

ADVENTIST QUEST FOR TRUTH:

A NEW METHODOLOGICAL OPPORTUNITY

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TRUTH AS *KOINONIA*: THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN GOD'S SELF-REVELATION

From its beginnings Adventism depended on a new sense of what the Christian truth was. In fact, I would even claim that if we are to understand Adventist theology and identity adequately, we can do that only in the light of Adventists' continual quest for truth.¹ In the history of the Adventist church the question of identity arose as secondary issue—a mere by-product of Adventists' original search for truth. It was this quest for truth that initially united them as a community.² It was this quest for truth that shaped their powerfully dynamic vision of their own role in God's cosmic story of the restoration of the defected world. It was this quest for truth that transformed them and enabled them to see themselves as a vanguard movement of God; a prophetic community that is called to become a part of God's eschatological gathering of his people that have been living in a sad state of invisibility, isolation, and scatteredness for so long. Their prime task, in this scenario, was to restore the fullness of the long-forgotten scriptural truth in order to make the true character of God known to the suffering world before the second coming of Christ. Their continual quest for truth shaped their ecclesial self-understanding as a pilgrim community that is always in motion—on a journey towards a fuller truth, constantly progressing in its knowledge of God.

While Adventists are proud of themselves for having such a dynamic and stimulating perception of the nature of truth, they are generally blind to the fact that, as children of an Enlightenment era, they have uncritically adopted excessively propositional, individualistic and logocentric interpretations of this concept, which have an intrinsic tendency to impoverish and marginalize ecclesiological discourse. By definition, such a reductionist concept excludes the church from being a significant

¹ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), p. vii.

² One of the first statements of faith in Adventist history is found in James White's response to the Seventh Day Baptists' inquiry about the identity of Sabbatarian Adventists. In his informal statement, White describes this group of Christians as being 'bound together by the bonds of love—love for the truth, love for each other, and love for a perishing world'. See, James White, 'Resolution of the Seventh Day Baptist Central Association', *RH*, 11 August 1853. Even in later periods of Adventist history, it was repeatedly affirmed by the proponents of the movement that the truth stands at the heart of Adventist life, its message, and its mission. See, Ministerial Association, *Adventists Believe*, p. vii. For a more recent official public statement that supports the fundamental claim that the Adventist church 'emerged from a quest for truth'—a common truth-seeking enterprise characterized by a continual dialogue and scholarly discourse, see: Joe Galusha and others, 'Seventh-day Adventists and Scholarship', *International Conference on Faith and Science in Denver, Colorado* (2004) <<http://fae.adventist.org/statement.htm>> [accessed 12/01/2016].

aspect of divine revelation; the remnant becomes just the messenger. The truth is expressed only in the form of the message proclaimed—predominantly in linguistic discourse, especially in a set of distinctive doctrines—and the carrier of the message is rendered secondary, if not insignificant. Instead of being an integral part of divine revelation, the remnant church in Adventist ecclesiology seems to stand *outside* the scope of what is regarded as the truth. Due to this problematic epistemology and the impoverished theory of truth implicit in many Adventist statements of faith (and its traditional interpretation of *sola Scriptura*), the movement, in fear of ecclesiolatry, has also treated ecclesiology as a secondary theological discipline by comparison with, for example, Christology and eschatology.

Even though Adventists would welcome the idea that community plays a crucial role in how we read and interpret the Bible, the truth they are uncovering in this personal and communal act of interpretation still remains propositional and always external to what they are as a community. This narrow conception of truth clashes with the wider biblical concept of truth as Person and, consequently, as *being*.³ Furthermore, it ignores the organic connection between the church and revelation that is assumed by Paul's declaration that the church is the very means by which God reveals his 'manifold wisdom' to the 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' (see Ephesians 3.10).

To address this reductionist tendency, I would like to propose in this presentation that in order to be consistent in their theological commitment to the Divine Word and be able to respond to some of the present-day ecclesiological challenges, Adventists need to enrich their notion of truth by viewing the community of believers not only as a messenger, but also as an integral part of divine revelation. They need to recognize that the church is not just a conveyer of the three angels' messages; it is an active participant in the life of God, and thereby, the locus of his self-disclosure. By its immersion in divine life that is made accessible to it in Christ through the Holy Spirit, the church not only professes and witnesses to the truth that is exterior to its own life, but also actively participates in it as the living sign of the coming kingdom of God.⁴

³ Grenz, 'Truth', p. 688; R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism in the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Amos Yong, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), p. 100.

In order to articulate a more nuanced and more comprehensive vision of the nature, shape, and extent of church's participation in God's self-revelation and understand truth's personal and communal dimensions, it is useful to venture in the rapidly burgeoning field of modern ecclesiology. We can learn from the insights that stem from one of the most dominant forms of contemporary ecclesiological discourse—*communio* ecclesiology, which takes the communal nature of truth (truth as *koinonia*) very seriously in its reflection about church's *esse*. According to this widely-accepted framework, that the church 'is not simply the receiver of revelation', but as the Body of Christ is 'bound up with revelation itself'.⁵

Whilst a full-fledged systematic articulation of truth's communal nature lies beyond the scope of this particular reflection, I do hope to prepare the grounds for such a constructive task by offering some preliminary methodological considerations. I will focus only on one aspect of church, which is in fact the key and ecclesially constitutive aspect of any *communio* ecclesiology—the relationship between the Trinity and the church. The aim is to outline three basic methodological and constructive guidelines (or directives) for grounding the vision of the church in the life of Triune God.⁶

I will articulate these guidelines in three steps. The first step of this constructive proposal involves a discussion of how to articulate the Trinitarian roots of the church in the most adequate way. The second step spells out some basic regulative principles that are needed for such a construction. The third step offers a brief demonstration of how the proposed Trinitarian theoretical framework functions when applied to the practical domain of the church's being, ministry, and mission. I believe that by following these three constructive suggestions, one can begin to articulate a highly dynamic and theologically rooted vision of the church that is constantly on the move (*ecclesia semper migranda*) towards becoming an integral part of God's self-revelation.⁷

⁵ Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, p. 12.

