

Thy Kingdom Come!

[Translated from the original Spanish]

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

Theme for Study and Reflection Number 3

The Church as a Mystery of Communion

Objective

It is important to understand that the Church is a *mystery of communion*, since our lay vocation and the charism of Regnum Christi only make sense within the Church and the Church is a communion of vocations and charisms within the love of God. We are called to live our vocation and our charism in communion with the other vocations and charisms in the Church. Also, we cannot understand ourselves deeply if not in light of the other vocations and charisms; and together with them, we cannot understand our identity, mission and charisms if not within the communion of the Church.

Moreover, communion is precisely the great task that John Paul II singled out, doubtlessly in a prophetic way, for the Church in our time: “To make the Church *the home and the school of communion*: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.”¹ Therefore, each day Regnum Christi aspires more and more to be a home for communion, and the current process of renewal should point in that direction.

This exposition of the theme opens with a brief initial exposition on the notion of communion within the doctrinal teaching of the Magisterium on what the Church is, in order to present afterwards the three stages of the historical evolution of the concept of communion from the Second Vatican Council to today. As support material, we add a selection of texts about the theological foundations of communion.

Outline

A. The notion of “ecclesial communion”. Communion is an appropriate notion for a deeper understanding the mystery of the Church. This concept is fundamentally

¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, 43.

a fruit of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and has been developed by the Magisterium following the Council. We present the supernatural nature, origin in the Trinity, organic configuration and missionary dimension of ecclesial communion.

B. The concept of “communion” from its beginnings to the Second Vatican Council. The first Christian communities understood communion as a spiritual reality and at the same time as a visible reality. Later there was a growing emphasis on its juridical dimension, overshadowing its theological dimension. Since the Second Vatican Council, we are seeking to recover and deepen our understanding of the richness of the original sense of this concept.

C. The “ecclesiology of communion”. The Church sees itself as a communion, rooted in the sacraments and therefore as a spiritual reality and not just a social or juridical reality. In the Church, there is at the same time unity and diversity between its members.

D. The “spirituality of communion”. Communion is not only a form of understanding the Church, but must become a way of thinking, feeling and working. Communion is made real in determined places and presupposes the restoration of the value of the identity and mission of all – nowadays particularly that of the laity – as a necessary condition for the fulfillment of the Church’s mission.

E. Some texts to support the theological foundation of communion.

Key Concepts

Communion

Ecclesiology of Communion

Spirituality of Communion

Dignity of the Lay Faithful

A. The Notion of Ecclesial Communion

1. Means of Explaining the Mystery of the Church

Communion “embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church”.² In the decades prior to the Second Vatican Council, the most common image of the Church among Catholics was that of the Mystical Body of Christ. This image harmonized unity with the plurality of the members, underlining that Christ is the Head from which the life of the whole ecclesial body springs and that many different types of members participate in the common life of the body and serve it with their specific contribution. With the Second Vatican Council, there was a change to make more use of the image of the Church as People of God, underlining the shared dignity of all the faithful by reason of their baptism and of the universal call to holiness and the pilgrim character of this people within the world. As we will see in this theme, in the last few decades, the Magisterium is putting the accent on “communion” when referring to the mystery of the Church. In everyday religious language, we are used to calling the reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist, “communion”. Here, we are not referring to that, but to a way of understanding the Church itself, to the whole of those baptized who are conformed to the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, since the Eucharist is the “fount and apex of the whole Christian life”,³ it is good to remember that the Church draws life from the Eucharist and that the Eucharist is the summit of the communion between humanity and God and of the faithful with each other. Therefore, the name of “communion” for the Eucharistic sacrament makes sense, since the celebration of this sacrament consolidates ecclesial communion and brings it to perfection.⁴

On the other hand, we should not forget that the Church can be seen – and studied – in different dimensions. This takes effort. We shouldn’t confuse these with its definition, as if by force we wanted to distill all the Church’s aspects into a single phrase. Remember that the Church is above all a *mystery*⁵ and therefore, we know

² Ibid, 42.

³ Ecumenical Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 11.

⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1: “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*. The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*.”; 34: “The Church is called during her earthly pilgrimage to maintain and promote communion with the Triune God and communion among the faithful. For this purpose she possesses the word and the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, by which she “constantly lives and grows” [*Lumen gentium*, 26] and in which she expresses her very nature. It is not by chance that the term *communion* has become one of the names given to this sublime sacrament.” And 34-46 (these numbers correspond to Chapter IV *The Eucharist and Ecclesial Communion*).

⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 770-780, “Mystery” is spoken of in the sense in which we refer to a reality revealed by God with salvific value for us that we know by faith (in this case, that reality is the Church). Therefore,

it through analogy, which presents a reality in a partial form and not in its fullness. So, it is important to be clear that *communion* is one of the possible models and that we should not forget to frame it within all Catholic doctrine on the Church in order to interpret it correctly, without trying to reduce to this one word all that we can say about the Church. Throughout history, ecclesiology (that is, the part of theology that studies the Church itself) has used different images or concepts in order to express the mystery of the Church according to what is most helpful or possible within the conditions of cultures and times. In our days, the concept of the Church as communion is what the universal Magisterium insists on the most.

In fact, through the centuries, the Church – led by the Holy Spirit – discovers its true identity ever more deeply. More recently, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been an important landmark, since it continued the reflection on the Church in its relation with the modern world, which produced a renewed concept of the identity and mission of the Church. When we study the documents of the Council (principally the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium*), we find five principal notions: The Church as the People of God, the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church as the Universal Sacrament of Salvation, the Church as the Vine and the Branches, and the Church as Communion. All five seek to express the mystery of the Church, in which they are closely related to each other. The notion of the Church as communion (which this theme deals with) has undergone later development, based on the council's documents.

2. *Supernatural nature of ecclesial communion*

It would be an error to limit ecclesial communion to the visible complementarity between the states of life in the Church, to the practical cooperation in some affairs or the effective distribution of tasks. This would be to reduce it to a superficial, external, organizational, pragmatic and materialistic dimension that definitely will not make us commit ourselves profoundly, but at best only superficially in a few activities. It would be no less an error to limit communion to an interior sentiment, an intellectual supposition or a blind affirmation, since this would be to reduce it to a dimension that is spiritualistic and in the end individualistic, that also fails to make us question our own lives or make us grow. In the same way, it would be a mistake to identify communion with fellowship, with growth in numbers, with communication, with socializing or with empathy or friendship. In such as case,

although we do have a sure knowledge of this reality through the certainty of the faith, we can never in this life have a complete knowledge of it. All the truths of the faith are “mysteries” (the mysteries of the life of Jesus, the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, etc.), since they contain a salvific reality that remains hidden to our eyes, even when faith permits us to have some knowledge of it.

we would be assuming a non-transcendent and naturalistic vision of ecclesial life. Also, it would be wrong to confuse communion with just any relationship with others, beyond reason or measure or awareness of one's own identity and that of our neighbor. Lastly, it would be equally wrong to interpret communion as the imposition of uniformity, simple submission to authority or silencing minorities. This would be the equivalent of reducing the Faith to ideology and ecclesial life to a system of power.

Ecclesial communion is participation in the love of the Trinity that, through the Church, is poured out on the world attracting us to union with God and with others. It is fundamentally the "communion of the saints" in virtue of the Holy Spirit.⁶ It is "a communion of life, charity and truth" instituted by Christ to be the instrument of universal redemption and extend itself throughout the world being in it light and salt.⁷ It is brotherhood in Him who makes us participants in the divine life as adoptive children of the Father according to his plan, the anticipation and beginning of the eternal gathering together with "the Father in the universal Church".⁸

Therefore, communion is built on the reciprocal, aware and free self-giving of the faithful through Christian charity, based on the faith in which we belong to one another in Christ.⁹ Pope Francis has invited all people since the beginning of his pontificate to care for one another, like brothers and sisters who share the same humanity, and even more we are invited as Christians, to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit of unity and diversity, to the Spirit of harmony.¹⁰ "For all of us, who

⁶ The Holy Spirit "unifies the Church in communion" and "the members of the People of God are called to a communication of goods" that is spiritual, apostolic and temporal; *Lumen gentium*, 4, 13 and cf. 50. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 949-953.

⁷ *Ibid*, 9 and cf. 50("the communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ").

⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

⁹ Cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 43.

