

**SHARING ECUMENICAL WISDOM:
LESSONS FROM ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC
COMMUNIO ECCLESIOLOGY**

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Abstract

Is ecumenical dialogue capable of transforming the communal self-understanding of churches? Another way of putting it is to enquire if transformational experiences from ecumenical dialogue can help churches in their internal reforms and renewal of identity. The understanding here is that ecumenical reflections on ecclesiology are very critical for the goal of unity and also for the mutual accountability that theology should offer to ecumenism. This article, therefore, attempts to answer this question of ecclesial self-understanding by focusing on the lessons that emerge 'from' the communion ecclesiology of the international Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. Additionally, it considers the lessons that emerge 'for' ecclesial transformation, exploring useful insights on how ecclesial communities could be positively equipped through such dialogical encounters for the purposes of internal reform and renewal.

Keywords: Anglican, Roman Catholic, dialogue, transformation, *communio*, ecclesiology, ARCIC

1. Introduction

One of the vivid experiences I had as a Christian growing up in Nigeria, was the gradual transformation of the Christian landscape by the explosion of Christian denominations. Places, where only the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches had stood side by side, have now been

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populated by churches and ministries of various shades and colors. Consequently, the denominational configurations of families, communities, and neighborhoods have radically been altered. Responses to this reality remain varied. Sometimes, these changes breed confusion, frustrations, conflict, or acceptance. In order to address this reality, one is challenged to explore the ecumenical wisdom that emerges from conversations on ecclesiology and the transformation of communal self-understanding of churches. Clearly, the idea of transformation is distinct from concepts like development or evolution. Development focuses on incremental acts of improving the standard or quality of a particular object, evolution relates mostly to the natural process of moving from one degree to another, while transformation requires a radical change in the attitude or composition of a particular object. Perhaps, the acceptance of the reality of ecclesial multiplicity in my context may have been due to a reluctant resignation to fate, or in some cases, a result of conscious acceptance. Positive transformation implies a conscious acceptance, and when it is achieved through dialogue, it constitutes a process of renewal.

To test this claim, this article examines the dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics with the aim of discovering the possibilities of transformation of communal identity as well as the ecclesial renewal of dialogue partners. This investigation is narrowed down to the *communio* ecclesiology of both churches as reflected in the 1981 *First Report* of the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC I). Challenges faced by *communio* ecclesiology are also examined and an eschatological horizon is provided as a way of hermeneutically addressing the tensions that emerge from this ecclesiology. In advancing a dialogue where churches transcend their ecclesial particularities, the objective here is to seek insights into how communal identities, in which churches define themselves exclusively in terms of in-group and out-group paradigms, could be transformed. Added to this is the search for insights into how churches are further enriched for the purposes of internal reform and renewal.

2. *Communio* Ecclesiology in an Ecumenical Context

Communio ecclesiology is at the foundation of the Church's understanding of Catholic unity. From both its common, literary as well as biblical meanings, *communio/koinonia* implies 'to share, participate or

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have something in common.’ It signifies ‘fellowship or community’ or ‘a relationship based on participation in a shared reality.’ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 John 1:3, 7).² As an ecclesiological concept, *communio* expresses both the Trinitarian and sacramental character of the Church, whereby the Church reflects “the sacramental image of the threefold communion in God” and also constitutes in itself “the real symbol of the community between God and humankind as well as among human beings themselves.”³ Thus, *communio* ecclesiology functions not only within the narrow intra-church self-understanding but also in the context of a more inclusive understanding of catholicity. Expressing this idea in his classic on *communio* ecclesiology, the prominent French Dominican theologian, Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, contends that “the Church is a *communio* of communions, even in the normal situation where these communions have, among themselves, only an imperfect or partial *communio*.”⁴ Conceiving the church of God as ‘communion of communions’ makes space for an enlarged fellowship that does not discriminate between the superior and the inferior, the in-group and the out-group. It limits the ability of any of the churches to make any absolute claim that its identity is the only or true church of God. Dialogue assumes a central role in this enlarged communion since it compels the churches to work together towards ensuring fuller unity. ‘Communion of communions’ in a way offers a more inclusive boundary such that the individual boundaries of the churches diminish when perceived from such perspective. Analogically, they become like demarcated cubicles in a large open office. Such is communion in an ecumenical context, and it is within this context that ARCIC’s reflection on *communio* ecclesiology thrives.

² ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” 328-343 in Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch, eds., *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*. Faith and Order Paper No. 187 (Geneva: WCC, 2000), §12.

³ Annemarie C. Mayer, “A Vision of Unity from a Catholic Perspective,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 13, no. 1 (2013): 16-32; 21.

⁴ Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992), 315.

2.1 *Communio* Ecclesiology at the Beginnings of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue

The dialogical engagement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics functions within a *communio* ecclesiology that is oriented towards inclusiveness. The 1889 accidental meeting in Madeira between Anglican layman Lord Halifax and Roman Catholic Abbé Fernand Portal of Cahors and Paris has been described as the first solid ecumenical exchange between both sides.⁵ Unfortunately, it was just between two persons and when they appealed to Rome for clarification on the validity of Anglican orders, the result was Pope Leo XIII's *Apostolicae curae* (18 September 1896) which considered the Anglican orders as null and void. The indefatigable Lord Halifax will again become an active member of the famous Malines Conversations which started on 5 December 1921 at the initiative of Belgian Cardinal Desiré Joseph Mercier.⁶ Cardinal Mercier was inspired by the document of the 1920 Lambeth Conference, *Appeal to All Christian People*, which called for a vision of 'Catholic communion', that is "... loyal to the truth, and gathering into its fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians', within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ."⁷ Quite interesting is the fact that the vision of communion set out by this *Appeal* opted for a retention of the distinctive liturgical methods which the churches developed over the years in their divided states. Little wonder Lambert Beauduin's Memorandum was titled *L'Église Anglicane unie non absorbée*.⁸ The Memorandum argued for union within the context of 'ecumenism of return' since it was not mature enough to explore a more

⁵ Mary Reath, *Rome and Canterbury: The Elusive Search for Unity* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 29.

⁶ For a detailed study on Malines Conversations, see Adelbert Denaux (in collaboration with John Dick), ed., *From Malines to ARCIC: The Malines Conversations Commemorated* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997).

⁷ Roger Coleman, ed., *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences 1867 – 1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 47.

⁸ English translation: "*The Anglican Church united not Absorbed*." The Memorandum was delivered at the fourth Malines Conversations on May 19, 1925 by Cardinal Mercier as the contribution of an unnamed canonist. Denaux, *From Malines to ARCIC*, 35-46.

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genuine and realistic model of communion. Nevertheless, one can argue that this was part of the early beginnings of a *communio* ecclesiology that reflected on unity and diversity outside the confines of individual churches.

A huge impetus to the development of *communio* ecclesiology outside the individual ecclesial boundaries was further provided by the *koinonia* of worldwide Ecumenical Movement represented by the World Council of Churches (WCC). The WCC, given its multilateral nature (since it involves a wide range of Christian communities), represents a more inclusive dialogical approach to communion to some extent. In the first conference of the Ecumenical Movement in Edinburgh (1910), we saw a developing language of communion which appraised the growing fellowship in Christ that rises above all ecclesial boundaries.⁹ It was a language that emerged stronger in Canberra (1991) at the seventh assembly of the WCC:

The unity of the church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God's grace to all people and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness.¹⁰

This project of articulating communion at the multilateral level by the WCC is further taken up at Santiago de Compostela in 1993. In Compostela, *Koinonia* was expressed as denoting "community, communion, sharing, fellowship, participation, solidarity"¹¹ perhaps in a

⁹ Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, vol. I, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), 361.