⁶ While a more comprehensively articulated proposal for addressing these and similar burning ecclesiological questions you can find in my new book on Adventist ecclesiology (*Towards an Adventist Version of Communio Ecclesiology: Remnant in Koinonia*) that will be published by Palgrave Macmillan next week (a book that emerged as a result of my doctoral research at the University of Oxford), at this point I will focus only on few key aspects of Adventist understanding of the nature of their quest of truth that can be enriched significantly by a development of a more comprehensive and rounded concept of church.

⁷ I find this topic to be essential for the present-day Adventism. If we want to build on the shoulders of those who started this movement and if we truly believe in this foundational value of truth-seeking, we need to make sure that we understand the nature of this endeavor, its potential blindspots, as well as new opportunities for advancing this quest further. Just like our predecessors at the 1919 Bible Conference, we find ourselves in a pivotal moment in the history of this movement. The recent challenges that emerged in the aftermath of the

TRINITY AND THE CHURCH

At the outset of this constructive proposal, offering some preliminary definitions is in order. With *communio ecclesiology*, contemporary scholars refer to a specific type of ecclesiology that describes the church in terms of relationships.⁸ The primary aim of this kind of ecclesiology is to give a clear articulation to the dynamic interplay that exists between the persons of the Trinity (Trinitarian communion), human beings and the triune God (vertical communion), the members of the communion of the faithful (horizontal communion), the local and universal church, and the church and the non-church.⁹ This relational ecclesiological discourse, which is regarded by many to be a “major achievement of ecumenical consensus,” defines the church as a community (*koinonia* or *communio*) of persons that is mystically united with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.¹⁰

Already from this basic definition it is clear that one of the primary tasks of *communio ecclesiology* is to seek to ground the community of believers in the life of

San Antonio vote in 2015 and the subsequent administrative initiatives and procedures that are trying to create a sense of unity—or, a particular type of unity—by signing endless series of endorsement and compliance documents, force us to rethink what we are all about, and what went wrong in the process of our communal truth-seeking. Maybe this is an opportunity to go deeper and move the borders of our existing understanding of how this quest for truth should play out in the life of the church. Maybe we could view this new challenge as a possibility to deepen, strengthen and achieve a more complete manifestation of the church’s multidimensional relational nature, as we journey together towards a fuller understanding of God’s self-disclosure among us. While most Adventists would fully support the statement that the voice of God in interpretation is most clearly heard in the context of the General Conference session, there are significant gaps in the understanding of how, and according to what principles, this voice should be discerned in that group. The events following the last GC session raised a number of questions: (1) How do we know that a majority vote really represents the voice of God? (2) Can and should our doctrinal questions be solved by imposing the interpretation of the Bible made by a relatively small majority on a rather large minority? (3) What kind of input can and should the appointed committee of educated experts (i.e., TOSC) have had in the decision-making process? (4) How should the example of the First Apostolic Council shape the way the church decides on issues of faith and church practice, keeping in mind that they were equally as attentive to the work of the Spirit in and through the Scriptures as to the Spirit’s work among them (Cornelius’s case)? (5) What happens when our direction relies on the uninformed and unenlightened voter, who can only speak from a very confined local context and has not been sufficiently exposed to the complex needs of the global church? (7) How can the work of the Spirit be discerned at the communal level? (8) Can new technological and communication advancements serve our aim to increase the representation in our decision-making bodies? (9) What should one do when the church structures and procedures do not seem to fully map onto the core of what the church should be at its core? etc. These and similar questions necessitate a more substantial ecclesiological engagement—one that has been neglected in Adventist church so far.

⁸ Robert Jenson, ‘The Church as *Communio*’, in *The Catholicity of the Reformation*, ed. by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 1.

⁹ Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 12. Lorelei F. Fuchs, *Koinonia and the Quest for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology : From Foundations through Dialogue to Symbolic Competence for Communionality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), pp. 25–43.

¹⁰ Herwi Rikhof, *The Concept of Church: A Methodological Inquiry into the Use of Metaphors in Ecclesiology* (London, Shepherdstown, W. Va.: Sheed and Ward; Patmos Press, 1981), pp. 233–35.

God. Most *communio* authors writing in the last half-century have recognized that the way one understands the nature and scope of God's involvement in the making of community largely determines the basic shape and orientation of believers' common life in him. They have therefore taken as their prime ecclesiological task the widening of existing social and ecclesial interpretations of the term "communion" (*koinonia*) by investigating the notion of human community as a *reflection of and participation in* the Trinitarian communion.

