωνία* are blood-brothers and fishermen. Jesus has called and welcomed them with a new focus (*follow me*) and mission (*fish for people*).²⁴

He likewise invited the tax collector Matthew to fellowship. Even an ex-rebel returnee, Simon the Zealot did not escape the calling of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke affirms that there were even women who accompanied Jesus: “The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene...and Joanna...and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources” (Luke 8:2-3). Hence, the story of Jesus calling the first disciples shows

²³ *Jesus life and Ministry*, <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/gehall/xtology3.htm>: Accessed on, June 4, 2015.

²⁴ Warren Carter, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: Revised Standard Version With the Apocrypha*, gen. ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1753.

“the communal nature of discipleship as a new household based not on genes but on doing God’s will (12:46-50).”²⁵ These disciples are to work with him and be part of the *κοινωνία*.

During his public ministry, Jesus taught his disciples that God is our Abba (Father). This description of God by Jesus is intimately relational. The God introduced by Jesus is one who invites people into a relationship. Even Jesus’ greatest commandments are commandments that bring about relationship: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mat 22:36-40).

Relationship therefore, is at the heart of the Christian faith, reflecting the fact that we as humans have been made for relationship. This simply reminds us that God is a God of fellowship who desires people to be in *κοινωνία* of love, justice, and peace.²⁶ One of the most fascinating themes in the Fourth Gospel is the language of relationality. The evangelist shows that Jesus is the perfect revealer of God-Father. As mediator, Jesus relates both God and humankind. Three levels of relationality can be identified in the Fourth Gospel: (1) God–Jesus (2) God/Jesus-believers, and (3) believers-believers. These relations can also be termed as intra-divine, divine-human, and intra-human relations.²⁷ Mariano Maung writes,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Matt Slick, “*A call to fellowship*,” <https://carm.org/christianity/devotions/call-fellowship>. Accessed on June, 15, 2015.

²⁷ See the work of Mariano Maung, “*Constitutive Relationality in the Fourth Gospel*,” Practicum Paper (University of Saint Joseph, Macau, 2013), 22.

In all of these relations, the major focus of the evangelist is on the person of Jesus and how he relates to both God and human beings. The Johannine Jesus is presented as the true center and authentic revelatory bridge between God the Father and humans. It is the Son Jesus who truly reveals the Father; he is the one who clearly functions as the protagonist in the gospel.²⁸

The invitation of Jesus to fellowship entails human response. The aim of Jesus' ministry is the restoration or redemption of Israel. From the restoration of Israel will follow the ingathering of the nations (Gentiles). Both are necessary for the universality of salvation. The "twelve" (δώδεκα), therefore, symbolizes new leadership for God's restored people. The "apostles" (ἀπόστολοι) is a term that literally means "sent ones," highlighting their commission. As they have experienced *κοινωνία* with Jesus, they too are replicate that to others. As they are invited to follow Jesus on a journey through Galilee, they too have to witness Jesus to others by crossing boundaries.

They are to proclaim God's reign not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. Jesus has made it clear to his disciples that to be in *κοινωνία* with him entails readiness to embrace the cross: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). This is the best response humans can give to Jesus' invitation to discipleship and fellowship. For Jesus, *κοινωνία* with him and his Father does not always promise bed of roses. The imitation of Christ entails readiness to embrace the cross.

²⁸ Ibid. 22; see also Reimund Bieringer, "Course Notes on Introduction to the Study of the Gospel of John," (Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven), see <https://perswww.kuleuven.be/~u0007546/IPS414John/notes/introduction06.htm>. Accessed on March 4, 2015.

3. Κοινωνία in the Early Church

Luke in his sequel to his Gospel provides us a theological history of the early church. The Acts of the Apostles is a significant piece of NT literature as it provides us some answers to the question: What happened to the Jesus movement after he ascended into heaven. Did the κοινωνία of disciples he establish prosper?

Acts 2:42-47 provides his readers with a glimpse of life in the early Church. These summaries remind and to encourage the reader that Jesus movement was making sure progress. “Highly idealized and idyllic presentations, the summaries featured the community as a closely knit group that shared goods and talents in common gathers around the twelve for liturgical and the catechetical nourishment, and steadily increased in number.”²⁹

Luke also shows how the creation of the Jerusalem community, in its typical aspect of unity, resulted from the outpouring of the Spirit brought about by the risen Christ. Luke’s first great summary which “gives a snapshot of the first Christians intent on living together with everything in common, is in fact preceded one might even say caused by Pentecost. The second summary (Acts 4:32-5), which portrays the community as being of one heart and soul, is likewise preceded and caused by a further “descent of the Spirit, known as the little Pentecost”³⁰ (Acts 4:31).