¹⁰ Cf. Francis, Homily at the beginning of his pontificate (March 19, 2013); "The vocation of being a "protector", however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. The vocation of being a "protector", however, is not just something involving us Christians alone; it also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. [...]. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person. It means protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, [...]"; *Idem*, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 216; "all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples. all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples"; *Idem*, Homily with the movements on Pentecost (May 19, 2013); "the Holy Spirit would appear to create disorder in the Church, since he brings the diversity of charisms and gifts; yet all this, by his working, is a great source of wealth, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, which does not mean uniformity, but which leads everything back to harmony. In the Church, it is the Holy Spirit who creates harmony. the Holy Spirit would appear to create disorder in the Church, since he brings the diversity of charisms and gifts; yet all this, by his working, is a great source of wealth, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, which does not mean uniformity, but which leads everything back to harmony. In the Church, it is the

are sons of God and constitute one family in Christ, as long as we remain in communion with one another in mutual charity and in one praise of the most holy Trinity, are corresponding with the intimate vocation of the Church.”¹¹

3. An “organic” communion: unity and diversity

What introduces us into the communion of the Church is our divine childhood in Christ. From Baptism – and from the other sacraments of Christian initiation – proceeds the common dignity of all Christians and at the same time the *raison d’être* of the diversity of vocations: “From their rebirth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality regarding dignity and action by which they all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ according to each one’s own condition and function.”¹² Therefore:

Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a *diversity* and a *complementarity* of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen *in relation to the whole body* and offers a *totally unique contribution* on behalf of the whole body.¹³

The Pauline image of a body remains as a point of reference: “Just as each of our bodies has several parts and each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other.”¹⁴ Thus: “the chosen People of God is one: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism’; sharing a common dignity as members from their being regenerated in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity.”¹⁵ Therefore, in the Church, we are all – clergy and laity – “brothers and sisters” and “if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ. For the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within

Holy Spirit who creates harmony [...] He is indeed harmony. Only the Spirit can awaken diversity, plurality and multiplicity, while at the same time building unity.” Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 20; “One and the same Spirit is always the dynamic principle of diversity and unity in the Church.”

¹¹ *Lumen gentium*, 51.

¹² *Code of Canon Law*, canon 208. Cf. *Christifideles laici*, 9.

¹³ *Christifideles laici*, 20.

¹⁴ *Romans* 12: 4-5.

¹⁵ *Lumen gentium*, 32.

it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need.”¹⁶

4. *Missionary communion*

Ecclesial communion is “missionary communion” since the Church is called to welcome all and is sent to everyone to reconcile humanity with God and, in him, make brothers of all men.¹⁷ “Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion.*”¹⁸

B. The concept of *communion* from its beginnings to the Second Vatican Council

The Latin word, ‘*communion*’, is a translation from the Greek ‘*κοινωνία*’ (*koinonia*). The root ‘*κοιν-*’ (*koin-*) means ‘that which is in common’.

“What we have seen and heard we are telling you so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing this to you to make our own joy complete.” (1 John 1: 3-4)

This passage from the first letter of Saint John can be considered the reference point for any correct Christian interpretation of communion, since it brings together its essential elements; communion begins with the encounter with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who comes to us through the proclamation of the Church. Thus is born our communion with each other, which is founded on our communion with the One and Triune God.¹⁹

Studying other texts from the New Testament, we can say that communion is presented in three different senses:

-With reference to Christ (Christological sense). Communion with Christ, the Son of God: called to the brotherhood with the Son (1st Corinthians 1:9), communion

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Cf. *Christifideles laici*, 8: The Church “is *mystery* because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Holy Spirit (cf. *John* 3:5), and called to relive the very *communion* of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history (mission)”.

¹⁸ Ibid. 32.

¹⁹ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Conference on the ecclesiology of Lumen gentium pronounced in the International Congress on the Application of the Second Vatican Council, organized by the Great Jubilee of the year 2000.*

with the Body and Blood of Christ (1st Corinthians 10:16), our part in the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10) etc.

-With reference to the Holy Spirit (Pneumatological sense). Communion with the Holy Spirit; we participate in the divine nature (2nd Peter 1:4), cooperation with evangelization (Philippians 1:5), communion with the Spirit (2nd Corinthians 13:13, Philippians 2:1), etc.

-With reference to the Church (Ecclesiological sense), that is, communion with the Church; the community of the believers in Christ, the brothers who share among themselves different gifts (Acts 2:42-45; 4:32-37), acts of solidarity with the community (2nd Corinthians 8:4), the ministry of the apostle in the different communities (2nd Corinthians 8:23), etc.

“Communion is a notion which is held in high honor in the ancient Church (and also today, especially in the East).”²⁰ With the passing of the centuries, the ecclesial sense came to be the dominant one, which continued throughout the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the concept of ecclesial communion will gradually take on a more and more *juridical* character (regulation of the relationships between communities, between the bishop and the faithful, for example) than *theological-spiritual* especially since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which in response to the protestant reform, sought to emphasize the visibility of the Church, that is its institutional dimension. For the purposes of this theme, we can consider that this tendency will be maintained practically without change until the end of the nineteenth century.

