

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

"Gentiles," even if fitfully, "do by nature the things of the law"? Theologians who discover an antinomy in the doctrine of sin may claim that St. Paul gives them materials for their conclusion. Perhaps that is true. On the other hand, it is plain that St. Paul coins no such epigrammatic formula. And yet it is much that he should recognise, if hardly oftener than in a single passage, genuine moral processes in the life of unregenerate men.<sup>1</sup> This passage, much more probably than any passage regarding the flesh, may be of Greek *provenance*. It has a very Stoical ring.

One might suggest in closing that St. Paul's Jewish dogmas are the least authoritative part of his teaching; that his personal experiences, while profoundly significant for every Christian, are yet touched with idiosyncrasy, precarious in intellectual statement, and not wholly free from paradox; and that it is his Christian postulates alone which are absolutely central for those who share with him the evangelical faith.

ROBERT MACKINTOSH.

### THE FELLOWSHIP (*Κοινωνία*) OF ACTS II. 42 AND COGNATE WORDS.

ONE of the practices or notes of life mentioned in Acts ii. 42, as those in which the early disciples of Christ "continued steadfastly" was ἡ κοινωνία, rendered 'fellowship' both in the Authorised and Revised Versions. Both these versions are, however, mistaken in connecting τῇ κοινωνίᾳ with τῶν ἀποστόλων ("in the apostles' teaching and fellowship"); still more mistaken is the rendering of the Vulgate, *communicatione fractionis panis*, only made possible by the unauthorised insertion of καὶ before τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου, and even then an incorrect translation. Rightly interpreted

<sup>1</sup> I set aside the perversely ingenious view that the good Gentiles spoken of in Romans ii. are the Gentile Christians.

then, 'fellowship' (*ἡ κοινωνία*) stands by itself as a characteristic of the Christian life together with "the teaching of the Apostles, the breaking of bread and the prayers."

It is sometimes assumed that *ἡ κοινωνία* is solely connected with the form of early communism described in verse 44. "They that believed were together, and had all things common"; and because the common life so described was both local and temporary it is inferred that this note of the early Christian Church was also transitory and not intended to be lasting or universal.

This inference seemed to be strengthened by the comparatively rare occurrence of the word in other parts of the New Testament. Such occurrence is, however, more frequent than appears to the English reader either of A.V. or R.V.<sup>1</sup>; and so far from passing away from Christian experience when the early days of 'gladness and singleness of heart' came to an end in the Church of Jerusalem *ἡ κοινωνία* became a permanent possession of the faithful, manifesting itself in many ways and finding expression in varied forms. And even though the primary reference in the passage we are considering is to some form of communism, the word must not even here be pressed into meaning a system of equal distribution of property. The instances both of Barnabas and of Ananias and Sapphira disprove that. The generosity of Barnabas is mentioned as exceptional. And Ananias, disciple though he was, was at liberty to keep his own. The expression then indicates generally that there was among the first converts to the faith a life of companionship and of readiness to impart to one another the means of subsistence. But, as we shall see, the word came to connote far more than this in the experience of Christian life.

<sup>1</sup> *ἡ κοινωνία* occurs nineteen, or possibly twenty, times in other passages of the New Testament (in Eph. iii. 9 it is a variant for *οἰκονομία*). It is variously rendered by "fellowship," "contribution," "communion."