²⁹ Sánchez Patricia Datchuck, *The Word We Celebrate: Commentary on the Sunday Lectionary, Years A, B, and C* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1989), 168.

³⁰ Fabio Ciardi, *Κοινωνία: Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Community* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 45.

The new Christian community was born with the outpouring of the Spirit. “The Spirit therefore is the gift of the risen Christ. Κοινωνία is the gift of the Spirit.”³¹ All the elements of Luke’s narrative underline how descend of the Spirit brought about the unity of the human race and created κοινωνία. For instance, “The first elements unity is revealed in the very terminology used to describe the setting for descend of the Spirit.”³² They were all together in one place (ἐπι; αὐτό; Acts 2:1). And all who believe were together (Acts 2:44). “The tongues of fire which divided as they came down and rested on each of the disciples are another element which shows the unity as the effect of descends of the Spirit.”³³

After the Ascension of Jesus the number of believers about one hundred twenty returned to the Upper Room where they had been staying and devoted themselves to prayer as they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. After Peter’s first sermon on Pentecost about three thousand souls were added to the community (Acts 2:14-42). Having filled the place of the twelfth member of their group by the election of Mathias, they awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit. After Peter’s first sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) a large number of souls were added to the community (Acts 2:41).

The community continues grew rapidly in the beginning. In Acts 4:32-37 shows how all these happened? It is also somehow consider the summary passages outline that ideally the characteristics of the early Christian community. The fact that their number

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

increased day by day indicates that they must have made a significant impact on the society of Jerusalem at that time.

The historical accounts of the book of Acts lends to a community founded upon love and acceptance. “This religious community of love in the primitive church was the expression of an enthusiastic love.”³⁴ The community shared out of the heart of generosity and deep interest (Acts 4:32). As well, this newly founded community embraced *κοινωνία* as an essential part of the life and worship (Acts 2:42). The financial struggles of the Galilean population in Jerusalem encountered the gracious actions of the fellowship of churches.

The collections that Paul brought to Jerusalem were a tangible expression of fellowship in the church. The collection has a religious overtone in II Corinthians 9:13: ‘by the generosity of the fellowship for them and for all others.’ For it arises out of the one gospel that unites Jews and Gentiles, and belongs to the same spiritual and material giving and taking of which Paul speaks in Romans 15:26.³⁵

United in purpose these early Christians were faithful to the apostles’ instructions, to *κοινωνία*, to the breaking of the bread and to prayer/worship. These were the external expressions of the internal spirit of fellowship that united the members of the group among themselves and with God. Holding all goods in common assured the care of the poorer members of the group.

³⁴ Johannes Schattenmann, “Fellowship, Have, Share, Participate,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 643.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Several passages in Acts summarize the most important features of the community life of the early believers in Jerusalem: They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and Fellowship to the breaking of bread and the Prayer" (Acts 2:42). In the Luke-Acts, Luke gave a two- volume history of the Church. In the gospel, he told the story of the origins of the Church in the life, mission, and ministry of Jesus. "In the Acts, he told the story of the development of the Church in the apostolic community."³⁶

Most Scholars see this as four keys Characteristic of the early Christian communal life;

a. Apostolic Teaching

The early believers committed themselves to the Apostolic teaching (Acts 2:42). The first activity is the apostolic teaching. Reference to the teaching using the term *didache* appears thirty times in the NT, five of which are in Luke-Acts (Luke 4:32; Acts 2:42; 5:28; 13:12, of Paul and Barnabas's teaching, 17:19 of Paul's teaching at Athens). "Instruction is an important part of the new community. The centrality of Jesus and the preparation of members to share in the new life and witness are key community concerns."³⁷ The disciples had been trained by Jesus during his time of ministry and began to teach, as Jesus had done. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit enabled Peter to stand up and expound Joel's prophecy. The Holy Spirit was his teacher and in the days that followed, all the apostles were inspired to teach by the power of the Spirit, and others

³⁶ Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1996) 103.

³⁷ Silvia Moises, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1994).

were involved too. That both Peter and Paul were teachers can be of little doubt, but (Acts 6:2) implies that all the Twelve were gifted in this way.