Influenced by the theological currents that were brewing during the first half of the twentieth century, the Second Vatican Council returned to communion in its original sense, going beyond the juridical. The constitution *Lumen gentium* presents the Church which “is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race”²¹ that is, like an internal spiritual reality or mystery, that is expressed visibly, understanding that the Church at the same time is a visible assembly and spiritual community.²²

²⁰ *Lumen gentium*, Preliminary note of explanation, 2nd.

²¹ *Lumen gentium*, 1.

²² *Ibid*, 8.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize that the word “communion” does not expressly occupy a central place in the documents of the Council.²³ Although the texts on ecumenism²⁴ mention it and *Lumen gentium* refers to it thirty-four times, most of the time, when we encounter the word “communion” in these documents its meaning is primarily juridical (the unity of faith and communion with Peter and with his successors, the link between ecclesial government and ecclesial communion, the particular Churches, the office of bishop, etc.). As we will see, the process of explanation and theological development of the concept came later, yet always based on the Council texts.

C. The “Ecclesiology of Communion” since the Second Vatican Council

The 1985 Synod of Bishops, that attempted to strike a kind of balance on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Council, tried to present the whole of the conciliar ecclesiology starting with a new basic concept: that of ‘the ecclesiology of communion,’²⁵ which we could define as “the effort to understand the Church more clearly as communion and to apply this idea more concretely to life.”²⁶

“The Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985 saw in the concept of an “ecclesiology of communion” the central and fundamental idea of the documents of the Second Vatican Council.”²⁷ Three principal contributions from the final relation of the Synod stand out:

-Communion is based on the sacraments. It is of the spiritual order. Therefore, “the ecclesiology of communion cannot be reduced to purely organizational questions or to problems which simply relate to powers.”²⁸

-The one, universal Church is present in all the particular churches. The unity and plurality of the Church must be recognized.

-Participation and co-responsibility,²⁹ which should exist on all levels and between all levels: bishops, priests, religious, laity, young people, adults, etc. Communion commits all the baptized

²³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Conference on the ecclesiology of Lumen gentium pronounced in the International Congress on the Application of the Second Vatican Council, organized by the Great Jubilee of the year 2000.*

²⁴ We are referring to the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* and the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Conference on the ecclesiology of Lumen gentium pronounced in the International Congress on the Application of the Second Vatican Council, organized by the Great Jubilee of the year 2000.*

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 34. Cf. 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report*, C1.

²⁸ 1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report*, C1.

²⁹ Ibid. C6.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

faithful to Christ (and not only some more committed ones or those who have consecrated their life, for example),

This last idea will be important, because it reflects a change passing from an ecclesiology that starts from the principle of authority and from the *sacra potestas* exercised by those who have received the sacrament of orders as the principle of structure in the Church, towards a self-concept of the Church that characterizes the Christian communities of the first centuries and that starts from the fundamental equality of the faithful in virtue of baptism.³⁰

In the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* (1988) the concept of communion is mentioned one hundred times, reinforcing the link between the different states of life in the Church, which is made up of these challenges:

-That of conceiving of communion of as both a spiritual and visible reality. This implies that ecclesial communion cannot be adequately understood when it is understood as a simple sociological and psychological reality (as something purely practical, means of organizing, programming, having common objectives, etc.). The exhortation is categorical when it affirms that the identity and mission of the laity only will be understood adequately from the living context of Church as communion.³¹

-That of organic communion, which is diversity and complementarity. In the Church different vocations live together. It is precisely thanks to this complementarity that each faithful layperson finds his or her place in relation with the entire body and offers it his or her own contribution.³²

What's more, *Christifideles laici* deepens the relationship between communion and mission: Christ, as the Son of God incarnate, is the source of communion with God and between persons, and is at the same time source of evangelization, that is, the announcement of the Kingdom among us. Both mutually imply each other, communion being the efficacious sign of evangelization.

"Even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). The fruitfulness of missionary activity is to be found in this communion.³³

Communion in itself is missionary,³ since through it, the Church presents itself and acts as the visible sacrament of salvific unity.³⁴

³⁰ Cf. A. Anton, *El Misterio de la Iglesia, Evolucion historica de as ideas ecclesiologicas*. II, BAC maior (Madrid-Toledo 1987) 930-931. (No English translation exists)

³¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 18-19.

³² Cf. *Ibid.* 20.

