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INTRODUCTION

What is here under discussion is the *koinonia* of the *Christian Churches* with each other. The term *koinonia* designates community of believers who live in unity, and also a Eucharistic community assembled together at the table of the Lord. The reflection first revolves around the concept of *koinonia* within the Judeo-Christian tradition. It sees *koinonia* as an instrument of unity between God and the human race and between the members of the human family. This unity is revealed in the name for the Church - the Church is called the Body of Christ- and it is expressed in a Eucharistic gathering of the members of the Body of Christ, and the members are united together in Christ as one family of God. It is God's purpose and plan for the church to unite the whole human family to His kingdom. The Church is one because it is a revelation of one God in the history of Salvation of the one human family. The one Church is a creation of one God through one Baptism, one Eucharist, one Gospel and the same faith. The Eucharist as *koinonia* of all the believers in Christ (1 Cor. 10: 16- 17) represents the first fruit of the unity of the church. It is very natural, therefore that on the discussion of the Church's unity, our thoughts should turn in the second place to the Eucharist, as a particular beneficial instrument of Christian unity. The issues raised by Christian unity, and even more, by ecclesial conflicts in the twenty-first century have recalled the theological matrix of *koinonia* in the early church, as a key element of contemporary theology of ecumenism, which is a movement aimed at fostering Christian unity and to overcome divisions and subjectivism among Christian Churches lacking organic unity with each other. The concept of *koinonia* is a necessarily antidote to the unwarranted divisions and historical minimization of Christian unity in the present century. *Koinonia* bore a rich fruit in the life of the early Christians of the first century church, and therefore, there is a good reason to trace the development of the concept, and to demonstrate its relevance in the twenty-first century.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT NOTION OF KOINONIA

In the Old Testament, the concept of *Koinonia* is prevalent in the minds of the Jews. Although this idea is present in Israelites' thought, nevertheless they lack both the term and inertia to express it, especially in the vertical level - in relation to the divine and human interactions. In some ways, the Hebrew term *chbr* expresses

the relationship between human beings among themselves, rather than the people's relationship with the divine.

Almost inevitably, in the context of sacrifice and sacrificial meal, a sacramental communion between Yahweh and Israel always comes into focus and it is as well understood that among the Israelites, common meal has a cultic character; however, the use of the *chbr-koinonia* to describe such a communion-meal is completely avoided. Hauch pointed out that: "their theological consciousness of the absolute respect for the name of Yahweh led them to circumvent the term *chbr-koinonia* to describe what is already present in the hand, and has momentarily made possible in the context of a common meal."¹ In the Old Testament, the sense of distance, which the pious Israelites owed to Yahweh, prevailed in this matter.

Even the Book of Deuteronomy which spoke beautifully about sacrifices and sacrificial meals avoided the term *koinon-chbr* to denote the relationship emerging from this meal but instead took up a term which alienated the divine dimension, namely *lpy* (Deut 12:7-12).

In the same vein, the Book of Exodus described the covenant of a right order (Ex 24: 1ff) and this description rests on a real *koinon* with God in a cultic meal (Ex 24: 9), but again circumvented the relationship between the divine and human dimensions of the communion-meal. The passage briskly says: "and they ate and drank" (Ex 24:11), and simply stops at that without further expressing this encounter as a communion, in a religious sense. A passage such as the Book of Sirach 6:10-12 bore the same connotation.²

Although the term *chbr-koinon*, strictly eluded the lips of the Old Testament man, and failed out of his religious consciousness in his relationship with the divine, nevertheless, the Old Testament people had many practices that embellished richly the concept of *koinonia*, especially in its horizontal level - in relationship between human beings with each other.

Although, *koinon* with God was never expressed technically in Jewish environment, however this relationship was achieved through keeping a smooth contact with God by the observance of the law. They understood themselves to relate to their God in a way of trust, fidelity, obedience, and love. Abraham responded to the injunction of Yahweh in trust, hope and obedience (Gn 12:22), and in this way, he became the father of faith and of nations (Rom 4: 11). Moses was made the leader of the Israelites, because of his fidelity and obedience to God's intention for the chosen people, the Israelites (Ex 3: 16). The Prophets were the consolers of Israel due to their steadfast trust in Yahweh (Is 40:27-31).

