

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
56 (3), p. 37-47, 2013

The Church Communion after the image of the Trinitarian Communion and its importance for the mission of the Church in the world

Ioan Tulcan

Ioan Tulcan

„Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad
E-mail: ioan_tulcan@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Holy Trinity gives a vital flow of gracious living that flows from God the Father, through the Son and then pours into us through the Spirit. Including us into the circuit of Trinitarian divine love, which is received through the Eucharist, the vital flow of gracious living returns afterwards, raising to the Father the human spirit through the same Son. This living life which is communicated through Church is meant to make us belong to the Father, to graciously bind us all to God. It gives an eternal value to the human inside. Being a theandrikos environment, meaning a human-divine life, the Church doesn't only overlap the religious life over the human one, but it rather gives to the last one, a deeply religious meaning.

Keywords

Church, Holy Trinity, Mission of the Church, Communion

The Holy Trinity has given the world a new life full of godly content so that we live it in the communion of the Church¹. „Behold, the tabernacle

¹ The Communion of the Church has more meanings, which we list here just as presented in summary by Ion Bria: „The participation of those who are a part of the new people of God, to the divine reality itself, through the being and sacrifice of Christ”: „What we have seen and heard, we declare to you, so that you share it with us. Our

is between people - says Saint John the Divine (the Theologian) - and He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21. 3). Therefore, the Church is „the tabernacle of God" in which, through the indwelling of the divine Trinity, the communion of believers in God is achieved. This communion, by which we share the divine life is a dynamic work of the Trinity, combined with our full adherence to the Christ's full experience, in order to reach „the unity of the faith and cognition of the Son of God, and become the perfect man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4, 13). This work which is „truly divine" - as Saint Gregory Palamas says - is beyond nature and it differs from God's creative action.

„So all that was brought into existence from the things which are not, by divine command, are created as a result of divine works, but not the works themselves. And God, making his abode together with the Father in the worthy people (John 14, 23), commits those arising from God's carriers, not through a creative command, but through union and divine indwelling, through godly power and grace, communicating to those united with what He owns by nature. So saints do not only share results, but they share the very works of God, imitating angels and their worth."²

communion is with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1, 3).

- „The Communion of the Holy Spirit" (II Corinthians 13, 13), meaning the personal and communitarian experience of the Christ's Spirit, which is expressed through the feeling of Christian solidarity, philanthropy, helping one another and mutual assistance (Acts 2, 42, 44).
- The Sharing and Receiving of the Holy Mysteries in the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10, 7, Acts 2, 42), a sign of belonging to the same community and confessing the same faith (Ephesians 4, 5).
- Synaxis, the liturgical assembly, which is a condition to participate in Koinonia.
- „The Communion of Saints" which the Apostles' Creed mentions about is the unity between the Church which bears fight for faith at this time and the Church of those who have already earned a permanent state of grace and direct communion with God. *The Eucharistic communion with believers of other faiths*. Following the ancient principle according to which the confession of the same faith precedes and determines the sacramental community... Orthodoxy claims the complete dogmatic unity, in order to form the Eucharistic communion" / *Dictionary of Orthodox Theology*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1981, p. 101).

² St. Gregory Palamas, *op. cit.*, p. 396, 397.

The Church Communion after the image of the Trinitarian Communion...

Of course, to live in a community is something specific for the human person, for they are not only distinguished from one another, but they also have „something in common” that binds them together. This „something in common” is the image of God in them, it is the sharing from their common source and which has placed in them various gifts. The different gifts must be used complementary, and if the „omousios-ness” lets us, however different from one another, as opposed to The Divine Persons, this is explained by „our certain separation that we can make bigger or smaller; it comes from the fact the human nature repeats itself distinctively with each human being. Nevertheless, the separation is not absolute. It is not ontological, it’s not as if from nature to nature”³, moreover, this separation is exceeded due to both common being source and reciprocal relationships, which in Church become communion relationships. The Church, this „new creation” of the Holy Trinity becomes a theandric environment for us, at the same time divine and human, through which the Trinitarian oikonomia of the world is created. Although one can speak of a theological difference between the theological plan and the oikonomic one of the Trinity, meaning that the first one refers to the divine nature and the second and the second to the uncreated energies of God, yet oikonomic plan does not represent a getting out from the Trinitarian plan, because it is not about created grace but an extension of the Trinitarian plan towards the uncreated living energies and to the heart of the Church, that they support and perfect. Because of the living energies that irradiate from the being of God like flashing rays, the Holy Trinity descends into Church, so that the Church strives for the Holy Trinity.⁴ This is why Lossky says, rightly, that the mystery of the oikonomia reveals in the life of the Church itself, the particular living model of the Trinity” and that the dogma of the Trinity itself reflected in the canons of the Church is the foundation of all religious oikonomia⁵.