¹⁰ WCC, "The Unity of the Church as *Koinonia*: Gift and Calling," in Gros et al., *Growth in Agreement II*, §2.1.

¹¹ WCC, "Message to the Churches," in in Gros et al., *Growth in Agreement II*, §4.

bid to be inclusive of the vocabulary choices any Christian church may choose to use in its expression of *koinonia*. More still, borrowing the Vatican II vocabulary, the assembly connects the church's vocation as 'sign and sacrament' in relation to a *koinonia* that is evidently Christological, though at once Trinitarian.¹² Meanwhile, the Faith and Order document, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013) reasserts the Trinitarian foundation of the church's *koinonia*, while at the same time expressing a not-too-confident sacramental *communio* ecclesiology. The reason for this position is that the language of sacrament is not shared by all the churches, but the idea of 'sign' in sacramental identity of the church is something that every church acknowledges.¹³ However, within the Anglican and Roman Catholic circles both the Trinitarian and sacramental identities of the church are strongly recognized.

2.2 *Communio* Ecclesiology in the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission

As aforementioned, the instance of the bilateral engagement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics has also developed a hermeneutic of *communio* ecclesiology. This is clearly spelt out in the ARCIC's 1981 *First Report* which acknowledged the concept of *koinonia* as the foundation of its work.¹⁴ In a way, the *Final Report* indicated the need to work out a common understanding of church with a consensus that is represented by the *koinonia* paradigm. Nicholas Sagovsky, one of the leading theologians in ARCIC II confirms that, "[T]here is now a powerful ecumenical consensus that in *koinonia/communio* we have a reconciling and fruitful way of understanding what it is to be church, and so of understanding what it is to be a Christian."¹⁵

¹² WCC, "Message to the Churches," §5.

¹³ WCC, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* [Faith and Order Paper No. 214] (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 16.

¹⁴ ARCIC I, *Final Report* "Introduction," nos. 4-5 in Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer, eds., *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1984), 64.

¹⁵ Nicholas Sagovsky, *Ecumenism: Christian Origins and the Practice of Communion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 19.

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Continuing with ARCIC I, ARCIC II undertakes an in-depth examination of this consensual *communio* ecclesiology. Far from applying it as a hermeneutical principle to study doctrinal issues like ministry, ordination, baptism, etc., the Commission undertook a four-year dialogue on the very nature of *koinonia* and the various elements that characterize it. The title of the common statement, *Church as Communion*, shows an attempt to articulate a common *communio* ecclesiology, an attempt that thrives on the implication that “the church is a dynamic reality moving towards its fulfillment.”¹⁶ Thus, communion proves critical in understanding not only the nature of the church but its purpose and mission. What this implies is the recapitulation of divine purpose of salvation which embraces a communion that goes beyond the community of human beings to include the entire ‘transformed creation’. In this way, the document positions ‘alienation’ as an antonym of communion.¹⁷ Boundaries that alienate people from one another, as well as from God, are dissolved by a communion that is represented by the sacramentality of the church. Meanwhile, the eschatological perspective expressed in the statement connotes an exclusively other-worldly understanding of the future or ‘fulfillment’.

On the specific communion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, the document was more exhortative. It was sincere in recalling the various areas of full and imperfect communion. Communion between both churches which is “founded upon the saving life of Jesus Christ and his continuing presence through the Holy Spirit,”¹⁸ exists fully in the sharing of some spiritual and liturgical gifts. One clear example is the joint Office or Liturgy of the Hours. Both churches also collaborate in services to local communities as well as in propagating Christian education. Learning from one another has become the norm while both churches grow in maturity from the wounds of the division.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the principle of collegiality and the need to adapt to local cultural conditions have been more clearly recognized by the Roman Catholic Church than before. Developing

¹⁶ ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” §3.

¹⁷ ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” §16.