These two major approaches—*imitatio Trinitatis* and *participatio Trinitatis*—are currently at the forefront of the contemporary ecclesiological conversation when it comes of clarifying the relationship between the Trinity and the church. In order to determine which one of these two, if any, is a more promising methodological route for articulating a dynamic *communio*-based vision of a church that participates in the truth of divine revelation, it is necessary to consider briefly their main proposals, prospects and limitations.

(I) THE *IMITATIO TRINITATIS* APPROACH

The first approach—*imitatio Trinitatis*—focuses on the concept of church as an image or icon of the triune God.¹¹ The principal, axiomatic idea is that the ecclesial relations somehow reflect the intra-Trinitarian relations.¹² Hence, the inner-Trinitarian *koinonia*, according to *communio* ecclesialogists, should be used as a structural blueprint for the human *koinonia*. Accepted as almost a standardized ecclesiological procedure, this approach ('from above') has been developed and applied extensively by a considerable number of mainline Christian theologians.

Within Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theological circles, the most coherent, creative, and profound theological attempts to define a vision of the church according to the image of a triune God have been made by Metropolitan John D. Zizioulas (Eastern-Orthodox tradition),¹³ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who later became

¹¹ For instance, Zizioulas defines the church as 'a set of relationships making up a mode of being, exactly as is the case of the Trinitarian God'. John D. Zizioulas, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution', in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. by Christoph Schwobel (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), (p. 27). In other words, the church is a 'reflection' of God's *relational* way of being. See, John D. Zizioulas, 'The Church as Communion', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 38 (1994), 7.

¹² Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), (p. 76).

¹³ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

Pope Benedict XVI),¹⁴ and Miroslav Volf (Protestant/Evangelical and 'Free Church' tradition).¹⁵

After drawing certain principles from their understanding of the inner life of the triune God, these authors made a series of deductions that subsequently impinged on their entire theological thinking, and especially on their understanding of the *koinonia* at anthropological, soteriological and ecclesial levels. Thus, shaped by their distinctive conceptualizations of the inner life of the triune God, the concept of *koinonia* is used to elucidate various aspects of their "ecclesiology of communion," such as the church's identity, structure, authority, mission, offices, life in history, and finally, her sacramental life, built most expressively around the Eucharist.¹⁶

A particularly prominent feature of this kind of Trinitarian approach to *communio* ecclesiology seems to be continual interest in the structural aspects of both the Trinitarian and human community. For example, Ratzinger's insistence that the structure of Trinitarian relations is characterized by pyramidal dominance of "the one" (precedence of divine substance over non-accidentally conceived persons) results in support for a monolithic, hierarchical vision of the relationship of the Pope to cardinals, of the cardinals to bishops and, in turn, of the bishops to the laity. On the other hand, Zizioulas's stress on hierarchical bipolarity between "the one" (the person of the Father) and "the many" (Christ and the Spirit) implies an asymmetrical-reciprocal relationship between bishops and laity. Finally, Volf's notion of the polycentric and symmetrical reciprocity of "the many" (perichoretic divine persons) forms a congregational and pneumatic ecclesial vision that insists on "the priesthood of all believers."¹⁷

The problem with such an approach is that in order to be feasible at all, it has to presume the existence of an exceedingly specific, reliable, and detailed knowledge of the inner being and workings of God—knowledge that we as human beings simply do not possess.¹⁸ Also, it draws too close a parallel between the communal being of

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁶ For a more thorough critical and comparative analysis of the concept of *koinonia* in the writings of these three authors see: Tihomir Lazic, 'Koinonia: A Critical Analysis and Comparison of *Koinonia* within Joseph Ratzinger's, John Zizioulas's and Miroslav Volf's Versions of 'Communion Ecclesiology'' (MA Thesis, University of Wales Lampeter, April 2008). The next section of this thesis will briefly highlight some of the most important conclusions of my MA research project. An electronic version of this dissertation can found at: <http://n10308uk.eos-intl.eu/eosuksq101_N10308UK_Documents/Dissertations/Lazic.pdf>

¹⁷ *ibid.* pp. 95–96.

¹⁸ For a more detailed analysis of the inadequacies of the *Imitatio Trinitatis* approach, see: *ibid.* pp. 104–09.

the Creator and the created order. This critical ontological assumption cannot be fully sustained.¹⁹ As a result, their project becomes merely a guessing game, a projection of human ideas about what *communio* might mean in our experience of relationships with others onto our understanding of the dynamics of Trinitarian communion. They are, so to say, creating God according to our image, instead the other way around.

There are several other inadequacies that are worth mentioning here. For instance, the authors writing within this strand of *communio ecclesiology* have failed to take into consideration the current sinful conditions in which human beings exist. This omission may be due to their assiduous preoccupation with translating the perfect Trinitarian model in the sphere of human relationships, while at the same time neglecting the human agency in the process of ecclesiology.

As a result, they have produced an overly idealized, abstract, static, ahistorical, romanticized, and almost entirely docetic vision of the church. This certainly cannot be a good foundation for what we are trying to achieve—that is, to provide an account that acknowledges the messy, historical, dynamic, and concrete everyday reality of the community of believers that are constantly on the move. Therefore, in the light of this assessment, I submit that, notwithstanding its popularity as the most widespread contemporary *communio ecclesiology* procedure, the *imitatio Trinitatis* approach is not the most suitable starting point for developing a vision of a church that is an integral part of God's self-revelation. With this in mind, I now turn to the analysis of the potentials, proposals, and weaknesses of the next—perhaps less popular, yet hopefully, more promising—*communio ecclesiology* approach.

