

Communion Fellowship: The Challenge of Ecumenism

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Abstract

The persisting mutual exclusion at the eucharistic table is an imminent challenge the ecumenical movement needs to face. The situation obfuscates the progress and achievements of the ecumenical journey, erects a scandal and a countersign to the Church, to Christian unity and mostly to the essence of the sacrament itself. The article ponders on the various voices and reasons calling for a change and how these changes could be implemented.

Keywords: ecumenism, ecumenical fellowship, Eucharist, table-fellowship, *communio in sacris*.

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Introduction

In 2008, in an article entitled "Receiving the Experience of Eucharistic Celebration," (Philips, P., 2009) Peter Philips was sending an SOS alert regarding the critical moment ecumenism was faced with. He denounced the gap between convergent statements in ecumenism and their practical reception and implementations in respective denominations. (Philips, P.,2009: 458) As a way out, he used a figurative language, asking churches to break the rules and, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, "move more quickly towards recognizing the possibility of eucharistic sharing as a step on the path to unity rather than simply as an event celebrating the eventual achieving unity." (Philips, P.,2009: 459) Noticeably, eucharistic communion and its related topics have been at the center of ecumenical dialogue.¹ One of the latest documents, *From Conflict to Communion*, the report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on unity in view of a common Commemoration of the Reformation, has not been an exception. It specifically dedicates 21 paragraphs on the issue.² The document succinctly presents Luther and the Catholic views on the Lord's Supper, their respective understanding of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, issues of trans-substantiation, and modalities of communion under one or two species, conservation of consecrated species as well as devotions surrounding the Eucharist. It also explores diverse theologies evolving around the Sacrament of the Eucharist and modalities on the ways of celebrating it. All these points are of great importance in ecumenical dialogue because of their direct and concrete implications for the practice of eucharistic hospitality, which is admittedly the

¹ For a detailed exploration of the debate, I would refer to the respective positions of denominations to the document of World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1978). In fact, much of the theological discussions and respective pastoral positions are positioned in reference to the contents of that document.

² *From Conflict to Communion*, #140-161.

highest expression of *communicatio in sacris* in the ecumenical circle.

In this essay, I will explore *communicatio in sacris*, as the fullest expression of spiritual hospitality in the ecumenical sphere. My intention is not to repeat the theological argumentations others have already clearly stated.³ Reading in between the lines, I intend to highlight one of the greatest frustrations underpinning the progress in ecumenical dialogue. Though central to Christian life and Christian unity, the Eucharistic table is far from being a venue where all the baptized celebrate their unity with the Triune God and with each other. In the long run, a defective practice of spiritual hospitality hibernates the goal of ecumenism, deprives ecumenical interactions of their inspirational source, with the risk of lowering them to a sheer exchange of ideas or a commitment to a social cause. Commitment to ecumenism in that case will not be different from a pledge to a social, secular cause. In contrast to models of ecumenism focalizing on theological consensus and social cooperation, and in response to the new features and awareness emerging from the expansion of the ecumenical arena, I will ponder on spiritual hospitality for practical inspiration in facing the challenges and dilemma of common celebrations and interdenominational table fellowship. In the last section of the paper, I refer to Taizé as a pilot model for the type of contextualized spiritual hospitality, as a possible answer to the demands of ecumenical fellowship.

1. TABLE OF UNITY OR TABLE OF DIVISION: A RECURRENT ECUMENICAL CHALLENGE

The Eucharistic table, which is supposed to be a sign of unity, is still unfortunately where divisions among Christians are most obvious. It stands as an insuperable wall, a divider that this far draws away the aspiration for a realized unity. For Christians involved in ecumenical dialogue and frequent participants in

³ Detailed study on the topics has been undertaken by John A. Radon, ed. (2013); Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner(1983); William Purdy(1996); Nicholas Sagovsky(2000); Faith and Order(1982); LWF & PCPCU(2013).

inter-confessional celebrations, it is one of the saddest and eloquent marks of ecumenical discriminations. As dialog partners in the World Council of Churches, Diane Kessler and Michael Kinnamon, recount their experience as follows:

.....each of us has been invited as a Protestant ecumenical guest at Roman Catholic and Orthodox eucharistic services. We love the liturgies. Often we are friends of the celebrants and many in the congregation. We participate as fully as possible in worship, until the distribution of communion elements, which we as Protestants may not receive according to the discipline of these churches. At this point in the service, all of us are reminded painfully of the power of our remaining divisions. (Diane Kessler and Michael Kinnamon, 2000: 67)

Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner, assessing the history of ecumenism, note that

For all the meetings, all the papers, and all the words, in practice little seemed to have changed. Although there were increased feelings of good will, and some caricatures had been eliminated, the churches still seemed hopelessly divided. They did not exhibit their oneness, and Christian women and men with different denominational labels were unable officially to come together at their Lord's table. The earlier ecumenical euphoria was replaced in many circles by cynicism. (Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner, 1985: vii-viii)

Similar sadness and disappointments occur in the reports of individuals and groups who have participated in ecumenical talks. The agreed Statement on the Holy Eucharist signed by the members of the Orthodox - Catholic Consultation, on the one hand affirms "remarkable and fundamental agreement" on essential theological questions regarding the Eucharist. On the other hand, it states that "recognizing the importance of this consensus, we are aware that serious differences exist in our understanding of the church, Eucharistic discipline, and pastoral practice which now prevent us from communicating in one another's churches." (Borelli, J. & Erickson, J. H. Eds., 1996: 45-46)

The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism notes the sense of pain related to the situation as follows:

When members of the same family belong to different churches and ecclesial communities, when Christians cannot receive communion with their spouse or children, or their friends, the pain of division makes itself felt acutely and the impulse to prayer and ecumenical activity should grow.⁴

Similar voices can be heard from different other ecumenical settings around the world. It is the case with inter-confessional couples and families, who though they share a common Christian life at home, are estranged from each other's spiritual table. It is also the case in some Catholic theological institutions which, to foster ecumenical hospitality, have welcomed students from other denominations and yet lack clear policy on ecumenical table fellowship. Moreover, still in the Asian context, to avoid the embarrassment that Diane Kessler and Michael Kinnamon mentioned, ecumenical gatherings simply shun away from common eucharistic celebrations.

Visibly, there are theological reasons and church disciplines that keep the Eucharistic table fellowship a formidable obstacle to unity. Without belittling those reasons, there are voices that advocate a conciliatory way, one which does not divide the Church, (Radon, J. A. ed.,2013: 301) and takes seriously the challenge of " the greatest scandal of all", that is "the pain of our inability to come to the same Eucharistic table among Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches," (Diane Kessler and Michael Kinnamon,2000: 79)or the realization that "many Christians cannot come to the same Eucharistic table together." (Kessler, D. & Kinnamon, M.,2000: 36)

2. INADEQUATE OR IMPOSSIBLE ANSWERS?

Years of dialogue have brought Christians of different denominations to a better and deeper mutual understanding. In fact, those problems have been addressed again and again in successive documents. One of these is *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1978). It pondered on the theological issues surrounding the sacrament and provided practical guidelines for the celebration. All this was with intent to foster understanding and communion among churches.

⁴ The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, # 27

The increased mutual understanding expressed in the present statement may allow some churches to attain a greater measure of Eucharistic communion among themselves and so bring closer the day when Christ's divided people will be visibly reunited around the Lord's Table. (Faithh and Order,1982: 12)

Furthermore, the document exalted the importance of sharing in the one bread and one cup in the following terms:

The eucharistic communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion within the body of Christ which is the Church. The sharing in one bread and the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places. It is in the Eucharist that the community of God's people is fully manifested. (Faithh and Order,1982: 13)

However, instead of serving as a practical ground for intercommunion, the document served as a reference for denominations to define their respective attitudes. While on the one side the responses praised the work done, acknowledged the good intent of searching for a common ground, still they expressed great reserve to the factuality of fostering Eucharistic communion. The conclusion of the consultative work of the Eastern Orthodox- Roman Catholic Consultation held in 1983-84 was simply discouraging: "we do not find that the growing consensus on Eucharistic theology and practice is of itself sufficient for such sharing among our churches." (Borelli, J. & Erickson, J. H. Eds.,1996: 72)The justification was that "communion is possible only between those churches which have faith, priesthood and the sacraments in common." (Borelli, J. & Erickson, J. H. Eds.,1996: 98) And yet, the same document did recognize the benefits of Eucharistic con-celebration among church representatives as well as local communities in the following terms:

identity of faith is particularly manifested and reinforced by the sacramental act itself. [...] By proclamation of the one mystery of Christ and sharing of the one sacramental communion, the bishops, the clergy and the whole Christian people united with them are able to witness to the faith

of the Church. (Borelli, J. & Erickson, J. H. Eds.,1996: 98)