¹⁸ ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” §49.

liturgical diversity, the increasing exercise of provincial autonomy, and the growing appreciation of the universal nature of the church have led Anglicans to develop organs of consultation and unity within their own communion. These developments remind us of the significance of mutual support and criticism, as together we seek to understand ecclesial communion and to achieve it.¹⁹

Apart from areas of convergence and mutual learning, allusions to difficult aspects of the relationship between the churches were also pointed out. While the idea of “continuing differences”²⁰ might imply a validation of growing divergences between both churches, there is nevertheless an overriding optimism that the search for unity is worth pursuing. *Church as Communion* is thus a strategic document that is aimed at sustaining this optimism towards overcoming the barriers to mutual communion. Yet, beyond sustaining optimism, it constitutes the central hermeneutical approach to the dialogue between both churches. As the document reveals, “[O]ur approach to the unresolved matters we must now face together will be shaped by the agreed understanding of communion we have elaborated.”²¹ The impact of this approach is evident not only in the advancement of the dialogue (now ARCIC III) despite the many obstacles on the way, but also in the practical fruits of this dialogue as concretely exemplified in many of the results of the National Commissions (ARCs) as well as in the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) project.²²

¹⁹ ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” §54. The English Catholic theologian, Paul Murray, takes on the idea of mutual learning in his concept of ‘receptive ecumenism.’ One of his numerous publications on this issue include the edited work, *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁰ ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” §56.

²¹ ARCIC II, “Church as Communion,” §57.

²² IARCCUM undertakes the practical dimension of the ARCIC dialogue. It was established in 2000 following the ARCIC II’s Statement ‘Communion in Mission’ in order to widen the dialogue in more concrete ways. See, Adelbert Denaux, Nicholas Sagovsky and Charles Sherlock, eds., *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled: The Final Report of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission 1983-2005 (ARCIC II)* (London: SPCK, 2016), 321.

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Bilateral ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics have communion as its central methodological principle. Communion or *koinonia* that is deeply rooted in the Trinitarian *perichoresis* is the underlying principle of relationality within each of these churches and so it establishes an easy meeting point for dialogue. If dialogue within each church is aimed at building a *koinonia* of unity and diversity, universal and local, then it is quite an appropriate hermeneutical tool to advance any dialogue with any church. The tension remains on how to ensure that the quest for communion does not become an obstacle to maintaining the unique autonomy of each community. Despite the tension, and in spite of it, communion that transcends each church, as well as bilateral relations, is a vision that can only be sustained through dialogue.

Yet from a more critical point of view, perhaps there are reasons to disregard any optimism on the methodology of *communio* ecclesiology as a result of its evident limitations. In other words, one may ask: Do the clear limits of *communio* ecclesiology not hamper its possibility to bring about the transformation of communal identities in dialogue?

2.3 On the Limitations of *Communio* Ecclesiology

Against any attempt to romanticize the idea of communion, one must have to reckon with the challenges that such an ecclesiology poses within ecumenical context. We see these limitations in the problems relating to the nature of communion between the local churches and universal church, the juridical elements of church organization, as well as the practical dimensions of *communio* ecclesiology, especially those related to consensus, authority and collegiality. Following the observations by Nicholas Sagovsky, one of the drafters of the 2016 Final Report on ARCIC II, it is important elaborate on the five areas of tension in the ecumenical application of *communio* ecclesiology.

- a) An evident tension emerges when *communio* ecclesiology is taken up separately from either the context of the local churches (*ecclesiology von unten*) or that of the universal church (*ecclesiology von oben*). Here, the churches are confronted with two intractable questions. *Von unten*: “How do churches in communion together respond to new questions and practices within