What gives a special significance to this primitive form of Christian socialism is that it represents an effort to continue the life of discipleship and companionship with Christ which had been enjoyed by the Twelve, and by others, who had "companied" with them during the earthly ministry. Little is said of this companionship in the New Testament narrative. But there are many notes of an intimate and loving friendship. His disciples are "the same as brother and sister and mother" (Matt. xii. 50); they are His "little flock" (Luke xii. 32); they are His "little children" (John xiii. 33); and "those whom He hath chosen out of the world" (John xv. 19); above all, "those who had continued with Him in His temptations" (Luke xxii. 28). The interest and sweetness of such intercourse must have been incomparable. No condition of partnership and brotherhood could be imagined more entrancing and more full of spiritual joy than that. For nowhere is life more enjoyable than in a community of comrades inspired with high ideals and directed by a leader whom all trust, and who is felt to be showing to his followers the way to a fulfilment of deeply cherished hopes. With Christ, in His intercourse with His disciples, this ideal grew to absolute perfection. The question, then, arose quite naturally, could that bright and blessed life be continued? It was indeed a *κοινωνία* in which all who had known Jesus would long to continue steadfastly till the end came. For at first this common life of fellowship was upheld and brightened by the near prospect of the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. iv. 15).

Nor, again, did the ideal of 'a fellowship' with Christ pass away when the earliest hopes of the *parousia* vanished. It remained throughout Apostolic times, and long afterwards. It is still present, if not as a prevailing Christian term, yet as a living and eternal principle of the Christian

life which invisibly binds together in 'hoops of steel' all communities which name the name of Christ.

As a classical and vernacular word *κοινωνία* was not connected with any system of philosophy or ethics, and, with one possible exception, came into the New Testament vocabulary without definite pagan association which would involve caution in introducing it to Christian use. The exception is suggestive and interesting.<sup>1</sup> Among the papyri inscriptions recently discovered in Egypt there is a certificate of Pagan sacrifice, such as was granted for exemption from persecution. The date is A.D. 250. In it the attesting witness writes: "I, Aurelius Syrus, as a participant (*κοινωνός*) have certified Diogenes as sacrificing along with us." The quotation emphasises St. Paul's contrast between the Christian communicant (*κοινωνός*) and the communicant of demons (1 Cor. x. 18 f.), and throws some light on the associations which gathered round the word in its Christian use.

Even from the first we have seen that the meaning of *κοινωνία* went far beyond and deeper than the sense of almsgiving and participation in worldly possessions. From the first it implied a principle of brotherhood and spiritual fellowship which lies at the root of true Christian Socialism. Its position on its first occurrence in the New Testament (Acts ii. 42) is suggestive. It comes between 'the doctrine or teaching of the Apostles' and 'the breaking of bread.' Christian fellowship, the result of Apostolic teaching, leads on to its highest expression in the eucharistic 'breaking of bread.' And as Christian experience was enlarged fresh associations were brought into the word. 'Fellowship' is hardly an adequate rendering of *κοινωνία*, although it has been adopted in most passages where the word occurs; and indeed it is difficult to suggest a better English equiva-

<sup>1</sup> G. Milligan, *Greek Papyri*, 48. 19.

lent. But *κοινωνία* implies a closeness of union approaching to identity. Hence the significance of its use to express the believer's union with the "Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. i. 9), and with the Holy Ghost (2 Cor. xiii. 14 and Phil. ii. 1); still more significant and touching is the communion with the sufferings of Christ which His servants are privileged to share (Phil. iii. 10 *κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ*, and Rev. i. 9 *συγκοινωνὸς ἐν τῇ θλίψει . . . καὶ ὑπομονῇ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*). Compare with these the striking passage where St. Paul speaks of himself as "filling up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. i. 24). St. John, after a long experience of *κοινωνία* as a binding force in the Christian life, adduces it as the foundation motive which impelled him to write his Epistle: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship (*κοινωνίαν*) with us; yea and our fellowship (*κοινωνία*) is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3). In other words, "continuing steadfastly in the fellowship" was still a note of the Christian life in the generation in which St. John lived.