The refusal of the Jews to reciprocate this love in worship is "to disobey God... and to be ignorant of His graciousness."³ This line of thought is picturesquely brought home in the Book of the Prophets: "the ox knows its owner", "and the ass its

master's crib: but Israel does not know, my people do not understand" (Is 1:3; Jer 9:6 ff). The actual obedience to God is mirrored in the ethical relationship of man to man that is in the horizontal level - through justice, love and solidarity (Hos. 6:6; Jer. 22:16). Many prophets in Israel spent most of their lives at odds with their people, trying to inculcate this moral relationship in the consciousness of their people.

At the end, the eschatological vision of the Jews is indispensable in contributing to the understanding of *koinonia* in the New Testament. The unfolding process "of the eschatological images of Israel in the Old Testament was depicted in the vision of a great banquet to be eaten by the just with God at the fulfillment of history."²² This vision is sharpened in the meal-images of Jesus with His disciples.

2. KOINONIA IN THE TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Jewish sociological strata, the rabbis used to hold together "with their disciples the *chaburah* meal, but during the time of Jesus, He widened the scope of this meal-fellowship to include the outcasts of the society, the ritually unclean tax collectors and other notorious sinners (Lk. 5:19-32), for He had come to call sinners to repentance" and not to condemn them to judgement.

In the canonical writings, the firm memory of *koinonia* is reinforced in the pictures of the meals which Jesus shared with the tax-collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17, Luke 7:36-50; 14:12-14). Jesus' "fellowship and sharing table with them was an anticipation of the eschatological banquet in which the gracious mercy of God was already being extended, and relating to the memory of the meal involving bread and wine that Jesus ate on the night before He gave His life for the world (Mark 14:25; Matt 26:29; Luke 22:16-18; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)."²³

In the New Testament, the concept of *koinonia/communio* is profoundly inexhaustible (it occupies an important place) and it is centered on the Person of Jesus Christ, the foundation stone of Christian *koinonia*. In this vein, Paul adduced: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). Whoever, as a Christian, acknowledged that he or she is received by God in this manner is assured that neither life nor death, nor any forces or powers of this world can separate him or her from *koinonia* with God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:31-39).

In tune with this, the theological centrality of the concept of *koinonia/communio* can be viewed under three aspects - being baptized in Christ, participating in the Eucharistic flesh and blood of Christ and sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Current theological thoughts underlined the ecclesiological principles which are at hand in the Christian understanding of *koinonia*.

The useful sense across-the-board of how Christians realize *koinonia* concretely, is more complex than the meaning that such term would be for the Greek world-view. Ideally and realistically, "in its fundamental Christian meaning *koinonia*

communio designates the union of the faithful with Christ, hence their common participation in Christian goods (Acts 2:42ff), in one faith (Eph 4:2ff), in the Body and Blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16ff), in the spirit (2 Cor. 13:13), and finally, in the unity that constituted the Christian as one, on the basis of all things which they possess in common with one another (1 Jn 1:3-6). Thus communion is seen to be constituted by the Christian life in its fullest sense of meaning. It can be subjectively, but more or less actively possessed, and it is in and of itself an indivisible reality. One is either in communion or one is not."²⁴

Considered from its later theological development in the New Testament, *Koinonia/communio* stems from the relationship within the Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and the Triune community with the human family. Through redemption, we become children of God in Christ (Jn 1:12). We are born again in Baptism, dying and rising with Christ and sharing in His new life of grace (Rom 6:6:1ff). God's Spirit is in us, freeing us and making us creatures of a new world who share in the *koinonia* of the divine community. We live in communion of life with God, the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ (Jn 17:21).