The position of the Roman Catholic Church displays a similar contrast. In a sign of ecumenical openness, Vatican II established two basic principles regarding the sharing in sacramental life with members of other churches: bearing witness to the unity of the Church and the sharing in the means of grace.⁵ In his handbook for spiritual ecumenism, Cardinal Kasper states that "the Eucharist is the privileged place to pray for unity."(Kasper, C. W.,2007: 57)Moreover he described the present condition as "a state of division and growing communion between the Catholic Church and other Churches and Ecclesial Communities."(Kasper, C. W.,2007: 60) Yet, though he credits the progress in the on-going ecumenical dialogue, he reiterates the traditional Catholic stand regarding intercommunion.

Eucharist and ecclesial communion are intrinsically linked to one another. Therefore, as long as fundamental disagreements in matters of faith persist and the bonds of communion are not fully re-established, celebrating together the one Eucharist of the Lord is not possible. (Kasper, C. W.,2007: 58-59)

Nonetheless, he restates the exceptions when Catholic ministers can administer sacraments to Christians of other denominations or instances when Catholics might receive the sacramental services from other denominations.⁶

And the situation might be more complex than expected if we consider Cardinal Kurt Koch's view on the vagueness of current ecumenical situation. "The basic problem in the current ecumenical situation is the fact that the objective of the ecumenical movement over time has become vaguer;" he says, and explains further that

⁵ UR#8.

⁶ "Catholic ministers may give Holy Communion to members of the Eastern Churches whenever they ask for it of their own will and possess the required dispositions; they may give Holy Communion to members of other ecclesial communities if, in grave necessity, they ask for it of their own will, possess the required dispositions, and give evidence of holding the Catholic faith regarding the sacrament. Conversely, the Catholic Church allows its members in certain circumstances and under certain circumstances and under certain conditions to receive Holy Communion from ministers of Churches where a valid Eucharist is celebrated." (Kasper, C. W.,2007: 59)

several Churches and ecclesial communities emerging from Reformation more and more dissociated themselves from the original objective of the visible unity in faith, in sacraments and ministries in favor of a call for a mutual recognition of the different realities as churches and thus as parts of the one Church of Jesus Christ. (Muller, J. and Gabriel, K. Eds., 2015: 350)

The general picture of the present situation is of despair. But where does the problem lie and why all efforts done thus far seem to lead to nowhere?

There are diverse reasons: naïve idealism emerging from an inappropriate understanding of Christian koinonia, lack of will among church members, and mostly fear of changes, etc. Nicholas Sagovsky warns against "the dangers of identifying any human society, sacred or secular, with some utopian vision."⁷ He is alluding to those who conditioned the common celebration of the Eucharist to the realization of full visible unity. Eucharist is Jesus offering himself unconditionally to the believers. Peter Philips makes a similar observation as he writes:

I am beginning to think that we must move more quickly towards recognizing the possibility of eucharistic sharing as a step on the path to unity, rather than simply as an event celebrating the eventual achieving of unity. To claim that eucharistic hospitality must be understood as a sign of unity achieved is to a certain extent an exercise in studied naivety, for we all come to the Eucharist falteringly as sinners turning to Christ in our need for healing and reconciliation. (Philips, P., 2009: 460)

As for Vladimir Vedorov, he reiterates the importance of the practice of common prayer for restoration of Christian unity, and regrets the attitude of those opposing it. As for Eucharistic intercommunion, he says:

It is understandable that there are some canonical problems with common Eucharist, though they, too, need some explanations. The principle "First unity in faith and then unity by the Chalice" is disputable. What is unity in

⁷ His warning comes from an observation emerging from Karl Popper's elaboration on the risks incurred in aligning the Christian understanding of koinonia to Plato's idea of a perfect society. The root of Christian koinonia is to be found in the Judaic conception of covenant. (Sagovsky, N., 2000: 195)

faith? A certain dogmatic pluralism is present in any confessional tradition. (Fedorov, V., 2016: 69-70)