The Holy Trinity gives a vital flow of gracious living that flows from God the Father, through the Son and then pours into us through the Spirit. Including us into the circuit of the Trinitarian divine love, which is received through the Eucharist, the vital flow of gracious living returns afterwards,

³ D. Stăniloae, *Holy Trinity, the structure of supreme love*, p. 338.

⁴ D. Popescu, *Roman Catholic ecclesiology of the documents of the Second Vatican Council*, in „Orthodoxy” XXIV, 1972, no. 3, p. 346.

⁵ V. Lossky, *Theologie Mystique de l’Eglise d’Orient*, Aubier, Editions Montagne, Paris, 1944, p. 174.

raising the human spirit to the Father through the same Son. This living life which is communicated through Church is meant to make us belong to the Father, to graciously bind us all to God. It gives an eternal value to the human inside. Being a theandrikos environment, meaning a human-divine life, the Church doesn't only overlap the religious life over the human one, but it rather gives to the last one, a deeply religious meaning, so that it can share with the sensible life, the family life and the work itself together with its generated effort to progress and renew the world. That's why the universe itself is included in this movement towards God, because:

“Through the report of getting unified with God, the universe is ordered by concentric circles where the middle is held by the Church, whose members become children of God. However, this adoption is not the end at last, because there is still a narrow circle within the Church - that of saints - ... entering into union with God”⁶.

Being communicated the Son's grace through the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8, 15) The Church also takes into account our growth in Christ, in a communion whose perfect image is that of Trinity. Functioning after the image of the Holy Trinity, the Church presents in the same way the antinomy of identity and diversity⁷ simultaneously. Compared to the divine existence, where the Persons, the essence and energy stand out, in Church, what stand out are the people, the nature and acts; and if the Trinity is made up of each person, bearing the full divine God, the same it is in Church, where every believer has to try to become the bearer of divine-human plenitude. In this respect Lossky says that „the Church is the center of the universe, the place where the destinies are decided” or „the place where in present life the union with God is fulfilled, union which will be perfected in the world to come, after the resurrection of the dead.”⁸

Our gracious union in the Church with Christ and through Him with the Holy Trinity, although it differs from the union in the same Christ of the human with the divinity, it still relates to it, not in the meaning of union of two natures into one person, but in the meaning of togetherness of more people to the same life of the Holy Trinity, after the image of Trinitarian

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁷ Archimandrite Sophrony, *Unite de Eglise a l'image de la Sainte Trinite*, in „Contacts”, X, (1958), no. 24, p. 95.

⁸ V. Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 175-176.

The Church Communion after the image of the Trinitarian Communion...

communion, or the union of God with us, to gather us in His Sacred society.

„This shows that the Church is a society, a communion whose human and visible dimension is intrinsically united with a divine, invisible dimension, in the way that Christ-the human and Christ-the God is one and the same Savior, Jesus Christ. After the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, at the basis of all Christian spirituality lays the idea of communion in both directions, vertically and horizontally. He speaks of our communion with the Father and with his incarnated Son, Jesus Christ (I John 1, 3) and also about the communion with each other (I John 1, 7), communion manifested in love...” (I John 4, 7).⁹

This communion is open to all, for if man is the microcosm, the Church is the macro-anthropos, as St. Maximus¹⁰ says, or an environment of which we can share each other, the uncreated and unlimited fullness of grace, so as to climb the various stages of holiness of the Church, in constant communion with all its saints. This way, the Church makes a communion achieved in both space and time and between all its members,¹¹ reinforced by reciprocity or complementarity of the prayers that make an unique heart vibrate in all those who live in the same spirit of community of the Church and nourish themselves with the same unifying energies of Christ.