3. THE IDEA OF KOINONIA IN JOHANNINE WRITINGS

The idea of *koinonia* occupies a central place in Johannine literature. John "expresses communion in his own distinctive idiom. While the fourth gospel speaks of abiding or dwelling in the Father and the Son and of their love and life abiding in us, the first epistle...deploys the concept of *koinonia* richly: 'our *koinonia* is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3).'" In this very epistle, "we find the word *koinonia* (*communio*), which was to become of such importance for the ecclesiology of the patristic and later periods. Only here in the New Testament that *koinonia* is used forcefully in theological sense to express the union that exists between God and believers (vertical level)" and relationship among believers themselves (horizontal level).²⁵ The theological impetus attached by John to *koinonia* may be seen first from the purpose adduced by John in this order.

In Johannine theology, *koinonia* in the Christian concept begins with Christ, risen and present in His church through the Holy Spirit. Consequently, to enter into *koinonia* with Christ results also in having *koinonia* with the Father. Christ is, therefore the basis of our *koinonia* with God, and "we have only to make our request to the Father in His name and He will grant it to us" (Jn 16:23). For John, *koinonia* is something that is functional. It is "not an emotional identification or alliance in a common cause, but a recognition of the solidarity grounded in the incarnation and redemption achieved through Christ. The horizontal dimension of the Christian *koinonia/communio* is expressed in and supported by the vertical dimension, participation in the Risen Lord which is the gift of the Holy Spirit."²⁶

The concept of *koinonia* in its horizontal level is seen in the light of the relationship which exists between the communities: "What we have seen and have heard, we proclaim to you, so that you may have *koinonia* with us, as we have *koinonia* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1Jn 1:3).

Equally important for John is the preposition "in" which bears a complete "ontological meaning of communion."¹¹ This ontological union of God is expressed in the Gospel in this manner, "I am in my father and you in me and I in you" (Jn 14:20). The theological basis of *koinonia* in John is that it is more and more personified and related to ideas like life, truth, and light. "We are in communion with Him who is the truth" (1 Jn 5:20). In the second phrase, therefore, John used the antithesis between "darkness" and "light." Consequently, if we claim that "we have *koinonia* with Him and walk in the dark, we are lying because we are not living the truth" (1 Jn 1:6). On the contrary, "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have *koinonia* with one another and the blood of Jesus His Son sanctifies us from all sins" (1 Jn 1:7). All those who are purified and sanctified in the blood of Jesus Christ "yield abundant fruit" (Jn 15:15); and *koinonia* in this sense demands a personal and genuine relationship between Jesus and the believer. We have only to live in Him and He will live in us, anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away - he withers (Jn 15:4). The bearing of fruit is made manifest in the life of love. In so far as God is love, to live in communion with God is to live in communion with our fellow human beings (1 Jn 4:16).¹²

Finally, John takes the concepts of unity as the very essence of the Church: "The theme of unity, according to the Gospel of John is related to a life of communion of believers. That is the reality of the church."¹³

4. THE CONCEPT OF KOINONIA IN PAULINE TEACHING

Paul uses the term *koinonia* to express the unity of fellowship, which binds all the body of believers together in Christ. For: "God, who has called you into fellowship of His son Jesus Christ our Lord is faithful to his promises" (1 Cor 1:9). Paul refers to our common vocation from God, as the basis of unity between Christians.

Koinonia is a call, which expresses a concrete fellowship between Christ and a single believer and again with the whole body of the believers within themselves. But how are we united with Christ and then together as Christians? When Paul wished to indicate the interior nature of the fellowship for each individual Christian, "he did it by means of the phrase *en Christo einai* (to be in Christ). The Soteriology and Ecclesiology of Paul could thus be brought under the umbrella of *koinonia*. Fellowship with Christ is for Paul a way to salvation, an ideal path which every Christian community must aspire to follow."¹⁴