D. Kessler and M. Kinnamon suspect instead that lack of will and fears of change have predisposed some church members to finding all good reasons for not moving an inch further. Instead of embracing changes, they act as advocates of their respective traditions: "Perhaps, the greatest challenge the Councils of Churches face is the lack of will by their members. The status quo is comfortable state - especially when churches are feeling threatened within and without." (Kessler, D. & Kinnamon, M., 2000: 80)

Why are changes needed? Arguments in favor of a change of policy come from a generalized dissatisfaction with the present state expressed through a reiterated highlighting of consequence of present situation. For the WCC, "insofar as Christians cannot unite in full fellowship around the same table to eat the same loaf and drink from the same cup, their missionary witness is weakened at both the individual and the corporate levels." (Faith and Order, 1982: 15) As for H. Fries and K. Rahner, they stigmatize rivalries and mutual exclusion on the eucharistic table as an intrinsic contradiction of the Eucharist itself.

It has always been considered a rupture of the unity of faith and of the Church to set altar against altar, to deny or exclude someone from sacramental fellowship (*communio*) in the Lord's Supper. It is excommunication (*excommunicacio*) in the truest and deepest sense of the word. At the same time, it is the most severe contradiction to the Eucharist itself, which from the very beginning had been regarded as sign of unity and a basis of church community..... (Fries, H. and Rahner, K., 1983: 123)

Because of the above, they warn that church fellowship is impossible as far there is no eucharistic fellowship, "Eucharistic fellowship is the realization of church fellowship. " (Fries, H. and Rahner, K., 1983: 123)

Arguments advocating eucharistic fellowship have been formulated in different manners. They however seem to have fallen on deaf ears. The reason is that they are trapped in the gap of two types of reasoning, which, to bear the expected fruit, should be brought into dialogue. The theological reasoning of

ecumenists does not always find the listening and compassionate hearing they ought from canonists and leaders called to define and enforce church discipline. Eucharistic fellowship will only be possible when the two sectors in each respective church and ecclesial denomination will embrace a reasoning which enables them to assess their own paradigm, not in a strict apologetic way, but according to the high demands of Christian unity. The anthropological paradigm of hospitality could offer the framework for that epistemic and practical reasoning.

3. SPIRITUAL HOSPITALITY

The image of hospitality as the new framework to rethink eucharistic table fellowship came from a stylish comment by a Mennonite bishop during the AMCU VI Meeting in Bangkok (Asian Movement for Christian Unity). (Batairwa, P., 2017) Alluding to the secluded ways Catholic participants were celebrating the Eucharist, he stigmatized the generosity and hospitality among Christians. He observed that church leaders are ready to pay the impossible in order to make their guests feel at home. When it comes to the Eucharist instead, he finds their attitude completely different. He asked why should one be eager to offer mundane things but not the bread of life, the food of eternity received from the Lord for oneself and for the whole world? In fact, as an implementation of the topic of that gathering, he suggested our theological thinking to culminate in prayer and the breaking of the bread. Unfortunately, as it is the case in many situations, his suggestion remained only a nice dream. However, my interest in the question of intercommunion goes back to that instance. Since then, I've discovered more people sharing similar concerns. Moreover, I have realized that to avoid the embarrassment inherent to present policy on table fellowship, the Eucharist has been excluded from ecumenical gatherings. Hospitality however, permeates human life; it has deep roots in the biblical traditions; it has been a common practice in religious life and for all these reasons, it can benefit ecumenism.

What's hospitality and why spiritual hospitality can help avoid ecumenism from unnecessary embarrassment? Kessler describes hospitality as an anthropological experience which starts when individuals seek to know the other. The predisposition creates a "host and guest" relationship and together with it an encounter wherein mutual acceptance of the divergence of social and cultural

traditions, religious convictions, and practices of those involved. (Kessler, D. C. Ed., 2005: 26) Applied to ecumenism, hospitality is "extending and honoring invitations among Christian communities;"(Kessler, D. C. Ed., 2005: 26) it is "a church - to - church relationship in which invitations are extended and accepted" (Kessler, D. C. Ed., 2005: 30) and wherein churches or ecclesial communities act as hosts and guests.