the local churches?”²³ The 2018 debate on communion for non-Catholic spouses as well as the ongoing ‘Synodale Weg’ in the German Church come to mind here. However, one wonders what effect it would have on the communion within the entire Church. Within Anglicanism, the terrible consequences of the debates on sexuality remain an example of how contentious this approach could be. And if it is this problematic within the individual churches, how then can it function within an ecumenical context? *Von oben*: “How is the communion of the Trinity in which the church participates promoted, discerned and protected within the life of the local churches?”²⁴ In other words, is the foundational belief in the Trinity not endangered when local churches are conceived as ‘independent’? Either of these approaches have serious implication for ecumenism. As Sagovsky observes, they reflect Aristotelian and Platonic models respectively, and they immediately go to the heart of the famous 1985 debate between the two German Cardinals, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) and Walter Kasper, over the priority of either the local or universal church.²⁵ Little wonder this problem has been taken up as the central responsibility of ARCIC III.

- b) Another set of tension emerges at the horizontal level of *communio* ecclesiology where the concept of *koinonia* must necessarily

²³ Nicholas Sagovsky, “The *Koinonia* Ecclesiology of ARCIC I and II,” 277-286 in Denaux, et al., *Looking Towards a Church Fully Reconciled*, 285.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The debate was provoked by the 1992 *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion* by the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) in which he appears to affirm an historical and ontological priority of the universal church to particular churches. This was followed by a response by Walter Kasper and a counter-response by Ratzinger himself. Cf. Walter Kasper, “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” *The Furrow* 52, no. 6 (2001): 323-332; Joseph Ratzinger, “The Local Church and the Universal Church: A Response to Walter Kasper,” *America* 185, no. 16 (19 November 2001): 7-11..

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embrace the reality of conflict. At the vertical level, specifically within the inner-divine life of the Trinity, no conflict is experienced. The perfect relationship among the three divine persons manifests itself in a perfect unity, hence a perfect communion. However, in accounting for communion in the church as a truly human experience, then *communio* ecclesiology should “suggest ‘sharing’ or ‘participation’ through conflict...”²⁶ One already witnesses this conflict in the area of moral teaching that often tends to polarize the church between the so-called conservatives and the liberals or progressives. In the light of this difficulty, one wonders if *communio* ecclesiology is really pragmatic enough. Or should there be a more hermeneutical understanding of *communio* in a way that both the desired unity and the inevitable conflict are held in a fruitful tension? Perhaps, this is what is required for the possibility of practicality of *communio* ecclesiology.

- c) In relation to the above, therefore, difficulty of practical application emerges as the third tension. *Communio* ecclesiology with its emphasis on relationships and community remains fascinating and theoretically sound, but needs to be given its practical component. Members of ARCIC observe that the practical relevance of the work of ARCIC requires that it be “translated in the world of the church as institution.”²⁷ One concrete way of doing this is through revision of the Canon Law codes of both churches. More so, the revision of the liturgical texts is another way of getting practical. The question remains: How can these be achieved? Which aspects of the canons or texts are to be worked on? How can these be done without disrupting the integrality of the communal identity of each church, in terms of teachings and liturgical life? Care must therefore be taken so that the churches will not be overwhelmed with the ‘extras’ and

²⁶ Sagovsky, “*Koinonia* Ecclesiology,” 285.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

adjustments that might make adaptations difficult. It must be noted that the quest for practicality led to the establishment of the *International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission* (IARCCUM). Perhaps a less provocative but realistic way to initiate the process of practicality is to institutionalize some of the initiatives already taking place under IARCCUM.²⁸