„The Christian life, the life of Christ is a path that leads from the multiplicity of corruption... to the establishment of a pure nature, where there is a new multiplicity, which belongs to the

⁹ D. Pogan, *Communion of the Church in the image of the Trinitarian community*, in „Metropolitan of Banat”, 1974, no. 1-3, p. 40.

¹⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Mystagogia* head. II-IV, P. G., t 91, col. 668-672.

¹¹ In this respect, St. Nicetas of Remesiana says: „Since time immemorial, be it the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or the prophets or the apostles, or the martyrs, or others who were righteous, who are and will be, they form a single Church because they were sanctified in one faith and confession, they were sealed in one Spirit, they were one body, to which it is testified that Christ is the Head, as it was written (Eph. 1, 22, 5, 22-23, Colossians 1, 17). I say more. Even angels, powers and celestial powers get united in this one Church, because the Apostle teaches us that Christ was reconciled with all, not only everything on earth, but even those in heaven” (Col. 1, 20). „So, believe in this one Church and you will gain the communion of Saints” (St. Nicetas of Remesiana, *About Love*, 10 cited: Ștefan Alexe, *St. Nicetas of Remesiana and the ecumenical patristic from the IVth and Vth century*, in „Theological Studies”, XXI, 1969, no. 7-8, p. 533.

people united with God in the Holy Spirit. What was divided through those at the bottom, in the nature divided among several individuals, must be united into a single foundation in Christ, so as to divide between those at the top, in the persons of saints who have assimilated the deifying flames of the Holy Spirit.”¹²

The communion of the Church is made up after the image of Trinitarian communion, through Christ, in whom there is virtually its germ, in the hypostatic union of His divine nature with the human one. It is the intimate communion of a family who has as Father, God (Matthew 5, 45) and which has in Christ, the center of supreme intensity. It means the direct communion with Christ and the Apostles in „the apostles’ teaching and in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2, 42). The horizontal communion between believers develops on the structure of vertical communion with the entire Trinity and both interfere in Christ, or rather, in both directions, vertical or horizontal, the Spirit of communion with Christ vibrates, tending towards the perfection of the Trinitarian communion.

People are so different from one another, but having the same human nature, they feel in Church the same Spirit, who carries to all the same breathe of spiritual life or the same common current of spirituality. The Communion of the Church, being imbued with the Trinitarian communion, receives through this one a note of ontological fullness, seen by St. Peter who considers Christians as „partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1, 4). As a result, we all share the same divine unifying power and this way the communion with the Church reveals our unity and at the same time it is the source of this unit and has the means to accomplish it.

The Church may address to everyone and gather them all into its communion because its work touches or involves something that is common to all and to which all tend, consciously or less consciously. It brings to life the world of the Trinity. We all aspire to it because towards it and out of its power, our entire spiritual life vibrates. It is the source of our spiritual dynamism that animates our humanity. This spiritual dynamism can pervert itself, when it is not focused on its true purpose, but even in this case, it does not cease to exist, at least as a continuous return or a continuous burning for God, for sharing His life. This need exists in all of us and that’s why we say that the Church is ecumenical and its communion embraces us all.

¹² V. Lossky, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

The Church Communion after the image of the Trinitarian Communion...

Although we carry within us the same image of God, which is actually the image of the Trinity, we remain in Church, as different people, with different values and spiritual potential, nevertheless complementary, that is, with possibilities of deepening or letting grow these ones. The reciprocity of our spiritual value is however or especially oriented towards Christ, that is above and beyond all that divides us, over time and space, in the same faith and religious life of the Church, which always wants itself richer in asserting its content, more authentic in the experience and witnessing of Christ. This reciprocity is based on the love of God and the other, „for if human love can allow us to reach communion with God, and if this is the necessary way, it is because, mysteriously, God is present in any exchange of genuine love between two human beings”¹³. The love of God remains source and energetic power of the love towards man, through Christ, which mysteriously becomes interior to us, not as an intermediate that places us in communion with the others, but as a divine power working through the grace of the Spirit, which develops the communion of the Church through the power and structure of the Trinitarian communion. Christ and through Him, the Trinity remains, therefore, the strength of our communion, covered by the specific characteristics of the Trinitarian communion. The crowd of people meets in that unique revised and integrated nature in Christ and the Holy Spirit fulfills and manifests the oiknomia of the Trinity, the principle of unity of all mankind.¹⁴ But not only the community of Church gets fulfilled after the image and power of Holy Trinity, but our very soul carries inside the image of the Trinity, even since creation, because it was made not to look towards a unique, own God, but towards God – Trinity, being it consequently one and one belonging to the Trinity at the same time. Therefore, St. Callistus says:

„... the soul or mind (for the soul is mind and wholly, mind), the word (reason) and spirit, being made in an image above nature, one shows us the actual likeness of the One God in three hypostases. And this cannot come from elsewhere, but from the look and contemplation of the Trinitarian unity, which is above nature. Because this is what has made the soul thus and this brings

¹³ Pierre-Yves Emery, *Lapriere have coeur de la vie*, Les Presses de Taizé, Taizé, 1971, p. 73-74.

¹⁴ Paul Evdokimov, *The Pentecote*, in „Les Etapes de l’year of grace”, Collection of Taizé Communauté Neuchâtel, 1962, p. 114-115.

it to the particular state after falling. That is because without looking towards Him, it is impossible for the soul to receive Him. And this not happening to the soul and not turning back to the similitude, we find ourselves deprived of this Trinitarian way of being.”¹⁵

Getting united with God-Trinity, the soul becomes the Theophany of His presence, which is the presence of Him who, uniting in a total love the love of God and man,¹⁶ wants to become „all in all”. And if St. John says that „we shall be like Him” (I John 3, 2), St. Paul uses the present when he says: „But we all, looking through a mirror with open face at the glory of Lord, we get transformed in the same way, from glory to glory, as if to the Spirit of the Lord” (II Corinthians 3, 18). Seeing God in Christ is no way a passive act, without consequences, but it has the power to draw us to God and make us like Him. Therefore, the Christian life, the communion of the Church, carries in itself, the grace of some views of God, which although imperceptible beyond the realm of faith, has the power to change us after the image that it mysteriously shows and it makes us know, believe and join the Church, after the likeness of the Trinitarian plan.¹⁷

The one able „to see God” rose above the lower nature to „view from above” and towards „the everlasting happiness” or towards „the glory of the eternal” and „the holy glow given to the saints” – as the Philadelphia Teolipt says.

„This - says the same Teolipt- also receive the love of God which comes down from above upon him, it becomes Church of the Holy Spirit, it wants God’s will, it is carried by the Spirit of God, it is able of being adopted by God and it has God, taking pleasure in him and good willingly towards him.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Catafygiotul Callistus, about the contemplative life, in „Romanian Philokalia”, vol. 8, p. 437.

¹⁶ The phrase belongs to St. Maximus the Confessor, who says, „God’s love and people’s love are the two aspects of a single total love” (Ep. 3, P, G, 91, col. 409 B). This love is fully embodied in Christ, in which God and man look and recognize each other as if in a mirror.

¹⁷ Paul Evdokimov, *L’amour fou Dedieu*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1973, p. 44. See also Abbot Timotei Sevicu, *Christological doctrine of St. Cyril of Alexandria*, the „Metropolitan of Banat”, 1972, No. 7-9, p. 325-462.

¹⁸ Teolipt of Philadelphia, word about the hidden in Christ, in „Romanian Philokalia”, vol 7, p. 72.

The Church Communion after the image of the Trinitarian Communion...

Of course, the communion of the Church does not mean our participation to the being of God, because this way the man would be God, but it means a participation in God's works, just as a communion which becomes and fulfills gracefully.

„The man - says Evdokimov – enters in the most real communion with the „works” in which God is present and the same as in the Eucharistic mystery, those who received a divine „work” received God in His whole. The communion is neither substantial (because we would fall into pantheism) nor hypostatic (which was possible only in Christ), but energetic and in these energy-works, God is fully present.”¹⁹

The whole Christian life, seen as a saving work, has an aspect of communion. Consequently, we save ourselves in communion with each other, but not only among ourselves but also together with the angels and together with the entire creation, whose crown is the man. The communion of the Church means the shaping of love between us after the image of the Trinity, after which it yearns and it has to let itself captured, according to the word of St. Paul, resumed during The Holy Mass: „The grace of our Jesus Lord and the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all!” (II Cor. 13, 13), partaking of the same spiritual goods, in common, the faithful forward them together with their own contributions to the spiritual life of the Church. This „sharing” and „transmission” is generally performed on two levels: the first includes the sacramental communion, cultic or liturgical worship and the second refers to the communion in prayer, love and the works of love.