Teaching was important in the life and ministry of Jesus and in the life of the Early Church and is a major ministry of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the teaching of the apostles “they were faithful to their mission of apostolic teaching.”³⁸ They did have an especial teacher in the community such as Peter and John (see, Acts 4:2, 18). Including all the apostles, (see, Acts 5:21, 28, 25, 42), but the whole Church identified with their teaching, mission and made it their own to be effective teachers. The apostles are witnesses about the things, which they have seen and heard from Jesus. As John says, “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). Luke uses the same sequence again in Acts 4:33-35, where he writes of the power of the apostles as they continue to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and immediately he refers to the sharing of goods and money, so that no one was in need.

b. Community fellowship

The early believers committed themselves to fellowship Acts 2:42. The second mark of devotion that Luke records in the newly formed Jerusalem Church was to fellowship. In verse 44, they “were together”, similarly, in verse 46 they took their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart. “The word in its context encompasses the totality of relationships in the community of believers, including fellowship between members, between individual believers and God and even fellowship between the

³⁸ Ibid, 103.

believing community and God.”³⁹ Private ownership of property did continue, for daily they were meeting together in their homes to break bread. Selling their goods and property was a purely voluntary act and a means of expressing the fellowship and love they felt for each other. By their “common union” (κοινωνία), that is, by the way they were united with one another through their union with Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. “The communal life.” “Their common-union was made visible in their attitudes toward one another, the way they treated one another in daily life and genuinely shared with one another.” The community therefore was an apostolic in word and deed. And then that common life shows itself in how we care for one another.⁴⁰ Love for our brothers and sisters in the family, expressed in helpful, practical ways of doing charity. “Their common-union was made visible in their attitudes toward one another, the way they treated one another in daily life and genuinely shared with one another.” this sharing in the common things are what makes us a κοινωνία, a fellowship.

c. Breaking of the bread

The early believers committed to breaking bread together Acts 2:42. The third mark of “devotion” which Luke mentions is “the breaking of bread.” The reference to the breaking of bread appears only twice in the NT, in Acts and Luke 24:35, where it refers to table fellowship. In the previous chapter we briefly looked at the way the early disciples met together regularly in the Temple, but this was only part of their time

³⁹ Andy Chambers, *Exemplary Life: A Theology of Church Life in Acts* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2012), 68.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 105.

together. They also broke bread together and verse 46 implies that this was done in their homes, so they met together in the Temple and independently of the Jewish gatherings.

“The most basic meaning of the phrase “The breaking of Bread” is to share a meal. Luke may be using it to refer to eating meals together as a normative Church practice (cf. Acts 2:46; 20: 11).”⁴¹ The phrase can be used of sharing a meal together; it is likely that Luke is describing the community as celebrating some form of communion. In Luke 21:19 the same words are used as Jesus takes bread and breaks it. In Luke 24:35 it is used for the resurrected Jesus, breaking bread as two disciples realized who he was. Jesus’s practice of common meals was the foundation for this practice- they all ate and drank together as one because the members of the Church are in communion with one another. We are though many throughout the earth we are one body in this one Lord. By looking at the end of the story of Emmaus, Luke referred to the Eucharist as “the breaking of the bread.”⁴² Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:35). In the breaking of the bread, “Luke’s name for the Eucharist highlights the sharing aspects of the Eucharist. It speaks of the Eucharist as a community event,”⁴³ because the breaking of the bread is a communal or fraternal experience, It is also always associates with sharing of the bread in the life of community. La vadiere explains, “Bread that is broken to be shared, strengthening, and building up the community as an ecclesia, an ecclesial community.” One may notice the sequence in Acts 2:46: “day by day attending the

⁴¹ Chambers, *Exemplary Life: A Theology of Church Life in Acts*, 68.

⁴² Eugene, *The Breaking of the Bread: The Development of the Eucharist According to the Acts of the Apostles*, 10.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 10.

temple together and breaking bread in their homes.” A ritual meal celebrated in their homes to signify their unity and remember Jesus’s Last Supper. “This practice originated in Judaism where the head of a household would begin a meal by breaking bread and passing it around to his guests.”⁴⁴

d. Worship and prayer

The Early believers committed themselves to prayer (Acts 2:42). The fourth devotion of the early Jerusalem Church was prayer. (προσευχηαισ) This noun appears thirty six times in NT, twelve of which are in Luke- Acts and nine of which are in Acts (1:4; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4, 31;12:5; 16:13,16). There are also eighty-five NT occurrences, the verb to “Pray” (προσευχηομαι) appears thirty four times in Luke- Acts, sixteen of which are in Acts (Luke 1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12, 28; 9:18,28-29{2x}; 11:1-2{3x}; 18:1, 10-11; 20:47; 22:40-41{2x}, 44, 46; Acts 1:24; 6:6; 8:15; 9:11,40; 10:9, 30; 11:5; 12:12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8). “A community at Prayer is something Luke emphasizes about community life;”⁴⁵ and Prayer was a normal part of the Jewish religious life and so these Jewish Christians would be expected to pray regularly. William Barclay has seen to the heart of this group when he writes on this verse: These early Christians knew that they could not meet life in their own strength and that they did not need to. They always went in to God before they went out to the world; they were able to meet the problems of life because they had first met him.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid 68

⁴⁵ Silvia, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*.

⁴⁶ William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: Revised Edition (diskette)* (Oklahoma City: Ellis Enterprises, Inc, 1993), 20.