- d) At the center of *communio* ecclesiology is the tension of authority within the Church. Both Roman Catholics and Anglicans are yet to find the right balance in the central exercise of authority. On the one hand, Catholics are struggling with an overly centralized papacy and a minimal practice of collegiality. However, the pontificate of Francis is taking these issues very seriously, especially in the reform of the Curia as a way of boosting collegiality and the promotion of synodality. On the other hand, Anglicans are confronted by an ineffectual ‘instruments of communion’. Even the attempt at forging an Anglican Covenant in 2003 collapsed due to lack of adequate consensus. How can *communio* ecclesiology function in such chaotic contexts? In fact, it may be said that *communio* ecclesiology appears to be surviving at a conceptual level, and this is rightly so if there is no means of implementing the ideals that it represents. Nevertheless, one cannot overlook the roadmap it provides for a possible re-imagination of the church in the future. It is upon this vision that the internal renewal and reform of the churches are calculated.
- e) Finally, an unresolved difficulty in *The Gift of Authority* (1998) on the relationship between consensus and authority emerges once again as an added tension in *communio* ecclesiology. The debate here is on whether authority, and consensus-making in the Church are exclusively reserved for the clergy. In other words, “can the

²⁸ Cf. IARCCUM, *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue* (London: SPCK, 2007).

laity sometimes cooperate critically over against the clergy?”²⁹ This question borders on the processes and scope of synodality within the Church. For if *communio* ecclesiology builds on an all-embracing and inclusive understanding of the Church, where then is the legitimate place of the laity in the governance of the same Church? To be fair, Anglican Communion is far ahead of the Roman Catholic Church in implementing synodality, and so this situation provides an opportunity for ecumenical learning for Catholics. Far from being an object of ecumenical learning, synodality remains one of the fruits of Vatican II that needs to be fully appropriated in the life of the Church. The task of managing synodality for the sake of communion remains another daunting task in itself, though not of immediate concern in this article.

The challenges posed by these limitations demand that *communio* ecclesiology “must always be deployed against an eschatological horizon.”³⁰ We must realize that historical contingency only makes any methodology a ‘work in progress’, and equally, no one method provides all the answers that arise in ecumenical dialogue. Such an eschatological horizon helps the church to work patiently towards its possible realization in the future, and more still to a future that is collectively desired by both churches. The very definition of this future, as it is, has a lot of implications for the ecumenical life of churches.

3. Ecclesiological re-visioning from an Eschatological Horizon

Appealing to an eschatological horizon raises questions concerning the theological understanding of eschatology that is deployed here. According to Sagovsky, “the full expression of *koinonia* within church structures can only be an eschatological ideal. In the ordinary processes of history, *koinonia* will always fall short, as churches jostle for position and power within communion.”³¹ Sagovsky recognizes that there is a real danger in terms of the implications of such an understanding of

²⁹ Sagovsky, “*Koinonia* Ecclesiology,” 286.

³⁰ Sagovsky, “*Koinonia* Ecclesiology,” 286.

³¹ Sagovsky, “*Koinonia* Ecclesiology,” 286.

eschatology within the ecumenical life of both churches. Yet, he presents it as if eschatological vision implies a dead-end for the progress of ecumenical unity *in tempore*. What remains is an unmotivated wish in which the “current incompleteness” of *koinonia* “can itself act as a dynamic for further ecumenical exploration.”³² The question is: How exactly can an imperfect communion propel itself towards an ideal that is exclusively projected in the unpredictable future without any understanding of this *future as present*? The possibility of a future-made present, one could argue, remains the condition for any motivation of *koinonia* towards a future that is currently *not present*.

From the above prognosis, one is convinced that the five tensions in *communio* ecclesiology are interrelated and demand to be resolved within an eschatological horizon. As such, the intractable difficulty between the local and the universal, unity and conflict, orthodoxy and orthopraxis, authority and collegiality find rest in a future in which human experience is no longer the determining index in the construction of community. However, a future that can only be *hoped for* and not *lived out* is insufficient since both elements need to be held together as a way of hermeneutically resolving the paradoxical tensions that impede the realization of *koinonia*. In this context, *koinonia* is not left to motivate itself, but rather is propelled by an eschatological framework that maintains ecumenical exploration in a dynamic and progressive cycle.