Trinity works in us simultaneously from inside and outside: inside, planting in us a life that lifts us towards its divine source, stimulating this way our spiritual virtues and outside, the concrete forms that support and guide our zeal to Christ. Though life in Christ life creates the communion of the Church, it cannot be told that this community generates an identity between the life of Church and the life of Christ, because Christ's life in us is not Christ's whole life. On the other hand, if Christ lives in us through the Church and our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit that comes from the Father it means that the Spirit lives in us too or that we live in Holy Spirit and implicitly, in the Father and the default.

¹⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *L'amour fou* ..., p. 48.

The communion of the Church becomes this way a communion of participation to the very holiness of the Trinity. Christians participate to the sacred in a mysterious way that culminates in the Eucharist, but they participate together in a communion that does annihilate neither freedom nor personal responsibility. The worthiness of another does not substitute or prevent our own salvation, but it rather stimulates it, so that the particular striving is both a benefit of our own and of the others. Our prayer is not only for us, but for others, as well, as an aid which stimulates them towards Christ. We do not live in the Church some common habits and behaviors but we partake from the profound communion of the same principle of life, in which everyone needs everyone.

Our communion in faith, for instance, tends to substitute our subjectivity with God's objectivity, directing our lives towards the eternal values, towards God. The communion in love changes our natural essence of love, deifying it and making it participation to God's love. Even men's thoughts are meant to be those of God. The life of the Church constantly enriches our life, renewing us from inside and transforming us, enabling us to a knowledge and love that bear the seal of holiness and transfiguration. If the source of life lived in Church is in the Trinity, it can only gather, integrate in its communion what was separated through indifference or hostility. The Trinity is the mystery of perfect communion with God - the Trinity and one cannot live the life of God or participate to it, but in a communion, after His image. In Christ's body one can only live a life of communion, which is in itself a force of closing and cohesion. This life cannot be lived apart, in isolated groups or separated from one another, but it does not annihilate individual and collective differences as the diversity generating of tradition. The communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit does not prevent their personal distinction and just the same way, the communion of the Church does not mean the annihilation of the specific differences of those who participate in the same communion of love towards God and people, which has its source in the Holy Trinity. Those who believe that they can share the life of Church without getting integrated in its communion do not partake of the authentic living in Christ and its gifts. The Communion of the Church can thus be conceived and lived only by reference to the Trinitarian relations, which are both model and source, by extending them into Church. Therefore, we can speak of a fundamental dimension of communion , in the Orthodox ecclesiology, which has led some schol-

The Church Communion after the image of the Trinitarian Communion...

ars to use the term „ecclesiology of communion”²⁰. The ecclesiology of communion is however in contrast with the authoritarian centralism of Catholicism and the Protestant individualism. In the case of Catholicism that sees the Church more under its legal terms rather than sacramental, an anthropocentrism is promoted, recognition and constant legal tinting of the juridical power and authority in Church, which rather brings disadvantages to the communion of the Church, than to serve it. The Protestantism, promoting an even more advanced anthropocentrism, leaves away what is trans-historical in Church, asserting the superiority of loyalty to the institution of the church.²¹

Naturally, out of the communion of Church, the one after the image of the Trinity springs its social aspect too, because the Church, as communion, should exercise an existential opening to the world, expressed in helping the other, with which it is in solidarity of existence.

The church has its basis and source of existence in the eternal plan of salvation by God, the One in being and Trinitarian in Persons.

Infusing the same divine life for all members of the Church, The Holy Trinity produces both a horizontal communion among believers, and a vertical one, between believers and The Persons of the Holy Trinity. The vertical and horizontal dimension of communion in Church becomes reconciled in the light of the Holy Trinity.

The Church does not have only the model in The Holy Trinity, but also the power that produces and deepens in its communion, because the same divine life vibrates graciously in the members of the Church, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Just like the Holy Trinity, the Church is one and at the same time, a communion of persons. Christ who is inseparable from the Father and the Holy Spirit in Church entails the rising of Church through Christ in the Spirit and in communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

²⁰ See, for example: Ion Bria, *Communion ecclesiology* in „Theological Studies”, XX, 1968, no. 9-10, p. 669-681.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 680-681.