(II) THE *PARTICIPATIO TRINITATIS* APPROACH

The second approach—*participatio Trinitatis*—seems to be a methodological route that has been explored less often. It examines the relationship between Trinity and church in terms of the believer's participation in the divine life as unveiled in history, with an emphasis on dynamic personal interaction, indwelling, and sharing, both among the believers and with God. Rather than focusing on speculation about the inner mode of being of the immanent Trinity, the *participatio Trinitatis* ecclesiological project tends to stress the works of God *ad extra*. It grounds the church's being in those aspects of divine life that have been made accessible to human beings in the

¹⁹ *ibid.* pp. 122-27.

concreteness of the revelatory and reconciliatory event of Christ, in which human beings participate through the workings of the Spirit.²⁰

By viewing the church as an active participant in the triune life of God, this approach starts with “the Spirit-empowered works of God rather than the internal makeup of his being. It starts from below and works upwards, rather than starting from above and working downwards.”²¹ Karl Barth, although himself operating within a top-down approach, recognizes the legitimacy of this alternative way of doing theology:

There is certainly a place for legitimate Christian thinking starting from below and moving up, from man who is taken hold of by God to God who takes hold of man [...] one might well understand it as a theology of the third article [...]. Starting from below, as it were, with Christian man, it could and should have struggled its way upward to an authentic explication of the Christian faith.²²

Gregory J. Liston, in his doctoral dissertation “The Anointed Church: Towards a Third Article Ecclesiology,” explains the main trajectory characterizing such an approach:

In this movement from below to above, our theological reflection matches our discipleship. As we are drawn by the Spirit from our current fallen state into participation in the Godhead, so our theological reflections start from our current experience and knowledge (limited and tainted by creaturely mortality and sinfulness) and move upwards toward reflections on the nature and existence of God.²³

In the light of this, I propose that when articulating the vision of a church that participates in the truth of God’s self-revelation, one should start by examining the nature and direction of the transformative movement of the Spirit within us, through us, and around us. One should then move on from there to consider how, by means of our participation in the work of the Spirit, we are being incorporated in the pneumatic body of Christ, and through him united with God the Father. This Spirit-mediated-and-originated movement, from our imperfect and fragmented existence into the life of God, in which we are inextricably united with other fellow-believers (and the whole universe), is the basis of the church’s communal essence. This approach— as demonstrated by the increasing number of theologians writing within various

²⁰ For a more extensive exposition and assessment of the potentials of the *participatio Trinitatis* approach, see: Tihomir Lazic, ‘Remnant in Koinonia: Towards an Adventist Version of Communitas Ecclesiology’ (doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2016). An electronic version of this DPhil thesis can be found at: <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:96ee05e6-8a4c-4dc0-80de-fefc73a8c009>

²¹ Gregory J. Liston, *The Anointed Church: Toward a Third Article Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), pp. 12–13.

²² Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1972), pp. 24–25.

²³ Liston, p. 13.

Christian denominations²⁴—“holds great promise for theological insights.”²⁵ This is so, especially in view of its four-fold emphasis on particularity, transformation, relationships, and the movement.²⁶

With this in view, I would like to argue that *participatio Trinitatis* approach serves as a much more adequate methodological route than *imitatio Trinitatis* for constructing a truly dynamic and nuanced vision of a church that participants in the truth that it proclaims. Yet, similarly to *imitatio Trinitatis*, this participatory framework is not immune to various forms of ecclesial reductionism. For that reason, certain well-established ecclesiological principles that have survived the test of time should be respected in the process of construction.

THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CONSTRUCTION

To make sure that the trinitarian foundation of this participatory ecclesial framework is articulated adequately, I would like to propose that the following four regulative principles need be respected in the process of ecclesiological construction: (1) the principle of indivisibility, (2) the principle of balance, (3) the principle of comprehensiveness, (4) and the principle of ontological embeddedness. These four principles are intended to serve as basic guidelines, or correctives, in our attempt to develop a well-rounded and fully Trinitarian vision of a migrant koinonia. These regulative principles safeguard the integrity of the believers' witness about who God is and how he is involved in originating, maintaining, and completing the life of the church. In so doing, they shed light on the nature, form and extent of believers' personal and communal participation in the mysteries of divine life.²⁷

(I) THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIVISIBILITY

The activity of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit *ad extra* is always one and indivisible. Therefore, assenting to well-attested patristic insights, both Eastern and Western, one should acknowledge that “wherever the Son is there is also the Father and the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit is there is also the Father and the Son.”²⁸ This

²⁴ These include authors writing from the perspective of Roman Catholicism (Yves Congar, Ralph Del Colle, David Coffey), Protestant denominations (Lyle Dabney, Myk Habets, Gary Badcock, Clark Pinnock) and ecumenical traditions (Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Amos Yong, Miroslav Volf, Steven Studebaker).

²⁵ Liston, p. 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ For further explanation of these four principles, see: Lazic, *Remnant in Koinonia*, pp. 227–230.