The English language transliteration of the New Testament concept of *koinonia* is always *fellowship*, *communion* and *participation*. We shall present an aerial view of each concept, so as to be able to digest them in our theological deliberation. The term *fellowship* is today in vogue in ecumenical sphere, especially with reference to dialogue between Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. It is sanctioned as the operating concept underlying the Agreed Statements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on the Eucharist, Ministry and Ordination and Authority in the Church. The term *fellowship* according to the commission enunciates that it is "union with God in Christ Jesus through the Spirit that forms the heart of Christian *Koinonia*."¹⁵ In this connection, our "*koinonia*" with one another is encircled by our *koinonia* with God in Christ Jesus. "This report sees the 'Eucharist as the effectual sign of *koinonia* and the visible link and focus of unity."¹⁶ In as much as the Churches can recognize their common link in the Eucharist, they may consider themselves all as fraternal Churches within the one *koinonia* in Christ.¹⁸ In 1967, Bernard Lambert expressed in the Preface of his book, "Ecumenism" that ecumenical movement is definitely assuming a proportion of the greatest religious phenomena in our time. No Christian denomination has remained out of it. Through it, an immense reality is coming into being. He appealed that "in all Christian Churches and communions, ecumenical vocation may spring up among pastors, professors, among souls vowed to contemplation and among the laity in general without whom nothing will be accomplished and the last word will remain with the local community."¹⁹ If this plea is taken heed of, "the growth of *koinonia* will be especially attested when locally or universally, the Churches are called upon to act together on pressing social issues."²⁰

The next term, communion is an operative word in the current renewed ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic theology in the light of the Vatican II. In the writings of many Catholic theologians, *communio* has become one of the models of the understanding of the nature of the Church. "Its currency, often with somewhat fluid of meaning, attests to the prevalence of the notion of the church as a 'mystery' over and above the more institutional or social approaches to the understanding of the Church."²¹ Many uncountable publications of relevant meaning and works with popular names in the Catholic circle keep on emphasizing that the concept of *communio* penetrates into a deeper dimension of human life and expresses the fundamental and primary yearnings of man as a social being.

Participation has the general sense of referring to the Christians sharing in the life of God. Concretely, it depicts "a relation between individual Christian or Christian communities resulting from their common participation in one and the same reality."²² The church is a reality anchored in Jesus Christ and in the unity of the Spirit of God in which the believers "participate through faith and action, by

participating in the Sacramental signs of the Christian community and by the recognition of the same ministry to the Lord.²²

5 IMPLICATIONS OF UNITY OF ALL BELIEVERS WITH FATHER AND THE SON

The Gospels are filled with the evidence of the relationship between the Father and the Son, and the Son with the Spirit. The first witness is encountered in chapter 17 of St. John's Gospel. Jesus prayed for the apostles, and for those who through their preaching might be grouped in the family of discipleship of Jesus:

That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may know that Thou has sent me (Jn 17:21).

There is an ontological relationship between the Father and the Son, and this is reflected in our organic relationship with each other. In so far as this organic link remains unenriched through *koinonia/communio*, our relationship with each other lacks full development. The difficulty here is in principle the same as with every organic experience.

Every person must make his or her own response to the prayer of Jesus, and learn the truth expressed by John. The truth expressed by John is that "discipleship is not possible where unity is lacking. The Father and the Son are already one, and belonging to them means being one in them."²³ This is a great challenge to all Christians.

Many questions continue to surface: how do we form One Body of Christ? How are we united in Christ, in His Body, which is the Church? How far are we from the unity for which Christ prayed? In the Johannine Gospel, Jesus' prayer for unity is based on the statement, "I and the Father are one." We are the beneficiaries of Jesus' high priestly prayer. We thrill at the concept of ecumenism in the third millennium Church, and all of us are receiving new impetus from the prayers of Jesus.

The first way of bringing out the implicit ecclesiology of Jesus' prayer takes its starting points from the *Koinonia* and communion of Jesus with His disciples. Two of the fundamental tendencies of Jesus' ministry are His method of commensality and communality. Jesus ate not only with His disciples, but also often with sinners and tax collectors (Matt 12:9). He associated with those who were labeled in those days as separated brethren within the Jewish religion. In oriental culture, sharing at table with somebody else implies a sharing of life, a *koinonia* - and communion with him, especially on the horizontal level.