Acts 2:46 indicates that the disciples met in both private homes and in the Temple. And the context suggests that this prayer is more likely associated with the Lord's Supper than with a meal. And every day they devoted themselves to meeting in the temple area (see Luke 24:53). "At this point the summaries focuses on the spirit of the community and the atmosphere pervading the breaking of the bread; "they ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people"(cf 2:46b -46a; Luke 24:19)."47 These prayers included blessings but also thanksgiving and praise (Acts 2:47). "The Prayers referred to include any that were associated directly with the Eucharist, The breaking of the bread, but also pointed beyond such prayers, even beyond the celebration of the Eucharist."48

Moreover, "praying for each other was another aspect of *κοινωνία*. Pauline letters bear beautifully testimony to his constant prayer for the communities he founded."49 The apostles always prayed before made an important decision. They were also prayed for leaders example, for the Seven appointed to serve at tables were presented to the apostles so that they could lay hands on them and pray for them (Acts 6:6). Thus, in prayer, we abide in Jesus, we give him the things that put us down, and through prayer we receive the fruit of the Spirit.

In Acts they prayed for the healing, Peter prayed for Dorcas and she was raised from the dead (Acts 9:40) and Paul prayed for the sick father of the chief official of the

⁴⁷ Ibid 76

⁴⁸ Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Breaking of the Bread: The Development of the Eucharist According to the Acts of the Apostles* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998) 10.

⁴⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *An introduction to the New Testament* (New York: The Associated Sulpicians of the U.S., 1997), 15.

island of Malta and he too was healed (Acts 28:8); as well as the Spirit fell while they were praying. When they came together, they would praise God. Worship was very important to the early church, and something that they did often. This was extremely valuable time for the early church. Many Christians were killed because of their belief in Christ. They needed this encouragement and fellowship to remain faithful. Prayer therefore was obviously an essential part of their ministry.

“The early church continued in benevolence.” One can notice how the early church went about helping one another (2:44-45). The early church was willing to sell what they had in order to help those in need. They sold what was necessary for others to have what was needed. The early church sold what they had because it was their strong desire to fulfill the needs of the saints. According to Jerry Bridges, “Those first Christians of Acts 2 were not devoting to social activities but to a relationship – a relationship that consisted of sharing together the very life of God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰

One way the community spread so rapidly in the first century was because of persecution. Ironically, the more the church was persecuted, the quicker the church grew. One example was in Acts 8:1-4 where Saul was killing and imprisoning Christians, but what was the result? Luke writes, “And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. They prayed for boldness when they came under scrutiny from the authorities (Acts 4:23–31). All in all, Fabio Ciardi says,

⁵⁰ Jerry Bridges, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of κοινωνία*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 12.

One can summarize the *κοινωνία*, which inspired the first Christians at Jerusalem. It had three dimensions. First of all, their unity was founded on their common faith (Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14) which was inseparable from their common hope (2:47); this enabled them to understand that, together, they formed a community. Secondly, this unity had to be lived out. It was translated, above all, into a unity of Spirit: the companies of those believed were of one heart and soul (4:32). Thirdly, *κοινωνία* (especially spiritual *κοινωνία*) needed to be incarnated and transposed on to the tangible level of this world's goods.⁵¹

Thus, Acts portray Christians as closely united among themselves in a rich and coherent fraternal sharing. This unity is brought about and nourished by the word of God; receive in the teaching of the apostles. Acts offers us a picture of Christians united to the point where they form one heart and soul and can express this unity in the most concrete sharing of possessions, so that none among them is lacking in nothing. The emerging of the Church shows that it has grasped the heart of the gospel message.

Conclusion

Κοινωνία begun by the person of Jesus. Since the beginning the Word became human. Which is in all his teachings and actions during his Mission on earth? The initiative for the formation of *κοινωνία* is always on the part of God. It is his saving action to which people respond in becoming partakers in an intimate relationship with the Divine community of persons. *Κοινωνία* must become as integral part of Christian life for every child of God throughout every day of every week. *Κοινωνία* with God is important, but the true outworking of such a relationship is *κοινωνία* with other

⁵¹ Ciardi, *Koinonia*, 51.

Christians. No one can be a Christian on his or her own, gathering together is important, and even more so as the return of Christ becomes nearer (Heb 10:25). To live this κοινωνία faithfully is to be distinctively Christi

CHAPTER III: KOINΩNIA AS A MODEL FOR CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS LIFE

Introduction

One of the pillars of consecrated life is *κοινωνία*. The early Christians' *κοινωνία* became the guiding principle of consecrated life today as a participation in the Spirit of Communion or *κοινωνία*. It was the communitarian life of the NT *κοινωνία* where everything was shared as common and had a participation in the form of service. The communion, attained in the frame work of the community when the members share the peculiarities of common life, is essential to consecrated life. It is also important for one's to realize what are the model and implications of *κοινωνία* for contemporary consecrated life.

