

On the Scriptural Sense of "Fellowship" or "Communion" (*κοινωνία*).

By R. F. WEYMOUTH, D.LIT., FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON.

IN a recent number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, among the interesting articles on the Kingdom of God, appear (p. 466 *a*) the following pregnant sentences from the pen of Dr. Orr.

"God's royalty in His kingdom is shown not less by gift than by rule; it is gracious, unstinted, limitless *giving* which is the foundation of the whole. The kingdom in this light is the sphere of the Father's gracious, unbounded, self-communication for the spiritual blessing and enrichment of His people—the realm of the eternal life."

These words, recalling to my mind the *κοινωνία* that occurs four times in the first chapter of 1 John, and the interpretation that for many years I have been accustomed to put upon the word, led me to look into a few of the commentaries to see what explanation they give of this *κοινωνία* or "fellowship" or "communion."

For it seems to me that these words are, much misapplied in popular usage at the present day, and that many Christian people, intelligent, well read, and deeply versed in Holy Scripture, while they are employing a New Testament word, imagine they are employing it in the New Testament sense, when they are by no means so doing. It is indeed a thing beautiful and divine that they mean by "fellowship," but the "fellowship" or "communion" of Scripture is something more beautiful, diviner, sublimer far.

They take it to mean, when spoken of Christians in relation to Christians, the drawing near of heart to heart, the clasp of hand in hand, the eye responsive to eye, and above all, the interchange of thought and love and sympathy in religious *conversation* (in the present sense of that word). All this is beautiful and good, but it is *δμιλία* (as in Luke xxiv. 14, 15) rather than *κοινωνία*, and is essentially different from the "fellowship one with another" promised to those who "walk in the light as He is in the light."

In like manner "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" is often understood to consist of drawing near to God in humble, loving intercourse, with confession and thanksgiving, with supplication and praise and silent adoration.

Wonderful privileges are these, and yet that "fellowship" or "communion" in the true meaning of the word is something higher still.

I am not alone in considering these to be approximately correct representations of "Christian fellowship," as the expression is popularly understood; others, whose judgment as well as accuracy of observation I esteem, confirm the description.

It is evidently thus that we must understand Fawcett's verse—

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above;"

and James Montgomery's—

"In one fraternal bond of love,
One fellowship of mind,
The saints below and saints above
Their bliss and glory find."

And as to communion with God, Miss Frances Ridley Havergal writes—

"I came and communed with that mighty King,
And told Him all my heart: I cannot say
In mortal ear what communings were they."

(For in Scripture "fellowship" and "communion" are strictly and accurately one and the same thing. "Communion" is found four times in the Authorised Version of the New Testament, and always as the translation of *κοινωνία*; and "fellowship" fifteen times, representing the same *κοινωνία* (or its cognate verb or adjective), with the one exception of 2 Cor. vi. 14, second clause, where it stands for *μετοχή*. And yet we sometimes hear persons speak about the "fellowship *and* communion of the Holy Ghost," as if they were different things.)

But it is not only in hymns and religious poetry that this inexact use of these words is found; it appears in prose also. One example will suffice. "Whatever communion may be vouchsafed to us with the light and holiness and glory and love that are our inheritance above, the present end of all such communion is to fit us for so keeping in the earth the words of Christ that the Father and the Son may be able practically to sanction our ways

and to have fellowship with us here" (B. W. Newton, usually a scrupulously accurate writer). Here each word is plainly employed to signify close and intimate intercourse. I suspect the writer meant "communion [with God or with fellow-Christians] in the light and holiness," etc.

But, strange to say, this erroneous usage is sanctioned even by so high an authority as Thayer's *Grimm's Lexicon of the New Testament*, where "intercourse, intimacy" is given as the second meaning of *κοινωνία*. The passages quoted under that head will be dealt with below. They are Acts ii. 42; 2 Cor. vi. 14 (third clause); Gal. ii. 9; Phil. i. 5; 1 John i. 3, 6, 7; in none of which does Vincent (*Word Studies in New Testament*) give the above sense.

Nor need we be surprised at this lax use of the *English* words, for they came long ago to bear such a meaning in English non-biblical literature, even as early as the age of Hooker and Raleigh: see Murray's Dictionary, *s.v.* COMMUNION. But it is the *Greek* New Testament term that is now under consideration, and the use of "communion" and "fellowship" as its representatives in New Testament English.

As to this the commentators sometimes seem unhappily to take for granted that their readers know the true signification of the word as familiarly as they (in all probability) know it themselves; and apparently it does not occur to them to correct the prevalent misinterpretation. They often employ vague language which gives no help. Thus Olshausen, on 2 Cor. xiii. 13, speaks of the Father's love as "the source from whence the grace of the Lord Christ pours forth as a stream, producing brotherly communion among believers in the Holy Spirit." But what *is* communion? The question is unanswered. In his admirable commentary on the Epistles of John, my right reverend and truly revered friend the Bishop of Durham writes (what Dr. Vincent copies almost verbally) that the phrase *κοινωνίαν ἔχειν* "expresses not only the mere fact, but also the enjoyment, the conscious realisation of fellowship"; and yet he gives no definition that I can find anywhere in the volume of this last term. Yet he speaks plainly (though not fully) in dealing with Heb. xiii. 16, and more clearly still on Heb. ii. 14: see below.