The conduct of Jesus had great implications for ecumenism in our own day, especially in view of Eucharistic Meal of all Christians, and the unity for which Christianity needed in the twentieth-century. The action of Jesus himself can be shown in various ways in the principle of *koinonia* and communion in the early Church. The apostolic principle of *koinonia* and *communio* is basically concerned with the sharing of life in the early Church. The concept offers us a point of contact between the Catholics and the separated Brethren in our sincere efforts towards Christian unity. It is concerned with the sharing of things of nature, our material goods, and sharing of things of salvation as means of Christian unity.

In theological 'shorthand', this unity is called ecumenism. The term ecumenism applies principally of course, to the worldwide movement among Christians of various denominations who confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and moved by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit committed themselves to prayer, dialogue, and sociological communication, and other means within the human reach to disengage conflicts and dismantle barriers and move ahead towards the unity which Christ willed for the Church, His Body (Jn 17:21; Eph 4:4-5; UR 1-4).

The second way of bringing out the implication of Jesus' prayer starts from the mission of Christ, which reaches its climax in the mission of the Church. In the mind of the Evangelist, Christians are to be one, so that the world may believe that the Father has sent Jesus to them. The mission of Jesus is glorify the Father, and "at the same time it is obvious that the lack of unity among Christians contradicts the Truth which Christians have the mission to spread and, consequently, it gravely damages the witness²⁴. The exact nature and mission of the Church is vis-à-vis the Kingdom of God.

The Church is the sign of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church's mission is to establish human rights, justice, and peace in the world. On the other hand, the nature of the Church reveals her inner dimension as the instrument of unity and communion between God and human race and between members of the human family. And it is this inner life of communion that makes the mission of the Church to the world relevant and effective.

The theological import of the Church as a *koinonia/communio* is applicable to the Church as a Family of God in Africa. Africans are called into *koinonia/communio* with God through His Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord (1 Cor 1:9). As a result we share in the same human rights and privileges as members of the Body of Christ through Baptism. Through Baptism, believers/Christians are called into fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and participate in the divine life of God (2 Peter 1:4). The glaring question is how functional is that *familias* ecclesiology of the African Synod within the Church in Africa, especially towards the direction of ecumenism?

We have generally destroyed the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church. The totality of the Church: every aspect of the church's nature (spiritual, physical, sociological and cultural) is wounded and affected. The wounds are not optimistic prospects for the future of Christianity in the African soil. Division within the Church is a threat to unity of Christianity, and fuels inter- and intra ethnic conflicts within the Body of Christ, in Africa.

Unity challenges the Church's internal life, by calling the Church to practice by herself what she preaches to the world. Within the Church herself there are so many conflicts and factions existing side-by-side among the members and between different denominations. At present, the Christian people act more like the proverbial ostriches with their heads buried deep into the world, when they themselves are disunited and are splintered into innumerable denominations and countless sects and cliques.

6 KOINONIA: A SOURCE OF UNITY OF THE CHURCH AS A FAMILY OF GOD

The theological paradigm which served for our reflection here is the nature of the church as a *koinonia* and *communio*, communion is not an abstract concept, but it can become our day-to-day reality when it moves our inspiration to work for peace and unity of the one Church of Christ, as a family of God in Africa.

The Church is a communion and not sects and denominations - she is a communion of human beings among themselves and human community with the Triune God, "as persons in communion."²⁶ Communion conveys the message that God is present in human community to create new life out of the old life-situation of a committed community, and God invites the Church as His family in Africa to collaborate in this work of salvation.

The principle of communion is not a closed system in itself. The real life of a religious being, that is, the life of prayer, the listening to the Word of God, the practice of brotherly and sisterly love, the sharing of common vocation, participation in one bread and one cup can only possess their full meanings in the life of communion where and when it is genuinely practiced. Communion is really a form of communication in a sense that cannot be merely expressed by words. This life of communion is only possible when we all realize that the Christian life is a call to service and participation in the mission of Jesus Christ which demands the breaking down of all boundaries and barriers.