In this chapter it is interesting for me to develop *Κοινωνία* as a Model for contemporary Religious Life into three points: First, I will write about The Mystery of Trinity as Prototype of *Κοινωνία*, second, The Religious Community as a Paradigm of Unity of Reconciliation, and third The Message of Pope Francis on the Year of Consecrated Life.

1. The Mystery of Trinity as Prototype of κοινωνία

A Biblical understanding of fellowship starts with the Trinity, for there it is interdependence in perfect form. Genesis 1 presents to us an implication of κοινωνία within the Godhead (Gen 1:26). He had so much love that he had too expressed it through relationship. The three divine Persons lived out with one another and we are invited into interacting with one another the same way the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit interact with one another. This is why κοινωνία is a central part of every Christian's life because our God is a God of κοινωνία / fellowship and ever since God has brought us into his κοινωνία, then we should live out His κοινωνία with one another. So everyone is being invited to κοινωνία with him and with one another. Particularly in the consecrated life since consecrated life is an imitation of Christ's way of life.

According to Justin Rigali, "Consecration means belong to Christ and in him being related to the most Blessed Trinity."⁵² In regard to this relation St. John Paul II says, "The Consecrated life, deeply rooted in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord, is a gift of God the Father to his Church through the Holy Spirit"⁵³ (*Vita Consecrata*, no1)

Furthermore, Divine unity of Trinity is about Love. The love of the Father for the Son in the Holy Spirit. "The Christian tradition acclaims God as the perfect community

⁵² Justin Rigali, *Show us Your Mercy and Love: Thirty Reflections on Life in Jesus Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 145.

⁵³ John Paul II, Catholic Church: *On the Consecrated Life: A Simplified Version of John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata* (Chicago, IL: Institute on Religious Life, 2004) No 1.

of love.”⁵⁴ St. John in his first letter says “God is Love” (1 John 4:8). The description of St. John has picture us that God’s knowledge and expression of that love is the very inner life of the Trinity.

The Trinity is the origin and pattern of all authentic love, the life of the Trinitarian unity is characterized by perichoretic relationship, which is reciprocal giving and acceptance; they are dynamically one in other, so that in each one of the three the other two are present. The consecrated life therefore is oriented towards others and being in one another. “Chiefly it is oriented towards God, to whom religious vows are primarily sworn, but also towards brothers or sisters in community, and towards those encountered in service to the wider world.”⁵⁵ The *κοινωνία* imitates the colleges of the apostles and of the prophets. To achieve this, they had to break their hearts to each other, as brothers and sisters.⁵⁶ The mystery of Trinity is the best prototype of *κοινωνία* because from Trinity one may find the perfect unity, love, communication, and relationship.

The quality of Christian life is based on imitation of the life of Trinity. The trinity is the example of every human community, from the simplest way, which is the family, to the universal Church. It shows how love creates unity out of diversity. Unity is what a family learns from the Trinitarian model, the same for those who live the Consecrated Life since they are forming themselves in a community.

⁵⁴ Joseph Dennis Billy, *Living in the Gap Religious Life and the Call to Communion* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2011), 47.

⁵⁵ Br Matthew Jarvis O.P. *Consecrated Life and the Trinity* , <http://english.op.org/godzdogz/consecrated-life-and-the-trinity>, Accessed on 24 July 2015

⁵⁶ Jose Cristo Rey Garcia Paredes, cmf, *Theology of Religious Life: From the origins to Our Day* (Quezon City, Philipines: Claretians publications, 2006), 20.

“The foundation stone of a religious community is laid down on the rock of the communion of members living in common. The true signs of communion gathering of the members, daily practices, participation in common life, study, discussions are the important aspects necessary for the community living.”⁵⁷

All the creatures are made through the Trinity (John 1:3; Col 1:16). The bond of communion is the love that brings together all the members of the Body of Christ. In order for us to talk about, and live out *κοινωνία*, we must begin by looking at God, when we look at God we find him to be a Triune God interacting in perfect *κοινωνία*. He invites us into that fellowship and we can interact with Him and with others. It is God’s will that we are in *κοινωνία*. We were not made for being individualistic beings; we were made to be in communion. There is a saying that goes “No man is an island.” And most importantly, we are created to live and love as God does.