²⁸ Zizioulas, pp. 67–122.

indivisible wholeness of God is the real source of the mystery of human oneness as reflected in the life of the community of believers. There is one God and therefore one church. Any attempt to dissociate the work of one divine person from the work of the other would render incomplete one's exposition of the revelatory nature of church's communal life.

(2) THE PRINCIPLE OF BALANCE

In any relational ecclesiology, the work of Christ and the Spirit must be given equal weight. It is not possible to provide a comprehensive vision of the church by neglecting the work of either of these two Persons, or treating the work of one of these as somehow inferior or secondary to the work of the other. A well-developed ecclesiology will find a way to safeguard this balance. Once an integrated account of the organic relationship between these two (and the third) Persons of the deity has been developed and their close personal involvement in the community-making processes is recognized, a more comprehensive and adequate portrayal of various facets of the church's life will become possible.²⁹

(3) THE PRINCIPLE OF COMPREHENSIVENESS

When trying to discern the nature of the Trinitarian contribution to the life of the community of believers, the entire historical work of a particular person of the Godhead should be allowed to have a bearing on the ecclesiological discourse.³⁰ For instance, one cannot selectively emphasize the Spirit's work of enlightenment and sanctification in human life, while at the same time ignoring his equally important works of gathering of a community and bringing about the eschatological kingdom of God. Similarly, one cannot build a balanced ecclesiological synthesis by grounding it only in the eschatological restorative work of Christ, while neglecting the role of his incarnation, or his death and resurrection, in the incorporation of the believers within the life of God. This principle—the principle of comprehensiveness—requires an ecclesologist to embrace the wholeness of the divine activity *pro nobis*, in all its variety and richness, when articulating their theology of church.³¹

²⁹ Ibid. p. 129; J. McIntyre, 'The Holy Spirit in Greek Patristic Thought', *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 7 (1954), 357.

³⁰ Zizioulas, pp. 126–29; Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (London: Chapman, 1986), p. 1.

³¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret : An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. edn (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 57–58; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Amos Yong, *Toward a Pneumatological*

(4) THE PRINCIPLE OF ONTOLOGICAL EMBEDDEDNESS

Undergirding these three principles is the general conviction that it is not enough to speak about the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in regard to the church, merely as one aspect of ecclesiology among others. On the contrary, the union of believers with the three Persons is constitutive of the church, and therefore represents a foundational assumption implicit in any ecclesiology. The work of each person of the Trinity 'must qualify the very ontology of the church'.³² Although a certain level of mystery and vagueness in the description of migrant koinonia in both inter-Trinitarian and theo-andric relational contexts will always persists, it continues to be axiomatically true that the divine actions pro nobis are constitutive of the church's communal esse, not merely accidental or peripheral, and should remain fully endorsed. Divine initiative is not something that "animates" a church that already exists. Father, Son and the Spirit make the church be.³³

* * *

In this proposal, I would like to argue that the full adherence to these four principles in the process of articulating an Adventist version of *communio* ecclesiology is necessary. While ensuring the adequacy of the theoretical account of the involvement of the triune God in the process of ecclesiogenesis, these principles—when applied properly—lead to a fuller understanding of the nature and scope of believers' participation in the life of the triune God.

The church as the pilgrim community of God is still "under construction" and needs goals to strive towards. The current reality of the church is too messy, sinful, and fragmentary. The discrepancy between the ideal vision and the less-than-ideal daily actuality of the migrant church will remain until the eschaton.³⁴ This does not, however, render the attempt to clarify the ecclesiological ideal an entirely futile intellectual exercise. Once integrated into the ecclesiological account, they serve as basic guidelines, or correctives, which encourage and facilitate the migrant church's attempts to reach a permanently improvised, delicate balance between the person

Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002). Zizioulas, p. 129.

³² Herschel Odell Bryant, *Spirit Christology in the Christian Tradition: From the Patristic Period to the Rise of Pentecostalism in the Twentieth Century* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2014), pp. 512–20. Zizioulas, p. 129.

³³ According to Zizioulas, the church is constituted in and through the action of the Father, Son and the Spirit, forming an ontological category in ecclesiology. See Zizioulas, p. 132. Elizabeth Teresa Groppe, 'The Contribution of Yves Congar's Theology of the Holy Spirit', *Theological Studies*, 62 (2001).

³⁴ This thesis has been convincingly established in: Zizioulas, p. 132.

and the community in the process of becoming one with God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit.³⁵

TRUTH AS KOINONIA: APPLYING THE VISION

The full application of the *participatio Trinitatis* framework (see step One) and the above-outlined principles of construction (see step Two) lies beyond the scope of this particular study. However, it is still possible within the bounds of the current proposal to identify one of the key challenges that such a construction will entail, once attempted. I would argue that as soon as constructive ecclesiologicals decide to fully adhere to the above-outlined principles, they will need to deal with certain deficiencies that their respective ecclesiological traditions suffer from.

For instance, when it comes to *communio* ecclesiology—particularly, its western versions—the most common deficiency includes a severe condition known also as “Holy Spirit Deficit Disorder.”³⁶ If this assessment is accurate—and there are numerous scholars from different religious traditions that would concur with it—one of the first tasks of providing a truly Trinitarian vision of a church’s communal esse involves a systematic effort to overcome this pneumatological deficit. This entails providing a more robust pneumatological account of believers’ participation in the life of God.