The true radical sense everywhere in the New Testament—one that is not categorically denied

by any commentator, so far as I can ascertain—is just what the derivation from *κοινός* indicates, *possession in common, participation, partnership*, the same idea being conveyed also by the kindred verb, concrete noun, and adjective. Thus in Luke v. 10 we read of some who were "partners with Simon" (*κοινωνοί*). This is the only place where it is clear that common ownership of this world's goods is signified. But it is worth noting that this was a leading sense, though now obsolete, of the *English* "fellowship." In the arithmetic books for schools that were in vogue (as I well remember) sixty years ago—Joyce's, Bonycastle's, Keith's—may be found rules dealing with "Single Fellowship" and "Double Fellowship," fellowship simply meaning Partnership. Hence it is not improbable that the early translators meant partnership by this word. And possibly it is this association of ideas that led Baxter to say in his note on 1 John i. 6, 7, replying to the question, "Is it not Phanaticism to talk of Fellowship with God, or Communion either?" "Fellowship is too harsh an English word, but *Communion* is the thing meant, consisting in receptive participation from God and accepted returns to God." We learn, however, from Dr. Murray's great work, what Baxter had seemingly forgotten, that "communion" also was sometimes used to signify commercial partnership; for, about 1530, the counsel is given, "Yf thei be merchauntes, dyvision of heritage is bettyr than commvnion."

The concrete noun means a participator, namely, in crime, in Matt. xxiii. 30, where M'Clellan translates, "We would not have been their accomplices in the blood of the Prophets. *Κοινωνός* in Philemon 17 is well explained by Bishop Ellicott, 'a partner,' *scil.* in faith and love and Christian principles generally." Lightfoot's rendering is less happy, "a comrade, an intimate friend," although almost immediately afterwards he adds, "Those are *κοινωνοί* who have common interests, common feelings, common work."

The verb *κοινωνέω* always signifies to *have a share* (as in Rom. xv. 27; 1 Tim. v. 22, etc.), or to *give a share* (as in Rom. xii. 13; Gal. vi. 6). And so the adjective *κοινωνικός* in 1 Tim. vi. 18.

Similarly in every place where any one of these four words is found, the thought intended to be conveyed is that of *partaking* or *causing to partake*.

So Principal Edwards explains *κοινωνία*, in 1 Cor.

i. 9, as "participation in Christ's Sonship." So Bishop Ellicott on Gal. ii. 9 writes, "'Right hands of fellowship,' *scil.* in the Apostolic office of teaching and preaching." So Lightfoot on Phil. i. 5 writes, "Their participation with the Apostle whether in sympathy or in suffering or in active labour or in any other way"; which is substantially Wiesinger's view also. So Bishop Westcott teaches that *κοινωνία* in Heb. xiii. 16 "expresses specially the help of alms," as indeed it does in three other passages—*pace Cremerii dixerim*. "Freely to impart to others" is Dr. Moulton's rendering; "liberality" is Moses Stuart's. On Heb. ii. 14 Dr. Westcott says, "*κεκοινωνήκε* marks the common nature ever shared among men as long as the race lasts." In Acts ii. 42 *κοινωνία* may mean participation in meals and worship (Neander), or communication of money and other supplies for the poor (Mosheim, Kuinoel, Olshausen, Hackett), or possibly the Communion of the Lord's Table, though it is very doubtful whether this use of the word prevailed before the fourth century. In 2 Cor. vi. 14, it evidently indicates common possession. "What in common has light with darkness?" is Thayer's rendering, while strangely enough he cites this as an example of "intercourse, intimacy": surely, *bonus dormitat Homerus*. On the same passage Alford quotes with approval Meyer's remark on the five words there used "to express partnership," this *κοινωνία* being one.

In like manner, if we turn to 1 John i. 3-7, the believers' mutual *κοινωνία* there spoken of as desired or as existing is by no means merely "intercourse" or "intimacy," but, as with curious inconsistency the same lexicon proceeds to explain, "it consists in the fact that Christians are partakers in common" of such and such blessings. And assuredly that is the only sound interpretation. Standing originally on the same footing as sinners, they all share the same redemption; are sanctified by the same indwelling Spirit; partake of the same grace of the Lord Jesus here and the same love of the Eternal Father; participate in (largely) the same hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, temptations and victories; take part in the work for Christ which is the duty and delight of the whole Church; are fellow-soldiers in the same fight against the common foe, and joyfully anticipate a common triumph and the fulness of "the common salvation" in the glory and bliss of the same heaven. Such is the *κοινωνία*, the actual partnership; and upon this

as a foundation *ὁμιλία* may be, and very commonly is, based. What is more natural? And yet the partnership itself is an essentially different thing from conversation about it, however intelligent and edifying and joyous such conversation may be.