As the apostolic community is a community of those who have been called because the love of Christ has gathered a great number of disciples to become one, so that, like him and thanks to him, in the Spirit, they might, throughout the centuries, be able to respond to the love of the Father, loving him “with all their hearts, with all their soul, with all their might” (cf. Deut. 6:5) and loving their neighbors “as themselves” (cf. Mt. 22:39).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Religious Community as Communion of Common Life in the Light of CCEO (The Promulgation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium Culture*) Culture : http://www.dharmaramjournals.in/ArticleDetails.aspx?AID=95#_ftnref5, Accessed on August 2, 2015

⁵⁸ *Congregation for institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life*: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_profile_en.html : Accessed on July 3, 2015.

Therefore, one of the significant dimensions of Trinity is the community of Love and persons modeled for each and every one of us in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity. Trinity is the primary symbol for Christians of a community that is held together by containing diversity within itself. The language of Father and Son is relational language, and reminds us that, for God, as for us created in God's image, relationship and community are primary.

Furthermore, "the greatest joy we can give to God is clearly that of presenting ourselves to him as a united family."⁵⁹ As in the Matthew says "when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5:23-24). God wants to incorporate us into this reality of communion as well. "So that they may be one, as we are one". (John 17:22).

2. The Religious Community as a Paradigm of Unity and Reconciliation.

On the basis of Trinitarian Love, the love among persons has three dimensions.

First, respect for the worth of each other as constituted by God's Love. Respect for each other is an image of true humanity. Consider each other as the sons and daughters of God. In the 1 letter to John Jesus reminds us that since God loves us so much we "ought to love one another." The beauty of Religious life may clearly be seen in

⁵⁹ Fabio Ciardi, *κοινωνία: Spiritual and Theological Growth of the Religious Community* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 223.

the simple generosity of its members. A simple gesture of openness to another in trust, a simple act of humiliation, is already a step towards closer brotherhood/sisterhood. Act of simplicity towards one beautiful enough to discover in one's brothers/sisters the living witness that they are of community and of a shared mission. Love is the primary language to express in the community life; it is that makes the religious community a paradigm of unity and reconciliation. The more a person loves, the more that person is loved; in community life the sense of appreciation is very important, because without that life in community would dry. The more one affirms the more one is affirmed and valued. The first community of believers was built up constantly when it was lived out in a climate in which the brothers/sisters learned to affirm and appreciate one another. It is not necessarily to do extraordinary things in order to accomplish a great deal, nor to do a lot of things to make a person extraordinary.

Second, solidarity with all persons in relationship of love. The heart of solidarity is the life of Jesus, because it is through incarnation that God is in a very real way in solidarity with humanity and that we are in solidarity with God.⁶⁰ Everyone is formed in the image of God, and from God we learn to love our neighbor as an act of solidarity. "It becomes also an act of solidarity towards and with God."⁶¹ The Gospel of Matthew tells us "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40).

⁶⁰ Alison Gelder, Catholic Social Teachings, Faith in a better world: *Solidarity* <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/themes/solidarity/explanation/>, Accessed on August 3, 2015.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Solidarity or interdependence of human beings is never far from the mind of the bishops at the Vatican II Council. “It is a term always employed by Pope John Paul II in keeping with the Church’s Social Teachings’ tradition to explain the love that unites personal and societal union, in his teaching on economic and social justice.”⁶² Pope John Paul II refers to “solidarity as both a vision and a virtue”⁶³ (SR no 40) The Pope proclaims the farsighted hope that someday humankind will live in universal solidarity and peace as God’s people. “His vision of a people united in God assumes that all human beings are now related as sisters and brothers because they all have the same creator, redeemer, and sanctifier.”⁶⁴ Every act of solidarity brings another into light; and this act of solidarity is an act of communion, an act in which we reflect the love of God for us. As God the Father Who is so generous by giving us His only Begotten Son in order to save us. Our belief in this Father, Son and the Holy Spirit and our faith as believers bring us closely into a state of unity with one another and with God. “Catholic Social Teaching becomes the life blood of reciprocity between God and humanity and the Eucharist is the Sacrament of solidarity.”⁶⁵

Third, fidelity to one another as inherits of every love relationship. Fidelity to one another in community is important, and every relationship needs faithfulness. Through faithfulness we trust in one another. God is the perfectly faithful to his people. St. Paul in

⁶² James L. Fredericks, Dialogue and solidarity: *Nostra Aetate* after Forty Years, “*Pro Dialogo*, Bulletin 121, 2006 /1, 94.

⁶³Ioannes PP. II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html, Accessed on August 3, 2015.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Alison Gelder, Catholic Social Teachings, Faith in a better world: *Solidarity* <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/themes/solidarity/explanation/>, Accessed on August 3, 2015.

his letter to Timothy says “if we are faithless he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:13).