³³ John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris mission*, 75.

Notwithstanding the contribution of the Synod of 1985, the understanding of communion in some situations continued to lose transcendence and empty itself of its theological content to transform itself into a “slogan”.³⁵ For this motive and for others, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a clarification in 1992: *Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, whose content we now lay out:

-This communion is not just visible, but also invisible. The doctrine of the Apostles, the sacraments and the hierarchical order manifest the intimate relation between visible communion and invisible communion. Because of this, we cannot separate one dimension from the other. In fact, it is this relationship that constitutes the Church as the sacrament of salvation, and therefore, it cannot be a reality folded in upon itself or self-referential,³⁶ but permanently open to the missionary and ecumenical dynamic, since “she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her: to gather together all people and all things into Christ.”³⁷

-The idea of unity in diversity is explicitly linked to the ecclesiology of communion. The Church is not a democracy nor can it renounce the principle of hierarchical constitution set in place by Christ.

"The universality of the Church involves, on the one hand, a most solid unity, and on the other, a plurality and a diversification, which do not obstruct unity, but rather confer upon it the character of 'communion'". This plurality refers both to the diversity of ministries, charisms, and forms of life and apostolate within each particular Church [...]. In the context of the Church understood as communion, consideration should also be given to the many institutes and societies that express the charisms of consecrated life and apostolic life, with which the Holy Spirit enriches the Mystical Body of Christ. Although these do not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, they belong to its life and holiness.³⁸

That same year, 1992, the Catechism of the Catholic Church was also published. Its contribution will be very important when collecting and organizing the ideas that the Magisterium had been laying out about communion. Here, we will only mention the title of two paragraphs of the catechism: *The Church Is One* (numbers

³⁴ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9.

³⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, *Conference on the ecclesiology of Lumen gentium pronounced in the International Congress on the Application of the Second Vatican Council, organized by the Great Jubilee of the year 2000*.

³⁶ *Evangelii gaudium*, 236.

³⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, 1992, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 15-16.

813-822) and *Christ's Faithful – Hierarchy, Laity, Consecrated Life* (numbers 871-873).³⁹

D. The “Spirituality of Communion” in our Days

The apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* (1996), that mentions communion ninety-five times, will be the first text to speak expressly of a “spirituality of communion” and will continue to deepen the idea of “missionary communion”, already present in the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*.⁴⁰

We could define this “spirituality of communion” as “a way of thinking, speaking and acting which enables the Church to grow in depth and extension.”⁴¹ “*communion begets communion*: in essence it is a *communion that is missionary*”.⁴² In a world that lives a reality of division and discord (individualism, destruction of the family and of society); communion presents itself as a way to liberation in the face of the slavery of sin. The desire for communion is a clear sign of the times, not only for the Church, but also for the world. It becomes a point of union between them: a Church called to be witness of communion, the image of the One and Triune God and a world that fervently looks for that witness.

In the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001), outlining a plan for the Church of the third millennium, St. John Paul II gives us the most complete development of the concept. Between numbers 42 and 46 (Part IV: Witnesses to Love), we can find a synthesis of the spirituality of communion. Number 43 is particularly revealing:

But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need *to promote a spirituality of communion*, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are a part of me”. This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings,

³⁹ The titles in the Catechism in Spanish are much different: *The Unity of the Church* (numbers 813-822) and *The Diversity of Ministries* (871-873) – *Translator's note*.

⁴⁰ *Christifideles laici*, 32.

⁴¹ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata*, 46.

⁴² *Ibid*.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (*Gal 6:2*) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.⁴³

Communion is related with the living of charity: communion as a fruit of the love that makes of us all a single heart and a single soul (cf. *Acts 4:32*) and is converted into the heart of the Church, as Saint Therese of Lisieux wrote: "I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was aflame with Love. I understood that Love alone stirred the members of the Church to act [...] I understood that Love encompassed all vocations, that Love was everything".⁴⁴ We can say that from the spirituality of communion, I consider the *other* as a part of myself and that following the dynamic of love, the other comes to be *necessary* for me. We cannot fulfill our own vocation except in communion with others.

The so-called places of communion are also presented in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, as the spiritual places where this spirituality can be promoted, that should be cultivated in every moment and on every level: between bishops, priests, and deacons; between the clergy and the entire people of God, between religious and the laity; between ecclesial associations and movements. Only the entire Church makes Christ present in the world, since only the entire Church is his Mystical Body. Because of this, no groups or particular ecclesial class can try to fulfill the work of Christ isolated from the rest. No ecclesial vocation can try to monopolize the richness of Christ nor the reality of the Church.