With St. John indeed it is the predominant and determining note of Christianity. For the fellowship as defined by him is only another word for that brotherhood or brotherly love (*φιλαδελφία*) which makes the difference between darkness and light (1 John ii. 9 f.), and is therefore the essential characteristic of one who calls himself a Christian. It creates the whole atmosphere of the first epistle of St. John. And though the word *φιλαδελφία* (*philadelphia*) is not Christian by origin<sup>1</sup> it gathered a new and wider and deeper significance by its introduction into the Christian vocabulary. St. Paul, writing to the Thessa-

<sup>1</sup> Liddell and Scott give one instance only of its occurrence in classical Greek. It was, however, a favourite place-name. Three cities were so called. The adjective *φιλάδελφος* is beautifully used of "sisterly tears" (*φιλάδελφνα δάκρυα*), Soph. Antiq. 527.

lonians (1 Thess. i. 4) speaks of them in one of the most beautiful of New Testament phrases as, "divinely taught to love one another." They were *naturaliter Christiani*. Hence "no need to write to them concerning brotherly love." 1 John i. 9 f., cited above, shows how close the connexion had become between *κοινωνία* and *ἀγάπη* and *φιλαδελφία*.

Another verbal note of a less obvious nature may be adduced. Of the two Greek prepositions implying association or union one (*σύν*) indicates a much closer or more intimate connexion than the other (*μετά*). It is the first that came into Christian use to signify the union of the believer with Christ. It is in this sense that St. Paul writes of dying, being buried, and living with Christ (Rom. vi. 8, 2 Cor. xiii. 4, Phil. i. 23, Col. ii. 20) and of our life being hidden with Christ (Col. iii. 3). So, too, close companionship with Christ was a condition of Apostleship (Acts i. 21). But as the preposition *σύν* is in close etymological connexion with *κοινός*,<sup>1</sup> to be "with Christ" (*σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι*) is equivalent to be in union or fellowship with Christ (*ἐν κοινωνίᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι*).

But apart from the extension of the Christian vocabulary to emphasise this continuity of the *κοινωνία* the figurative language of the New Testament, with its parables and similitudes, points in the same direction. The illustrations of the Christian life suggest the same thought of association and brotherhood and companionship in work. Christians are fellow-labourers, fellow-athletes, fellow-soldiers. They are a holy temple with its several stones "fitly framed together for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 21), or they are like a human body, "knit together through that which every joint supplieth" (Eph. iv. 16, Col. ii. 19), each member of which is dependent on the other members (1 Cor. xii. 14 foll.). And this fellowship is not to cease

<sup>1</sup> For this connexion see Buttmann's *Lexilogus sub voc. κελαινός*, p. 375, note a.

with the life on earth. The Christian looks forward to a common citizenship in heaven (Phil. iii. 20, Heb. xiii. 14) and to "the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. xii. 2 f.).

Apart from similitude and parable the spirit of 'fellowship' animates the whole of the New Testament. The history of Christianity would have been very different if the same spirit had continued to be the predominant influence. But events belied the early promise. The four great notes of the Apostolic times were all infringed or broken within the memory of the generation which upheld them. (1) The teaching of the Apostles was challenged by false Apostles (Rev. ii. 2), by Judaisers (Gal. i. 6), and by adversaries like Phygelus and Hermogenes and Diotrophes (2 Tim. i. 15, 3 John 9); (2) the earliest contention in the Church arose from a dispute concerning the daily distribution of food (Acts vi. 1 foll.); (3) the Eucharist itself gave occasion to abuse and scandals (1 Cor. xi. 20); (4) and we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews of neglect by some of the daily prayers of the Church (Heb. x. 25).

Still we may believe that in every age thousands of the faithful have 'continued steadfastly' in this charter of the Christian Church. And Christ Himself, around whom first the brotherhood of the disciples gathered and worked, still summons all His followers to join Him in the fellowship for the furtherance of the Gospel and the advance of His Kingdom.

ARTHUR CARR.

## *TWO NEW TESTAMENT PROBLEMS.*

### *I*

#### ST. PAUL'S FATE AT ROME.

IN THE EXPOSITOR for March, Sir W. M. Ramsay has urged afresh that Paul was released from Rome in 62 A.D. and remained free till c. 65 A.D. But though I follow him in