Hospitality has two additional characteristics. First of all, mutual acceptance derives from the Christian oneness - for both the hosts and guests share the same divine predilection established by baptism, the sacrament which identifies all those hosted by Jesus Christ, those who constitute the Body of Christ. ⁸Because of this, mutual recognition of baptism has been considered of great importance in ecumenical circle; it is understood as the only statutory reference for any possibility of table fellowship. For Cardinal Walter Kasper, "the recognition of each other's baptism allows the possibility of gathering in celebrations which affirm or commemorate the grace of baptism."⁹ For Hans Boersma, "Baptismal hospitality as *our* mutual recognition of each other's baptismal practices thus counters our divisions and implies unity of the baptized and with the universal Church."(Boersma, H., 2003: 71)For Thomas O'Loughlin, those concerned by discussion on intercommunion are people who "have assembled at the divine invitation manifested through the Church" and "have accepted that invitation in baptism." (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 384) Accordingly, recognition of baptism should be enough.....but to the present, such responses are only in rhetorical form. With this regard, Hans Boersma says: "If we recognize the baptism administered in other churches as establishing a common bond of unity should we not also accept all baptized Christians - regardless of denominational background - at the Lord's Table?"(Boersma, H., 2003: 72) Pope Francis's rhetorical question to the Lutheran woman married to a Catholic and speaking of the sadness of prohibition to take communion with Catholics reiterates the same. After declining to offer a canonical answer to a question he believed still needs more elaboration by theologians, Pope

⁸ UR #22; WCC's document, "*Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*"; *From Conflict to Communion*, # 219, 239.

⁹ It is intriguing noting that the Eucharist is not included in the list of the graces of baptism. (Kasper, C. W., 2007: 33-34)

Francis says:

A pastor friend once told me that "We believe that the Lord is present there, He is present." What's the difference? There are explanations, but life is bigger than explanations and interpretations... I ask myself: "but don't we have the same Baptism?" If we have the same Baptism, should we not be walking together? And you are a witness of a profound journey, a journey of marriage: itself a journey of family and human love and of a shared faith, no? We have the same Baptism. (O'Loughlin, T., 2016: 386)

Second, given the diverse nuances and realities among the churches, ecumenical hospitality cannot but be an area of creativity, concerned with the best and most possible way of accommodating the guests rather than prescribing rules to follow. (Kessler, D. C. Ed., 20015: 43) Spiritual hospitality is not abstract; it is exteriorized in concrete gestures; one of the most problematic remains the Eucharistic intercommunion. To offer a creative solution to the problem, one needs to think thoroughly the connection between spiritual hospitality and Eucharist as a meal where the others are welcomed. In fact, attitudes and principles of hospitality go together with a contextual performance of "good host"/ "good guest" - that is a resolve to embody and enact the responsibilities and roles of the host and the guest. The notion of meal sharing can convey another understanding and feeling of the effect of the presence/absence of intercommunion. As Massimo Mantinari says, "table is one of the best places for communication - perhaps the ideal place, where the desire to communicate with one's familiars is expressed with ease and freedom." (Montinari, M., 2012: 177) Thomas O'Loughlin emphasizes that "meals are a human institution" that "without them (meals) we would not be human!" He further sates that "for us food is always more than 'fuel' or nourishment" that "food is not only that which sustains us, but is a basic focus of all existence." (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 380 passim) If this is true for any kind of meal, and food, how much more valid it should be for the Eucharist.

In a poignant reflection on ecumenical Eucharistic practice, Thomas O'Loughlin noted that the contradiction emanated from an appalling development in the theology of the Eucharist. That theology extracted the Eucharist from its original meal setting. The gospels recall Jesus as fond of meals; the great Passover

or Last Supper took place in the context of a meal; after resurrection, many of the apparitions and communities' encounters with the Risen Lord took place in the context of meals. Moreover, the origin of the Eucharist goes back to the community celebrating their fellowship with Jesus as Lords in meals, a practice that still continues to our days. (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 374) Through history, however, the connection between Eucharist and meal progressively disappeared. Meal setting was forgotten and replaced by more abstract and spiritually appealing concepts. The Eucharist became an unbloodied sacrifice, or the bread of the angels. All those explanations were getting farther from, if not opposed to, food and feeding. (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 375-378) This has been the source of contemporary discipline and guidelines on the Eucharist. Would the meal context be taken into account, the absurd contradiction of present practices of mutual exclusion will be very apparent and unbearable. Thomas O'Loughlin invites us to imagine the unthinkable in the following terms:

Consider this situation: there is a family meal and others are invited. They arrive and are seated at table, the food is placed on the table but an instruction is given by the host that only family may eat is then issued: the others may sit and watch, may join in the conversations, but they must stare at their empty plates while next to them others whom they know feast. The mere bringing of the image before our minds is enough to show its absurdity. Surely no one would be that gauche, no one would be that insulting people they know, no one would have so little understanding of "how things are done" (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 382-383)

Going back to the connection between meal and sharing and the Eucharist, Thomas O'Loughlin, concludes that Christians should not refuse each other the right of communion without falling into an intrinsic absurdity. He says:

To be human is to be a meal sharing animal, and because this meal sharing is fundamental to us, meals have an inherent grammar that is beyond the domain of human constructions - and since we must adhere to the fundamental meal nature of the Eucharist, this grammar is primordial to any regulations we might impose upon it. We cannot *both* affirm a common baptized humanity *and* refuse to share the meal of the baptized,

without denying the very nature of the event that we have gathered to celebrate." (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 387)

Accordingly, one of the demands of the grammar of meal sharing is that "those at table all have access equally to the bounty of the table, and are made a community of shared values. (O'Loughlin, T. 2016: 383)

Rediscovering the value and anthropological demands of hospitality and meal sharing brings new awareness to the present impasse of table fellowship among Christians. I should add that perhaps, it conveys better the perspicacity of the new environments where Christianity is flourishing. Ecumenism in these environments is met with different predicaments for their theological and pastoral sensitivities differ from those of mainline churches, direct heirs of the dissensions of reformation. Cardinal Kurt Koch notes:

ecumenical encounters and dialogue are no longer held solely between the historical mainline churches mainly of the West. This is particularly true for the countries of the Southern hemisphere. Given the fact that the historical schisms for the most part have taken place in Europe, in the Southern hemisphere, they are present as a European and thus, to a certain extent, a colonial inheritance. This historical fact explains why ecumenical dialogues with the historical mainline churches are not the primary problem in the Southern world. Therefore, the crucial ecumenical challenges today are no longer the traditional Protestant churches and ecclesial communities which, in the global context, are rather declining, whereas Evangelical and charismatic groups, Pentecostal movements and many autochthonous free churches experience a rapid group. (Koch, C. K., 2015: 345-346)

4. TAIZÉ: A PILOT MODEL FOR ECUMENICAL SPIRITUAL HOSPITALITY

In his assessment of the 100 years of ecumenical dialogue, while answering the questions, what have we achieved? Where are we now? Where are we going? - Cardinal Walter Kasper's response is realistic:

We have not achieved the full visible unity of all Christians; but worldwide

Christendom, with Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians, and Christians in Anglican Communion and in the Free Churches, has drawn closer together. Despite all the barriers that still exist, it sees itself as a community of brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. (Radon, J. A. Ed., 2013: ix-x)

As for the future, he sees it as promising for

what has been achieved in the ecumenical century that lies behind us can give us courage and confidence that what the Spirit of God has initiated will continue in the new century in a rapidly changing world, in ways that we human beings cannot predict. (Radon, J. A. Ed., 2013: x)

In what follows, I would like to suggest that Taizé is a pilot community for ecumenical spiritual hospitality. From its beginning, Taizé faced challenges of interdenominational fellowship; it reflected on those challenges and has continuously responded to them in a tactful way. In its journey, it has managed to live out its call of "a real parable of communion, a parable of reconciliation open to a future which embraced the concrete and visible unity of all Christians." (Spink, K., 2005: 68)

Brother Roger, the founder of Taizé Community, was very much aware of the ecumenical problem for he has personally experienced its impact. He knew the suffering some Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christians experienced due to division in the Church, mutual exclusions among their respective ecclesial communities and denominations. Convinced of the counter testimony this caused to evangelization, he never wanted to create a schismatic group rather thought of a small community, witness to Christian unity, where ecumenical differences would cease to be seen as seeds of division. As for himself, he chose to remain a reformed protestant minister and theologian, "who also sought to nourish his faith and his spiritual life at the well-spring of other Christian traditions - Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox ones." (Kasper, W., 2016: 291)