Customs and institutions that foster participation should be promoted and valued. Although they may be consultative and not deliberative, they have a full meaning and importance. In this way, a reciprocal and effective listening can be promoted among all, preserving on the one hand unity in essentials and on the other seeking to move toward well thought out and shared decisions:

While the wisdom of the law, by providing precise rules for participation, attests to the hierarchical structure of the Church and averts any temptation to arbitrariness or unjustified claims, the spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with

⁴³ John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.* 42, where the text of St. Therese of Lisieux is quoted.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul. While the wisdom of the law, by providing precise rules for participation, attests to the hierarchical structure of the Church and averts any temptation to arbitrariness or unjustified claims, the spirituality of communion, by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every member of the People of God, supplies institutional reality with a soul.⁴⁵

In the structure of communion, which recognizes the legitimate differences between different places and states of life, there will be inevitable situations of occasional conflict. The way to resolve them will never be to silence disagreements or to immediately have recourse to authoritarian solutions, but to live charity, which is always liberating and unbiased. This can only be achieved by promoting a culture of mutual esteem, respect and harmony in the heart of the Church, recognizing the legitimate differences to open a real dialog between all the members of the people of God, whether clergy or lay. The bonds of union will always be greater than the motives for division; as St. Augustine says unity in the necessary, freedom in the doubtful, charity in everything.⁴⁶

Finally, it is important in the light of spirituality of communion that all the baptized be aware of their own responsibility in the ecclesial life. All the vocations are a richness for the Church and should be welcomed since they are rooted in Baptism.

Finally, we can affirm that a community is Christian in the measure in which it is in communion with God, with the brethren – including hierarchical communion, in distinctive aspects and degrees – and with the world, including love of enemies. So, the Kingdom of God is made present and built up. The Church is a community called together by the Word; a community of faith, of life and of love; a liturgical community, especially a Eucharistic and prayerful community; a community in dialog; a community that is evangelizing and missionary without limits.

E. Some support texts for a foundation of the theology of communion

1. Foundation in the Trinity

The mystery of the communion of the Church has its source in God himself, who reveals himself as an interpersonal communion of love and calls us to the salvation of all humanity, from the heart of the Trinity.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 45.

⁴⁶ Cf. Javier Del Rio, *Eclesiologia de Comunión y Nueva Evangelización*, 9 [There is no English translation – Translator’s note], and *Gaudium et spes*, 92.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity, namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source, and is itself the means to achieve this communion: united to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, [...] From the communion that Christians experience in Christ there immediately flows the communion which they experience with one another [...] In this communion is the wonderful reflection and participation in the mystery of the intimate life of love in God as Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit⁴⁷

Communion, then, has two dimensions: the transcendent dimension, communion with God, and the non-transcendent dimension that is communion with humanity, which springs from the first. In this double dimension, the agent of this communion is the Holy Spirit and it is manifested concretely in the life of the Church, which is like a visible, efficient continuation, that is, like a sacrament of the life of the Trinity. Since Pentecost, the Church is in Christ and Christ in the Church, in virtue of the Spirit. Thus, God is all in all. (1st Corinthians 15:28)⁴⁸

2. *Christological Foundation*

The Church is communion with Jesus. Three texts chosen from the Catechism:

From the beginning, Jesus associated his disciples with his own life, revealed the mystery of the Kingdom to them, and gave them a share in his mission, joy, and sufferings. (cf. Mark 1:16-20; Mark 3:13-19; Matthew 13: 10-17; Luke 10: 17-20; Luke 22:28-30) Jesus spoke of a still more intimate communion between him and those who would follow him: "Abide in me, and I in you.... I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:4-5) and he proclaimed a mysterious and real communion between his own body and ours: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."⁴⁹

When his visible presence was taken from them, Jesus did not leave his disciples orphans. He promised to remain with them until the end of time; he sent them his Spirit. (cf. John 20:22; Acts 2:33) As a result communion with Jesus has become, in a way, more intense: "By communicating his Spirit, Christ mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation."⁵⁰

The comparison of the Church with the body casts light on the intimate bond between Christ and his Church. Not only is she gathered around him; she is united in him, in his body. Three aspects of the Church as the Body of Christ are to be more specifically noted: the unity of all her

⁴⁷ *Christifideles laici*, 18.