Outside the Western predominant understanding of eschatology simply as the logical goal of the historical process, Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas offers us an eschatological paradigm that could serve the purpose that we have set out here. Zizioulas’ eschatological perspective is laid out in his phenomenal work, *Being as Communion*, under the chapter that investigates ‘Apostolic Continuity and Succession’. Here, Zizioulas distinguishes between two forms of eschatology as a way of avoiding any exclusive understanding that demotivates the progress of human agency in the life of the Church. His perspective also broadens the understanding of eschatology in a way that it assumes a practical

³² Sagovsky, “*Koinonia* Ecclesiology,” 286.

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relevance in the world while at the same time sustaining a vision of the hereafter. According to Zizioulas,

... there is a difference between eschatology conceived as *orientation*, and eschatology conceived as a *state* of existence which reveals itself here and now. As orientation, eschatology appears to be the *result of historical process* as the climax of mission ..., whereas as a state of existence it confronts history already now with a *presence from beyond history*. In the latter case an “iconic” and liturgical approach to eschatology is necessary more than it is in the former. It is the understanding of eschatology as this kind of *presence* of the Kingdom here and now that requires convocation of the dispersed people of God and of the apostles. As such this image presuppose the end of mission.³³

Zizioulas’ argument goes against an all-exclusive understanding of time as a linear designation of the end, in which the *present* is swallowed up as a valid component of time. I do not in any way suggest a fragmentation of time into past, present, and future since it goes against the idea of communion from both the vertical (in which the distinctiveness of the triune persons does not imply any separability in the Godhead) and the horizontal (whereby the understanding of ‘communion of saints’ does not exclude any of the three: pilgrim, triumphant, and suffering) dimensions. Rather, in *communio ecclesiology*, eschatology as ‘end of time’ refers to “*time redeemed* from this kind of brokenness through the intervention of the Kingdom between the past and the present.”³⁴ This idea of a double yet inseparable understanding of eschatology avoids the danger of dualism. Given this understanding, Zizioulas describes communion as “the fabric not only of the *goal* but also of the *way* toward the goal.” He further argues that “If we share nothing already, we cannot hope ever to share everything. And if we wish to move in the right direction, we must never lose sight of the final goal.”³⁵

³³ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 1985), 174, n.11.

³⁴ John D. Zizioulas, *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today* (Alhambra, California: Sebastian Press, 2010), 58.

³⁵ Zizioulas, *The One and the Many*, 59. Italics mine.

The goal and the way, the orientation and the state must be held together in order to avoid either an all too idealistic, Platonic understanding on the one hand or a simply pragmatic yet impossible understanding of *communio* ecclesiology on the other hand. For Zizioulas, such a complementarity makes sense since *eschatology as present* finds its concrete expression within the Eucharist as the fullest sign of communion. Despite the fact that ARCIC did not set out for itself an eschatology that clearly follows a theological trajectory, one could find in ARCIC II's understanding of the Eucharist the fullest expression of communion, an evidence of *eschatology as present*. This understanding is expressed in four theses: First, Eucharistic celebration recaptures the origin of ecclesial communion in the Trinity. Second, through it the church celebrates "communion in a visible fellowship". Third, communion in the Kingdom of God is anticipated in its fullness. Finally, through the Eucharist, the Church understands itself as on a mission to "realize, manifest and extend that communion in the world."³⁶ Together these elements show how the Eucharist acts hermeneutically in projecting an understanding of eschatology that holds together both the goal and the way. Zizioulas will further emphasize this role of the Eucharist.

Full communion means, in the first place, eucharistic communion, since the Eucharist is the recapitulation of the entire economy of salvation, in which past, present, and future are united and in which communion with the Trinity and with the rest of the churches, as well as with creation, takes place. Baptism, Chrismation or Confirmation, and the rest of the sacramental life, are all given *in view* of the Eucharist. Communion in these sacraments may be described as "partial" or anticipatory communion, calling for its fulfillment in the Eucharist.³⁷

The convergence between the eucharistic eschatology of ARCIC II and Zizioulas lies in the function of the Eucharist as the eschatological horizon upon which communion could be realized in the present. At the same time, the Eucharist acts beyond the present, leading up to the ultimate future in God. The fact that the Eucharist acts as the *way* does to

³⁶ ARCIC II, "Church as Communion," §24.