The Church is the Community of Salvation; a community redeemed through the Pascal mystery of Christ-through His life, preaching, death and Resurrection. There is an intrinsic connection between the Church as redeemed and redeeming community. In the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, there are many conciliar

references, which are embodied with the notion of the Church as a community and instrument of salvation. In the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, we read that the Church is by her very nature in Christ a sign and instrument of God's unity with the human family (LG 1).

The church is the sacrament of the world - *sacramentum mundi*. She is the mirror of the destiny of the whole human race - Africa, Asia, Europe, America and the rest of the human family. The Church invites the whole human family to the life of grace and *koinonia* with God the Father in His Son, Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Today, more than ever, the church must deepen its awareness that she is called to be a communion that transcends cultural divisions, ethnic conflicts, and going beyond ideologies that deny human dignity or those that hinders human developments and human promotions.

In a broader sense, the idea of *koinonia*/communion is related to the whole humanity of Africa. All human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and are called into communion with God and with each other. For it is God's plan of salvation to reconcile the broken humanity of the world and to bring it to perfection in His Kingdom.

The Church as a family of God in Africa is called by God to serve this purpose of reconciliation and to help break down barriers and conflicts which prevent that renewed community of love among human beings as willed by God. The prophetic mission of the Church is love which invites men, women, Catholics and Protestants, Protestants and Pentecostals, Christians and Muslims to a genuine relationship and communion with God that impels all to work for a truly human community, where justice and peace unite all together.

The Church as a family of God in Africa can be a true sign and an instrument of salvation for the continent by giving them the message of hope: that God is close to the Africans and supports them in their present situation and difficulty. In the Church as a family of God in Africa, God is speaking in and through the church reconciliation, compassion, peace and justice to the continent. Our life of *koinonia*/communion with the Triune God, and with one another will never be completely realized until we are ultimately united with God in peace and with each other.

7 THE EUCHARIST: ORGAN OF UNITY OF THE CHURCH AS A FAMILY OF GOD

From the above discussion, the effect of *koinonia*/communion in the early Church is centered mostly on Acts 2:42. An African from a cultural background once commented emphatically on this text: "The idea of breaking bread from house to house had existed among our people even before the advent of Christianity, even

as non-Christians feast in the house of their neighbours. Therefore, it is not a special sign belonging only to Christians as we read in Acts 2:42-7. It is rather a custom of our people but when practiced by Christianity it can have Christian orientation,²⁷ through its reference to Christ, the bearer of God's salvation.

In Christianity, meals of fellowship bears a salvific character:

It is a share that comes from our koinonia with the Father and Son, and mediated through the Spirit and accepted in faith in the Word and reception of the Eucharist. It is a life enjoyed with others, a fellowship of the whole world, enlivening each community and allowing for a communion for communities.²⁸

In this sense, *koinonia/communio* can be understood as a sharing of life in African context. In African milieu, the life which stands at the centre of every member of the traditional family is intrinsically connected with the life of the Eucharist, *unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will have no life in you.*

The *koinonia* with God and the human family finds its concrete realization in the *koinonia* of all Christian Churches in the context of the Eucharist. In the biblical records of the institution of the Eucharist as rendered by the four Evangelists and by Paul is shown how Jesus celebrated the Last Supper within the context of a common meal. The Eucharist is *koinonia* with Christ and with each other as members of Body of Christ, the Church.

The Christian Church as God's revelation in Christ cannot be realized in a vacuum, but in the context of human cultures and category of thoughts. The African people possessed authentic values to offer and enrich African Christianity and the Christian world in pursuit of ecumenism. In this vein, the love manifested in the traditional sharing of meal from one bowl and the traditional breaking of kola-nuts, as symbol of life can enrich the Christian understanding of the Eucharist as *communio*, as *koinonia*, as sharing of life with Christ and with one another.

At their village meetings, the Africans share the same kola-nuts, though made of many parts, but form one shape and symbolize the unity and solidarity of the community. In every gathering made up of both Catholics and Protestants, everybody shares the same kola-nuts as one family or kindred. But when we come close to the table of the Lord, the Eucharist, "Catholic and Protestants cannot share the One Bread and one Cup of wine at community gatherings as God's redemptive deed of salvation of humanity²⁹ effected through Christ.