⁴⁸ Cf. Bruno Forte, *La Iglesia, icono de la Trinidad*, Sigueme (Salamanca 1992), 30. (English edition is Bruno Forte, *The Church: Icon of the Trinity: A Brief Study*, Pauline Books and Media (1991). –*Translator's note*)

⁴⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 787.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 788; Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

members with each other as a result of their union with Christ; Christ as head of the Body; and the Church as bride of Christ.⁵¹

3. *Pneumatological Foundation*

The Holy Spirit and communion:

In order that we might be unceasingly renewed in Him, (Ephesians 4:23) He has shared with us His Spirit who, existing as one and the same being in the Head and in the members, gives life to, unifies and moves through the whole body. This He does in such a way that His work could be compared by the holy Fathers with the function which the principle of life, that is, the soul, fulfills in the human body.⁵²

The mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is brought to completion in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This joint mission henceforth brings Christ's faithful to share in his communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit. the Spirit prepares men and goes out to them with his grace, in order to draw them to Christ. the Spirit manifests the risen Lord to them, recalls his word to them and opens their minds to the understanding of his Death and Resurrection. He makes present the mystery of Christ, supremely in the Eucharist, in order to reconcile them, to bring them into communion with God, that they may "bear much fruit."⁵³

Thus the Church's mission is not an addition to that of Christ and the Holy Spirit, but is its sacrament: in her whole being and in all her members, the Church is sent to announce, bear witness, make present, and spread the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity. All of us who have received one and the same Spirit, that is, the Holy Spirit, are in a sense blended together with one another and with God. For if Christ, together with the Father's and his own Spirit, comes to dwell in each of us, though we are many, still the Spirit is one and undivided. He binds together the spirits of each and every one of us . . . and makes all appear as one in him. For just as the power of Christ's sacred flesh unites those in whom it dwells into one body, I think that in the same way the one and undivided Spirit of God, who dwells in all, leads all into spiritual unity.⁵⁴

4. *Sacramental Foundation*

Believers who respond to God's word and become members of Christ's Body, become intimately united with him: "In that body the life of Christ is communicated to those who believe, and who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ in his Passion and glorification." (cf. Romans 6:4-5; 1st Corinthians 12: 13) This is especially true of Baptism, which unites us to Christ's death and Resurrection, and the Eucharist, by which "really sharing in the body of the Lord . . . we are taken up into communion with him and with one another."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid. 789.

⁵² *Lumen Gentium*, 7

⁵³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 737.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 738.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 790; Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 7.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.⁵⁶

[...] to see clearly how the *res* of the sacrament of the Eucharist is the unity of the faithful within ecclesial communion. The Eucharist is thus found at the root of the Church as a mystery of communion. The relationship between Eucharist and *communio* had already been pointed out by the Servant of God John Paul II in his Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*. He spoke of the memorial of Christ as "the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church" [...] "the oneness and indivisibility of the eucharistic body of the Lord implies the oneness of his mystical body, which is the one and indivisible Church."⁵⁷

Communion means that the seemingly uncrossable frontier of my ego is left wide open and can be so because Jesus has first allowed himself to be opened completely, has taken us all into himself and has put himself totally into our hands. Hence, Communion means the fusion of existences; just as in the taking of nourishment the body assimilates foreign matter to itself and is thereby enabled to live, in the same way my ego is "assimilated" to that of Jesus, it is made similar to him in an exchange that increasingly breaks through the lines of division. This same event takes place in the case of all who communicate; they are all assimilated to this "bread" and thus are made one among themselves – one body.

In this way, Communion makes the Church by breaching an opening in the walls of subjectivity and gathering us into a deep communion of existence. It is the event of "gathering", in which the Lord joins us to one another. the formula "The Church is the Body of Christ" thus states that the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives us his body and makes us one body, forever remains the place where the Church is generated, where the Lord himself never ceases to found her anew; in the Eucharist the Church is most compactly herself – in all places, yet one only, just as he is one only. [...] The Fathers summed up these two aspects – Eucharist and gathering – in the word *communio*, which is once more returning to favor today. The Church is communion; she is the communion of the Word and Body of Christ and is thus communion among men, who by means of this communion that brings them together from above and from within are made one people, indeed, one Body.⁵⁸

5. Ecclesiological Foundation

The Church is one because of her source: "the highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit." The Church is one because of her founder: for "the Word made flesh, the prince of peace, reconciled all men to God by the cross . . . restoring the unity of all in one people and one body." The Church is one because of her "soul": "It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire Church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the

⁵⁶ Ibid. 1324, Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, 15.