As seen from the discussion about the Trinitarian roots of the church, the *participatio Trinitatis* approach is at its best when it starts with a rich account of the movement of the Spirit among believers and then explores the ways in which the Spirit transforms and gathers believers around Christ, making them an essential part of his story and therefore the story of the Father.³⁷ Hence, the current proposal rests on the premise that it is only by giving a proper place to pneumatology within the broader stream of the Trinitarian participatory ecclesiological vision that one can gain a fresh angle from which to reason about different aspects of our communal participation in the truth of God’s revelation. The development of a richer interpretation of the Spirit’s activity in the church is seen as one of the key prerequisites for a fuller, more nuanced account of the church’s participation in the life of the triune God.

A good starting point for such a reflection, I suggest, is an identification of the three principal domains of human life in which the community-making activity of the

³⁵ Lazic, *Remnant in Koinonia*, pp. 227–230.

³⁶ Cheryl Bridges Johns, ‘Overcoming Holy Spirit Shyness in the Life of the Church’, *Vision*, May 2012, p. 1.

³⁷ Liston, pp. 12–14.

Spirit (and thereby the astonishing aliveness of God's presence) can be experienced most vividly and richly. These include the movement of the Spirit within, through and around us. The identification and clarification of the domains and effects of the Spirit's work represent the first stepping-stone towards a fully Trinitarian vision of the church. The ensuing section will thus trace the practical effects of the ecclesially constitutive work of the Holy Spirit in domains of the nature, ministry, and mission of the church.³⁸

(1) THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT WITHIN US

The effects of the Spirit's stirring within us are most vividly expressed in the manifestation of the so-called "fruit" of the Spirit—which predominantly includes a change in the believer's character, attitudes, motives, and mode of being (Gal 5:22–23). To use Pauline terminology, this inner transformation (or sanctification) represents a gradual movement away from "the works of the flesh"³⁹ towards the "fruit of the Spirit"—love, manifested in joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and other similar Christ-like traits.⁴⁰ These fruits characterize the Spirit-filled life of any true member of the church.⁴¹

The Spirit is also involved in making the knowledge of divine things accessible to believers. This is done by means of the Spirit-mediated events of revelation, inspiration and illumination. Apostle Peter presents progress in life and knowledge, and the moral and epistemic dimensions of the Spirit's work within us, as conditioning each other. By growing in love, one grows in the true knowledge of God, and increased knowledge of God results in greater love towards him and others.⁴²

This double work of the Spirit—sanctification and enlightenment—is not an invisible spiritual process that cannot be perceived except by special spiritual discernment. It leaves important, tangible marks on the community of God, that are visible to the world around them. This happens most often in relationships. In other words, it takes place in the realm of believers' interaction both among themselves and with those around them. Jesus himself claimed that the realities of self-sacrificing,

³⁸ For a more comprehensive account of how the Holy Spirit works within, through and around us, see: Lazic, *Remnant in Koinonia*, pp. 189–206. The following section of this constructive proposal is a summary of the insights reached in this doctoral thesis.

³⁹ The phrase 'works of the flesh', according to Paul, involves: 'sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these'. See Gal 5:19–21.

⁴⁰ Galatians 5.22–23.

⁴¹ R. Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: God as Trinity* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2011), p. 74.

⁴² 2 Peter 1:3–8.

loving relationships that come about through the workings of the Spirit are the greatest external proof that a community of people belongs to God.⁴³ The manifestation of divine love, sublimely revealed in the paradigmatic person of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry, is thus the ultimate goal towards which the community of believers constantly aspires.⁴⁴

The work of the Spirit within us awakens our entire being, moves us into a more intimate relationship with Christ, and transforms us more and more into his likeness.⁴⁵ We are drawn closer to each other and provided with the ultimate grounds for communal life — close interpersonal relationships characterized by love, acceptance, forgiveness, commitment, and intimacy.⁴⁶

In short, the main effect that occurs when believers willingly respond to the Spirit's movement within them is a radical transformation that includes enlightenment of the mind (producing true knowledge of divine things) and a change of character and lifestyle (producing Christ-like love) that in turn shapes the nature of their relationships (koinonia with God and with others). These three aspects of the Spirit's movement within us—transformation, enlightenment, and the resulting koinonia—change the orientation of one's life from self-centeredness to other-centeredness. By responding to the movement of the Spirit within them, each believers' participation in the life of God is deepened. Thus they are enabled to reach out to other human beings and the universe with all its other inhabitants, with whom they are mysteriously joined into the same body—the body of Christ. Hence, moved by the Spirit's work within them, they are drawn together with the ties of divine love to become the equal sharers in the interwoven web of relationships of the manifested life of God.

(II) THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT THROUGH US

While the prime expression of the movement of the Spirit within us is seen in "spiritual fruit," his work through us is visible primarily in the manifestation of "spiritual gifts" (see, e.g., 1 Cor 12). This means that the same Spirit that works within us by opening up our entire being to a living relationship with Christ and other fellow-sojourners further manifests himself through spiritual gifts by which he draws us together into one

⁴³ 'By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35, ESV).

⁴⁴ Richard Rice, 'The Trinitarian Basis of Christian Community', in *Biblical and Theological Studies on the Trinity*, ed. by Paul Petersen and Rob McIver (Adelaide: Avondale Academic Press, 2014), pp. 101–12).