However, the Church, the Body of Christ built on African family spirit manifested in sharing of kola-nuts in traditional society, as sharing of life together,

can equip the Church in Africa to undertake issues emerging from ecumenism, especially in relation to intercommunion. The African practice of eating together one single kola-nut can serve as step forward to intercommunion and communication - the sharing together of the Eucharistic Body and Blood among Christian and members of different Christian Churches.

This traditional practice can foster the unity of African Christians, and help us strive to sincerely live that life of *koinonia/communio* which makes all one in Christ (Jn 17:21-22), makes all one Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-1), and makes us one family of God in Africa. As Christians we have one thing in Christ, and as Africans we have one *koinonia* in African culture, and they form stepping stones to Christian unity.

CONCLUSION

The energy generated by this research ought to result into a greater openness to ecumenical dialogue. The essay speaks of the Church as a *koinonia* and places particular emphasis on communion as a sign and instrument of unity. It sees unity as "the essence of the Church because the Church is a communion with God and communion of all humankind. There is a need for the unity of the whole human family in Christ, for all men and women are called to union with Christ (LG 3) and their call is not as individuals but as members of a community (GS 32).³⁰ Ecumenism in our African context today has not yet achieved its ultimate goal, especially in Nigerian context. In his address to the Christians in Nigeria when he visited that country, Pope John Paul II at the National Stadium, Surulere, Lagos, on February 12, 1982 encouraged them to go further and ceaselessly to make that prayer of unity by Christ a reality in the conduct of their life:

"Your efforts in ecumenism also deserve special mention. For when you engage in dialogue with other Christians you are working to carry out the desire of the Second Vatican Council for the restoration of unity among all Christians. The desire of the Council is an expression of Christ's own yearning 'that they may all be one' (Jn 17:21)."

But an even greater contribution to the cause of Christian unity is made through prayer and penance. The conversion of hearts is truly an effective

supernatural means. I commend you also for your initiative in working together with the members of other religions, especially the Muslims, in the promotion of peace, unity and human rights.³¹ The same insight was reaffirmed with greater specificity by the Supreme Pontiff's visit to Zaire: "It is this unity which is the source of our spiritual strength. This solidarity applies to all fields of human life, to research programmes, to great pastoral decisions and also to mutual esteem, without forgetting mutual support in the exemplary life which is asked of you and which may call for brotherly admonitions.³² Important for the Church in Africa is unity among themselves, and with other Christians. As for the separation between the Christian churches, it offers a sad picture of Trinity's broken face."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ³¹ Haach Friedrich, KOINONOS, in: Gerhard Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament. Band 3 Stuttgart 1983, P. 798. See, Campbell, J. Y., KOINONIA and Its Cognates in the New Testament, in: Journal of Biblical Literature 51 (1983) 353-354.
- ³² Even "C. A. Anderson Scott's view that Koinonia is a translation of the Heb. *Habawa* meaning a religious society or association has been disputed by majority of scholars.
- ³³ See Philips J., art., "Fellowship", in new Dictionary of Theology (ed) Sinclair Ferguson et al. USA, 1988, P. 255.
- ³⁴ Richardson Andersen, An Introduction to the Theology of the Old Testament, London 1981, P. 40.
- ³⁵ Raymond Brown, An Introduction to New Testament Christology, New York/Mahwah 1994, P. 66.
- ³⁶ Avis Paul, Christian in communion Mowbray 1990, P. 14-15.
- ³⁷ Raymond Brown, Opus cit., P. 66.
- ³⁸ Congar Y., Mysterium Salutis IV/2, 404-405.
- ³⁹ Avis Paul, Opus cit., P. 14-15.
- ⁴⁰ Schuyler Brown, the Origins of Christianity. A Historical Introduction to the New Testament, New York 1993, P. 154-155.
- ⁴¹ Paul Avis, Opus cit., P. 18.
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