³⁷ Zizioulas, *One and the Many*, 59.

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render it as an inferior eschatological horizon since it contains at once the fullness of the reality of communion, and as such is the *goal* itself. As a foretaste of the divine-human communion, its character as real, genuine, and authentic is never reduced.

4. Concluding Thoughts: *Communio*, Transformation, and Renewal

The communal identity of a religious community is always in the process of formation. This process is made possible by the willingness of the churches to dialogue both within itself and with others. The Anglican receptivity of the Quadrilateral was aided by what was already happening in the Ecumenical Movement in early 20th century. It provided Anglicanism with the needed impetus to articulate itself not only as a church of England but as a church on mission. The same is evident in the Roman Catholic self-understanding which was challenged by ecumenically conscious theologians right from the time of the Malines Conversations till Vatican II and beyond. It is thus pertinent to note that,

- *The communal identity of the church prior to historical divisions should not be seen as one that is sustained by a mere collection of individuals.* It was rather built upon a dynamic unity, a communion that has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. This identity is sustained by a serious relationship between the triune God and human persons, human persons among themselves, in-groups with other out-groups, communities amongst other communities. Thus, this makes the reality of Christian division very painful since it could be likened to a tearing off of one's ligament.
- *Efforts at Christian unity are best served by an identity that is constructed by this idea of communion.* An ecclesiology of communion can be traced from the very beginning of the church, and from the very mystery that the church represents. It combines elements of both the *life* and *structure* of the church. Given the development of varied structures in different churches over time, an ecclesiology that pays more attention to the structures, rather than seeking how we can *live* by what we *share in common*, will be unsustainable in ecumenical dialogue.

- *It is no surprise that communio ecclesiology of different churches can find their convergence as is evident in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. Communio ecclesiology thus assumes a hermeneutical function within ecumenical dialogue, while at the same time, providing answers to the constant need for internal renewal within each church.*
- *The key strength of communio ecclesiology is its emphasis on relationship, sharing, dialogue, and fellowship. In this constant spiral of relationality, the transformation of communal identity is set to happen. In the same vein, renewal in the life of any church also revolves around this relationality because it aims at promoting a more active and vivacious fellowship and relationship both with God and with one another.*

To conclude, *communio ecclesiology* as an ecumenical methodology resonates with many Christian churches on the following four key grounds: a) It is fundamentally Trinitarian since it is rooted in the inner life of the Trinity, and thus emphasizes the *relationship* that exists both within God and with God; b) it is Christological, by the fact that the revelation of God in Christ, remains at the center of the Christian identity and fellowship. Furthermore, revelation as a self-communication of God in Christ involves a *relationship* with the Holy Spirit as the one who constantly renews the church and calls her to communion with God and with one another; c) *Communio ecclesiology* is sacramental given that the Church's identity as a *sign* of union with God points to the sacramental character of communion. More still, the sacrament of the Eucharist expresses the full communion which Christians as co-pilgrims aspire towards; d) Finally *communio ecclesiology* is eschatological since it is based on the church's self-understanding as a dynamic reality on a journey towards its fulfillment, as well as on the incompleteness of Christian identity as indicated by the very fact of *relationality*. Its eschatological character constitutes a way of dealing with the complexities that are involved in the quest for unity. On the basis of the above, *Communio ecclesiology* becomes transformational since it compels the churches to embark on an internal self-examination as

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illustrated in the renewed understanding of the concept of ‘catholic’ as not the exclusive property of a particular Church. Related to this is the fact that *communio* ecclesiology takes particularities seriously. By looking at what is commonly shared, the particular traits of the churches in dialogue are better shaped for improved relationality both within the in-group and with respect towards the out-groups.