To the present, besides being an ecumenical monastic community, Taizé is a spiritual center and a place of pilgrimage yearly attracting thousands of Christians, mostly youth and regardless of their respective denominations. Hospitality is the secret ingredient to the ecumenical experience that Taizé offers. It permeates all, including the preparation and the conduction of liturgy. From arrival to departure,

one has to feel welcome and welcoming. Hospitality in Taizé means that no one should feel excluded or left out; that attention which is given to everyone's physical and spiritual needs strengthens unity and reconciliation. Taizé's hospitality is laudable because it is not forceful, rather flexible, adaptable, creative, inclusive and involving. The atmosphere leads one through the experience of the ecumenical monastic community without any toil. In fact, what Taizé guests experience during their short stay is the zest of the founding "parable of communion and reconciliation" that Taizé stands for. All these qualities predispose Taizé to stand as testing ground for real ecumenical fellowship. In fact, Brother Roger and his other reformed protestant members are known to openly commune at Catholic Eucharistic Celebrations, either at Taizé or during visits to other Catholic Churches. The explanation, according to Cardinal Walter Kasper is that in his spiritual (and ecumenical) journey, Brother Roger had defined his own way of "being in communion with the Catholic Church," that is, "his consciousness to have entered into the mystery of the Catholic Church, but without breaking, without abandoning what he had received and lived beforehand." (Kasper, W., 2016: 293) Kasper believes also that in his quality of founder, his journey might have implication for his community and eventually also be an indication for the future ecumenical journey. "..... it seems to me that Brother Roger's personal journey, guided by the Holy Spirit, is a discreet indication by the Holy Spirit for the future ecumenical path." (Kasper, W., 2016: 294) Taizé in this sense can be considered as living out the "unity in reconciled diversity" that many ecumenical documents have been speaking of.¹⁰

Conclusion

1. As the ecumenical journey starts bearing more fruit, the persisting lack of eucharistic communion among baptized is viewed more and more as a scandal, a countersign to the Church and its mission, as well as to the essence of the sacrament itself. Discontents and complaints with the present situation are calling ecumenical exchange to move a step further from its long standing theoretical discourse. The concern should no longer be why we cannot eat

¹⁰ *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity (Ap C) 44, From Conflict to Communion # 210*

together, why we cannot partake at the same eucharistic table, and instead define concrete measures to actualize eucharistic hospitality.

2. The urgency of the question also draws from the awareness of the new configuration of the ecumenical body. Mainline churches and ecclesial communities, whose historical characteristics constituted the agenda of ecumenical discussions, are no longer the only protagonists of ecumenism. Moreover, policies on mutual exclusion at the Eucharistic table lead the growing majority of Christians from the Southern Hemisphere to raise a crucial question: why should Christian divisions and rivalries be imported as a new original sin which is transmitted whenever and wherever one accepts the Christian faith?
3. The challenges of ecumenical intercommunion call for an inner church or ecclesial dialogue. Since it is an inner dialogue, participants will be aware of the risks and dangers incumbent to ecumenical meetings, where sometimes delegates behave as lawyers hired to defend the cause of their respective churches. The rhetoric is beyond why not communing together and more on practical modalities to effectively enhance interdenominational table fellowship. It is in other words putting in practice the modus to "always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division."¹¹ Endowed with a positive and proactive interpretation of the aspiration of the ecumenical movement, the task of the dialogue is to bridge the gap between the consensus existing between ecumenical theologians, the aspirations of the faithful and the mission of those in charge of implementing church discipline. Because it is for the greater and more visible unity of the Body of Christ, that dialogue needs refrain from parochial apologetics and conservatism and ponder instead on concrete ways Eucharistic intercommunion can contribute to the unity in reconciled diversity of the Church – Body of Christ.
4. Ecumenical intercommunion will become to be a reality when communities will be effective places where effective hospitality is practiced. And for that hospitality to extend to the spiritual arena, to which Eucharistic communion belongs, Christians and ministers regardless of their denominations need to be instructed regarding the status of the question, the consensus reached thus far,

¹¹ *From Conflict to Communion* # 239

the difficulties pending to its implementation. Proper instruction will provide the faithful with the knowledge required for the proper attitude in ecumenical celebrations, and make them responsible for the choices taken. Because of ignorance and proper information, ministers are tempted to play safe by a rigid interpretation of norms, denying or forfeiting the progress of the ecumenical journey.

5. Last, in accountability to the “body and blood offered for you and for all,”¹² each denomination should at the end of the day answer the question: who is more hospitable, WE or God? And to what extent are our respective practices allowing believers to encounter Jesus in our ecumenical fellowship? Are they not a hindrance preventing Jesus from reaching out, or being reached?

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¹² paraphrasing 1 Cor 11: 23-26.

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