In Jesus himself is perfectly demonstrated the pattern: love for God, acted out in love for others, in obedience to God's Word. Acknowledging our dependence on the power and grace of God, Faithfulness swims against the stream of contemporary culture, which says, “What’s in it for me? What are my needs, my ambitions, my desires, my goals, my hurts, my values, my profit, my benefit?” But God says faithfulness is proven by our others-directedness and by giving our life away, by looking at others rather than concentrating on ourselves. In other words, a mark of faithfulness is the kind of testimony you have with unbelievers. The Bible teaches that a pastor is to be above reproach in the community and to have a good reputation, not with believers, but with unbelievers. When God evaluates your faithfulness, He won’t be looking at your communication skills but He will be examining the way in which you walked before those who are outside the faith.

“The foundation stone of a religious community is laid down on the rock of the communion of members living in common. The true signs of communion gathering of the members, daily practices, participation in common life, study, discussions are the important aspects necessary for the community living.”⁶⁶ It is because humanity is ordained to be in communion with the Trinity. The Consecrated Religious are being called to *κοινωνία*, to be lived out Christ’s example. Religious, moved by the same Spirit

⁶⁶ Religious Community as Communion of Common Life in the Light of CCEO (The Promulgation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium Culture*) : http://www.dharmaramjournals.in/ArticleDetails.aspx?AID=95#_ftnref5, Accessed on August 2, 2015

of Christ, consecrate their life to God and to his salvific plan, so that wowing to live in poverty, chastity and obedience they give their whole life totally and exclusively for the growth of the kingdom.

3. Message of Pope Francis on the Year of Consecrated Life

Pope Francis declared 2015 as “The Year of Consecrated Life” on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, which speaks of religious in its sixth chapter and of the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on the renewal of religious life.

The Year of Consecrated Life is an invitation to each Religious Woman and Man to make 2015 a special time of refocusing commitment as Religious. Within this context Pope Francis invites all who witness the good news of God’s love and compassion to “wake up the world with endless gift of love.” Inspired by the Gospel, consecrated life in its diverse forms, as registered by the Institutes of Religious Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, has its roots in one’s consecration to God through baptism. Encouraged by the charity that the Holy Spirit pours in our hearts (Rom 5:5), consecrated persons are therefore called to embrace the universe and to become memorials of Trinitarian love.

Pope Francis is asking us, Religious men and women to be passionate lovers of all peoples, our neighbors. In the early Christians times the unbelievers said “look how they love each other” they were amazed at what the Christians were expressing through their attitude as brothers and sisters. Charity begins with me, at home, neighbors in society, country and rich out to the world. Fraternal love too, it starts with our brothers and

sisters. The Pope requests from us to be witnesses of fraternal love, to show to the world that “it is possible to live together as brothers and sisters in diversity.”

On Sunday, February 2nd, Pope Francis celebrated the 18th World Day for Consecrated Life highlighting the fact that Jesus is always at the center of Consecrated Life. “Consecrated life is an encounter with Christ”⁶⁷ In particularly inspired section of his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis writes, “True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. “The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness” (no. 88).⁶⁸

Words and thoughts that Pope Francis shared with the Superiors Generals give us glimpse of vital considerations for this year of Consecrated life.

“On Identity and Fundamental Mission of Consecrated Life”: First, Pope Deal with the question on what consecrated life we expect today? “You must truly be witnesses of a different way of doing and of acting. These are the incarnated values of the kingdom.”⁶⁹ “A radical approach is required of all Christians, but religious persons are called upon to follow the Lord in a special way: “They are men and women who can awaken the world.”⁷⁰ Consecrated life is prophecy. God asks us to fly the nest and to be

⁶⁷ Pope Francis: *consecrated life is an encounter with Christ*: <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-consecrated-life-is-an-encounter-with>, Accessed August 2 2015

⁶⁸ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii gaudium* (Città del Vaticano 2013), no 88.

⁶⁹ Antonio Spadaro, sj, Giuseppe Bellucci, sj, Meeting of Pope Francis with the Superiors General: http://www.vidimusdominum.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1268:meeting-of-pope-francis-with-the-superiors-general&catid=38:consecrated-life&Itemid=41, Accessed on July 2 2015

⁷⁰ Ibid.

sent to the frontiers of the world, avoiding the temptation to domesticate them. This is the most concrete way of imitating the Lord.