⁴⁵ The true knowledge mentioned in 2 Pet 1:3 refers to the experiential knowledge that involves all the facets of the human being: the mind, heart and body. It implies the most intimate relationship between two or more persons (Hebrew: *yada'*; Greek: *epignosis*).

⁴⁶ Doyle, p. 13.

complex pneumatic organism—the body of Christ. The Spirit sovereignly distributes these gifts, also known as charismata, to all the members of Christ's body, for their mutual edification and growth towards Christ-likeness. Because of this, while the transformative movement of the Spirit within us is directly reflected in the quality of the relationships that form the church, his work through us determines their formal structure.⁴⁷

It seems to be accepted by most contemporary *communio* ecclesialogists that the essential characteristics of the charismata are important, if not indeed determinative, for the ministries and structure of the community of believers.⁴⁸ I must add that, if a church's ministries and modes of communal service are to properly reflect the nature of Spirit-generated charisms, five foundational characteristics of these charisms should be used as regulative ecclesiological principles: (1) all charismata in the church are a direct result of divine action through the Spirit, with (2) the Spirit functioning as their sovereign distributor. These gifts (3) are joined together in a dynamic and interdependent communal entity, and are given to (4) all believers in Christ and (5) are always other-centred.⁴⁹

It is the movement of the Spirit through us (accompanied by the believers' deliberate and voluntary whole-life response to it) that is ultimately responsible for unifying and diversifying the ecclesial community. As a result of this Spirit-led initiative, the church can function as a community of believers whose pneuma-dynamic communal life is realized in the mystery of ecclesial unity—unity in which the variety of different personal manifestations of the work of Spirit in the form of charismata is maintained, yet organically integrated into the mysterious body of Christ.

This kind of pneumatic structure of church's ministries allows space for the pilgrim people of God to feel welcomed and cared for. It creates a space where they can use their God-given talents, experiences, and gifts and they can progress towards fulfilling their full potential. If the church's communal life is structured in response to the sovereign work of the Spirit among the believers, each person can experience a deep sense of belonging and rootedness in the life-giving movement of God. The interdependent mode of ecclesial relationships allows them to personally contribute to the well-being of all, while in return they could experience the fullness of Christ through the gifts exercised by others.

⁴⁷ Volf, pp. 228–33.

⁴⁸ Hans Küng, *The Church* (New York,: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 173–91.

⁴⁹ For a detailed exposition of these five principles, see: Lazic, *Remnant in Koinonia*, pp. 257–264.

As a result of the work of the Spirit through us, the church is transformed into a more welcoming, all-embracing, and just community. In this community, the uprooted ones can re-discover their roots in the life of God, the marginalised can find their irreplaceable and valuable role in the world, the rejected can feel accepted, the hurt can be healed, and the homeless can find their true spiritual home. It is within this Spirit-generated community that human beings can truly flourish and experience the fullness of life and joy (1 John 1:4). As such, the church on the move—although imperfect and broken at present—can become the foretaste and a hope of a better future, when the kingdom of God reaches its fullness.

(III) THE MOVEMENT OF THE SPIRIT AROUND US

The third domain in which the effects of the mysterious movement of the Spirit can be detected is the extra-ecclesial realm. The fact that the Spirit's movement is present not only within the confines of the church but also beyond its borders has been strongly emphasized by contemporary *communio* theologians.⁵⁰ They agree with Irenaeus's claim that "wherever the Spirit of God is, there is the church, and all grace."⁵¹ However, this does not mean, they repeatedly stress, that the work of the Spirit is restricted to the church alone. The Spirit is actively involved in the process of restoring the entire world to a pristine condition, within which everything is and lives for the glory of God. While involving the church as the foremost instrument in re-establishing the kingdom of God, the activity of the Spirit goes far beyond it. This, in turn, represents an invitation to the church "to get out into the world," find out what God's Spirit is doing in the world and "join forces with Him."⁵²

The fact that the Spirit's work is total and universal extends the church's sphere of interest and action to involving the totality of life and the world, including the secular sector of human life. According to this holistic outlook, the responsibility of the church that wants to be true to its *pneuma*-dynamic essence is to look beyond itself, to become aware of the Spirit's movement in a range of political, socio-economic, technological, scientific, and cultural developments around it, and join forces with him.⁵³

⁵⁰ Volf, p. 129.

⁵¹ This sentence is a translation of the Latin phrase: *ubi Spiritus Dei, illic Ecclesia, et omnis gratia*. See Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.24.1.

⁵² Newbigin, p. 18.

⁵³ Moltmann is one of many modern authors who affirm a close connection between the political and economic event of liberation and the experience of the Holy Spirit. See, for instance: Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.:

The work of the Holy Spirit among the nations stands as an open invitation for the church to cooperate with him in his outreach to the broken world. It also challenges the church to acquire learning and a humble spirit in its attitude towards others. Following from this, Healy argues:

Since the church at times learns from the work of the Spirit working in what is non-church, it seems reasonable to propose that the church should make a habit of listening to the non-church, of trying to discern the Spirit's action in its challenges, of seeking out its wisdom in case Christ's word is spoken there.⁵⁴

Only the church that stands in complete humility and poverty and is ready to learn and advance towards the revealed truth of God in the totality of the Spirit's work—including all his dealings with the created world and its inhabitants—can be regarded as the church that is true to its essence. In this sense, the movement of the Spirit around us, along with the Spirit's work within us and through us, forms an intrinsic part of the church's pneuma-dynamic esse.