⁵⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion, Understanding the Church Today*, 1996, 37, 76.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the Church's unity." Unity is of the essence of the Church: What an astonishing mystery! There is one Father of the universe, one Logos of the universe, and also one Holy Spirit, everywhere one and the same; there is also one virgin become mother, and I should like to call her "Church."⁵⁹

From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God's gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God, a multiplicity of peoples and cultures is gathered together. Among the Church's members, there are different gifts, offices, conditions, and ways of life. "Holding a rightful place in the communion of the Church there are also particular Churches that retain their own traditions." The great richness of such diversity is not opposed to the Church's unity. Yet sin and the burden of its consequences constantly threaten the gift of unity, and so the Apostle has to exhort Christians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)⁶⁰

"In virtue of their rebirth in Christ there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in the building up of the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function."⁶¹

The very differences which the Lord has willed to put between the members of his body serve its unity and mission. For "in the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission. To the apostles and their successors Christ has entrusted the office of teaching, sanctifying and governing in his name and by his power. But the laity are made to share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ; they have therefore, in the Church and in the world, their own assignment in the mission of the whole People of God." Finally, "from both groups [hierarchy and laity] there exist Christian faithful who are consecrated to God in their own special manner and serve the salvific mission of the Church through the profession of the evangelical counsels."⁶²

Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that *communion represents both the source and the fruit of mission: communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion*. It is always the one and the same Spirit who calls together and unifies the Church and sends her to preach the Gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). On her part, the Church knows that the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people. Thus the Church feels she owes to each individual and to humanity as a whole the gift received from the Holy Spirit that pours the charity of Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers, as a mystical force for internal cohesion and external growth. The mission of the Church flows from her own nature. Christ has willed it to be so: that of "sign and instrument... of unity of all the human race"(120). Such a mission has the purpose of making everyone know and live the "new" communion that the Son of God made man introduced into the history of the world. In this regard, then, the testimony of John the Evangelist defines in an undeniable way the blessed end towards which the entire mission of the Church is directed: "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you

⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 813.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 814.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 872, *Code of Canon Law*, canon 208, Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.* 873, *Code of Canon Law*, canon 207 s.2.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 *John* 1:3).⁶³

6. Conclusion

*Church communion then is a gift, a great gift of the Holy Spirit, to be gratefully accepted by the lay faithful, and at the same time to be lived with a deep sense of responsibility. This is concretely realized through their participation in the life and mission of the Church, to whose service the lay faithful put their varied and complementary ministries and charisms.*⁶⁴

Assimilation Questions for Team Reflection

1. How did I understand these ideas before reading this theme? How do I understand it now? In what ways has it enriched me?
2. What do I understand by “communion”? What do I understand by “ecclesiology of communion”? What do I understand by “Spirituality of communion”?
3. How can we grow in communion to avoid being reduced to mere juridical or practical units?
4. *Novo millennio ineunte* speaks of “places of communion”. What places of communion could I identify in the life of Regnum Christi? How could we take better advantage of them?
5. With respect to the life of Regnum Christi in the Church, how can we live our place within the Church in the light of the ecclesiology of communion?
6. What does the necessity of having unity in diversity mean to me? How does this apply to life in the Movement (in the different branches of Regnum Christi, in the sections, in the works of apostolate, etc.)?
7. The apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* speaks of spirituality of communion as a mode of thinking, speaking and working. How can we activate it in our teams, sections, localities and territories?

⁶³ *Christifideles laici*, 32.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 20.

Central Commission for the Review of the Regnum Christi Statutes

8. We know that the Church should not be turned in on itself, but missionary. Is our section a missionary community?
9. Does the spirituality of communion motivate me to invite others to the Movement?
10. Read *Novo millennio ineunte*, 43. If I had to choose one phrase from this text, which one would it be?

Recommended Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church, numbers 770 – 879.

Ecumenical Council Vatican II, Dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, numbers 1 – 17, 30-38.

John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici*, numbers 18 – 21.

John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata*, numbers 46 – 51.

John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, numbers 42 – 46.

Joseph Ratzinger, *Conference on the ecclesiology of Lumen gentium pronounced in the International Congress on the Application of the Second Vatican Council, organized by the Great Jubilee of the year 2000*.

Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion, Understanding the Church Today*, 1996.

1985 Synod of Bishops, *Final Report*, numbers C1, C2, C6.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Some Aspects of the Church Considered as Communion*, 1992, numbers 1 – 6, 15 – 16.

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