“On Growing Vocations in Mission Areas of the Religious”: Pope Francis acknowledges that vocations in young churches are “bearing fruit,”⁷¹ and the Church must reevaluate “her enculturation of Christ.” Citing the example of the servant of God Matteo Ricci, Pope Francis told participants that the Church must ask “Forgiveness for, and looking with shame upon, apostolic failures caused by misunderstanding in this field.”⁷²

“On the Formation of the Religious”: Pope Francis says that the process must avoid all forms of hypocrisy and clericalism. He emphasized the importance of good formation for candidates to religious life, saying that it is not a form of policing, but it is an artisanal craft. “Its aim is to form religious persons with a tender heart, not acid, not like vinegar. We are to be accepted, but not the corrupt.”⁷³

“On the role of the Religious Education”: The pillars of education are transmitting knowledge, transmitting methods, transmitting values. By these means, faith is communicated. The educators must measure up to those he or she educates, and must give careful thought to how to proclaim Jesus Christ to a changing generation.⁷⁴

Regarding On the Religious’ Life of Service and Witness in the Church. Pope Francis expressed his gratitude to all the religious consecrated men and women and most

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

importantly, he also includes his talk about Religious Communities. Pope Francis exhorted the religious on how important is to live in community as a religious. “At times living in a community may be very difficult, but it is very important, it is a way to bear witness. “Someone who is not capable of community life is not fit for religious life.”⁷⁵ When faced with conflicts when living in community we should not run away from them, but rather we have to accept them and deal with them firstly as persons.

Consecrated people are witness and this demands loving others with Christ’s love, a love manifested in serving others unconditionally. Jesus himself asks us to carry our cross with love and also with joy. The prophet Isaiah says, “Rejoice, Jerusalem, rejoice all you who love her”. Pope Francis proclaims “this is the beauty of religious consecration. It is Joy! Joy! Joy!”⁷⁶ 1 John, Christian fellowship is mark by Joy. Joy is the aim of fellowship: “We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4). In the context of our religious vocation, God tells us to be joyful disciples of Jesus.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Pope Francis, To Seminarians and Novices, on July 6, 2013.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting that I started my research by introducing the meaning of *κοινωνία*, providing a short evolution of that word from the secular Greek world usages to the religious usages in the NT. The word that has such a multitude of meanings that no single English word is adequate to express its depth and richness. *Κοινωνία* is a complex concept, one of the richest biblical insights into the fullness of the Gospel and the fascinating Greek approach to building community or teamwork are concealed by the English translations of the NT.

This Greek word in the letters of St. Paul and St. Peter and in the letter to the Hebrews is variously translated into English as communion, fellowship, participation, partnership, sharing, contribution, and taking part. It is one word with so many different meanings. What makes the one term so suggestive is the range of contexts in which it is used. In the NT, *κοινωνία* and its verb forms express deep, intimate, abiding relationship between God and us, and deep, intimate, and abiding relationship among us. *Κοινωνία* in the NT brings us the relationship that is everlasting. This is why the word has so many insights to offer and can deepen both our understanding of Christian faith and life, and suggests broader possibilities for the life of community.

Κοινωνία is a theme throughout the NT, pointing both to the relationship with God and to communion with all who share in his life (1 John 1:3; John 17:11). In Ephesians, St. Paul stresses the unity of the Spirit, “there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (4:4-6). We are being

called to *κοινωνία* because God has made us in His holy image for a life of relationship and mutual giving and receiving patterned on his own life. Indeed we are constituted as persons and discover ourselves as such within our developing relationships with God and one another. God graciously establishes *κοινωνία* with his creatures, a relationship of such intimate depth that it embraces *κοινωνία* in the flesh and blood, suffering and sacrifice, life and death, new life in the gifts of the Spirit.

It is also necessary to look at the early believers how they were inspired by the Holy Spirit who guided them along the ways of the growth of the first Christians Communities in Jerusalem. One may notice that *κοινωνία* begun by Jesus in the choice of his apostles, and was continued by them in the early Christian communities both in Jerusalem and in the Gentile nations, it had a distinctive character about it which is considered by some to be the distinctive quality of Christianity. This ideal fellowship of life and love should be the fulfillment in the Church of the glory of God manifested to the nations.

The divine Community of Triune God, the community of Jesus with his apostles and the sharing of the early Christian communities are reflected in today consecrated religious communities. This is how *κοινωνία* is established. It started by God and carry out to humankind. However the question still remains for us today: does *κοινωνία* in the NT still have meaning for us, today's Christians? By looking at the NT's *κοινωνία* what does it mean to live in Community for a Religious? These are the pertinent questions for us today who claim to be living in a global and pluralistic world which so many challenges.

God calls us together to learn to live with one another and for one another, to share together and to work for him together, to be in our togetherness and to love one another. We have to be a sign of God's love for the world. Κοινωνία is also to take responsibility for each one of us as we are companions on the journey, breaking bread and sharing life and in the love we bear is the hope we share because we believe in the unity and love of our God. Responsibility for your neighbor is responsibility to God, care for your neighbor is care for God, love your neighbor is love for God. "Those who say, I love God, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20).

So, we are a gifted to each other and we are invited by the Word of the Lord to act with justice, to love and to walk humbly with our God. Κοινωνία therefore means, participating in God's love, in the gifts of the Spirit, in the life Christ offers us in the mission of God.

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