Being part of the Spirit-generated koinonia means being one with the entire creation of God. One should therefore never limit the Spirit's action or confine him to the church only. Like a wind, the Spirit moves beyond the church and catches it up in its onward momentum.⁵⁵ It draws us closer to our fellow travellers and makes us sensitive to their needs and struggles. United by the Spirit, we stand together in solidarity and are transformed into a welcoming and just community. This openness to the work of the Spirit around us requires from the entrenched, fossilised and static traditional churches to reconsider their existing ways of doing mission. They are called to revise their attitudes towards others, alter their mode of outreach, and extend their

Baker Academic, 2002), p. 154; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, 1st Fortress Press edn (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992). In view of this recent re-discovery of the extra-ecclesial work of the Spirit, it is not accidental that one finds so many different types of liberationist movements and initiatives that insist on opening up the church to the world and engaging actively in its struggle to reach the ideals of justice, mutual solidarity, tolerance, and socio-economic, racial and gender equality. Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 16–17; Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, 1st HarperCollins pbk. edn (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991). A Belgian theologian, long resident in Brazil, José Comblin, sees a modern reappearance of the experience of the Spirit manifested in the social realm in the heightened desire to engage in social action, in the experience of freedom, in the growing need to speak out for the poor and marginalized, in the experience of community, and in a new aspiration for life. See: José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), p. xi. Similarly, Moltmann talks about the liberating work of the Spirit in three dimensions, associating them with three classical virtues: (1) liberating faith: freedom as subjectivity; (2) liberating love: freedom as sociality; and (3) liberating hope: freedom as future. For more details, see: Moltmann, pp. 114–20.

⁵⁴ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 69.

⁵⁵ Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 256.

scope of engagement. Instead of doing mission for God, they are invited to partake in the mission of God (*Missio Dei*). They are challenged to see mission as a whole-life participation in the movement of God towards the restoration of the defected world.

By transforming believers into the likeness of Christ (“Spirit within us”), incorporating them into his mysterious spiritual body (“Spirit through us”), and enabling their participation in Christ's movement towards the world and back “to the bosom of the Father”⁵⁶ (“Spirit around us”), the Holy Spirit orients the church towards the ultimate ground or telos of its being—Jesus Christ himself. In Christ, the entire universe, as well as all aspects of the ecclesial *koinonia*, are united and taken into the triune life of God that gradually unfolds in the arena of cosmic history. It is by virtue of this on-going spiritual union with its head, Jesus Christ, and through him with the Father, that the community of believers stands in the world as a truthful witness, a “foretaste” and “prophetic sign” of the coming kingdom of God.⁵⁷ Although imperfect and incomplete at present, the manifestation of *koinonia* can nonetheless provide an opportunity for the fragmented world to experience a glimpse of the future glory that will reach its final completion when the bride meets the Bridegroom (cf. Rev 19:7).

This helps us to understand our current task as a church of and for the 21st century. This is the church that not only proclaims the truth, but also embodies it. Imagine then the community of believers in which Spirit is at work:

‘a community of justice in a world of economic and ecological injustice; a community of generosity and simplicity (of being able to say ‘enough’) in a world of consumer satiation; a community of selfless giving in a world of selfishness; a community of truth [=humility and boldness] in a world of relativism; a community of hope in a world of disillusionment; a community of joy and thanksgiving in a world of entitlement; a community that experiences God's supernatural presence in a secular world where all days are the same and nothing is exceptional or supernatural...’⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Cf. John 1.18.

⁵⁷ The Spirit's indwelling in the church seals it and transforms it into a 'first instalment' and 'first fruit' of the realized cosmic reign of God. For an explanation of these anticipatory analogies, see: David Ewert, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1983), pp. 280–300.

⁵⁸ Daniel Duda, “Adventist Identity—A Never-Ending Quest”, TED Bible Conference, Newbold College, 18 June 2019.

CONCLUSION

By highlighting this relational, communal and personal dimensions of the truth of divine revelation, this constructive proposal makes ecclesiology central to the future Adventist theological enterprise, intrinsic to their grounding of theological claims and their interpretation of the Spirit's work among them. It can be expected that the discovery of the communal dimension of the truth might challenge certain foundational epistemic assumptions that have shaped Adventist mind so far. Yet, it is argued in this presentation that by embracing this discovery, Adventists will be able to understand more fully what it means to be the living embodiment of their end-time message.

Clearly, the development of a mature, complete and systematic theology of church still lies in the future. Adventist ecclesiology is still in its infancy, and a collaborative, perhaps communal, academic effort to develop it is required. However, by suggesting some potential ways forward, this reflection, I hope, might encourage other scholars to pursue this line of reasoning further. I believe that this truly dynamic vision of the church that actively participates in God's revelation, holds the potential to reinvigorate, inspire, and equip Adventists' further quests for God's truth. Hopefully, the Adventist commitment to the right attitude (orthopathy), right belief (orthodoxy) and right praxis (orthopraxy) in the light of Christ's pre-Advent restorative activity, will lead the Adventist movement to discover the communal dimension of the truth they are searching for: This is the truth about the grace and wisdom of the Father who, through the immediate and non-mediated action of the Spirit, has drawn them into the body of Christ, and, by doing that, made them active participants in the triune life of God.

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