And what is the "fellowship with the Father"? Again it means *partnership*, the wonderful and at first scarcely credible fact that the Infinite and Holy One deigns to admit us to a share in His boundless wealth—in other words, in Himself. The writer of Psalm cxix. had a glimpse of this truth when he wrote, "Thou art my portion, O Jehovah"; and so Bengel understands this *κοινωνία* with the Father, *ut ipse sit noster*. Hence, if we are strong, it is with His strength; if wise, it is with His wisdom, given "liberally and without upbraiding"; if holy, it is as "made partakers of His holiness"; if peaceful, it is with "the peace of God which transcends all our power of thought"; if joyful, it is with "the joy of the Lord"; if we love Him, and His people as such and for His sake, it is because He first loved us, and caused us to understand that "God is Love." It is the Father's "unstinted, limitless *giving*," His "gracious, unbounded *self-communication*," which is the secret.

Lastly and briefly, though it is difficult to be brief on such a topic, what is communion with "His Son Jesus Christ"? Let Bishop Pearson answer, "What is the fellowship of brethren and co-heirs, of the bridegroom and the spouse; what is the communion of members with the head, of branches with the vine; that is the communion of saints with Christ." And this participation in Christ is the chief element in "the communion of saints" with one another. Accordingly Pearson writes, referring to Eph. iv. 16, "In the philosophy of the Apostle, the nerves are not only the instruments of motion and sensation, but of nutriment also; so that every member receiveth nourishment of their intervention from the head; and being¹ the head of the body is Christ, and all the saints are members of that body, they all partake of the same nourishment, and so have all communion among themselves." And Principal Edwards, on 1 Cor. x. 16, has the same thought, pointing out that *κοινωνία* there "includes, first, that

¹ *Being*, that is, *it being the case that*, or *inasmuch as*; as often in Pearson, and occasionally in other seventeenth-century writers.

this receiving of Christ" [at "the table of the Lord"] "is the result of a mystical union with Him; and, second, that all that are in union with Christ are thereby brought into union"—Chrysostom's *ἐνοῦσθαι*—"with one another." But the

glorious *fact* of this union, participation, partnership is a widely different thing from the *recognition* of the fact in word or deed, a recognition always and infinitely (in the strict sense of the word) falling short of the fact itself.

The Holy Spirit in Creation.

BY THE REV. JOHN ROBSON, D.D., ABERDEEN.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters."—GEN. i. 2.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made."—JOHN i. 1-4.

It is with the work of the Holy Spirit in redemption that we have chiefly to do. But creation is the basis of redemption; let us, therefore, begin with a study of the work of the Spirit in creation.

We have seen¹ that we need not attempt to explain the work of the one Paraclete apart from that of the other—the work of the Holy Spirit apart from that of Jesus Christ. This is true of their work for man's salvation; it is also true of their work for man's creation. It goes back to the very beginning, to the laying of the world's foundations for the abode of man.

The divine agents in creation are brought before us in the opening of the Book of Genesis, and in the opening of the Gospel of John. The object of John in his Gospel is to speak of Jesus Christ, the Word of God; and so he refers only to His agency in the work of creation. The object of Moses in Genesis is to tell the whole divine agency in that work; so in his narrative we have the work of the Spirit recognised. But he does not ignore the Word of God; he begins his account of each epoch or each day of creation with the words "And God said." We do not find in Genesis the theological fulness that we do in subsequent writers in the Bible; but we do find in it the elements of all that we subsequently learn or deduce regarding the divine agency in creation.

The purpose of the author of Genesis is to teach us that God is the author of creation, not to inform us as to its processes; and he dealt with the story of creation as he had it.

There was an account of creation of the same general character as that in Genesis, current among

the people whom he had to teach, and when Moses was inspired to write his narrative of creation it was with this account that he had to deal. And how would his inspiration teach him to deal with it? To answer this question, we must first answer the question; what was the purpose for which he was inspired? It was to enable him to teach the truth with regard to God, not with regard to the earth—theology not geology. He was commissioned to teach the Israelites to believe in and serve the one living and true God, and only in what bears on that has he the authority of inspiration.

What, then, is the account which we have of the divine action in creation? First, there is the great primal act—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."² Then there is the detailed narrative how out of primeval chaos—waste and void—the earth was brought into its present condition suited for man's abode. And in accomplishing this, two agents are mentioned: "The Spirit of God brooding on the surface of the waters,"³ and at each new stage of creative development the Word of God expressed in the words "God said."

The expression with regard to the Spirit is that used of a bird brooding over its eggs. So the Spirit of God brooded over the waste and void mass which the earth then was, and by His divine energy brought out of it the order and life and beauty which now mark it. Each step in the process is given rather as the development of what was there before, than as the beginning of anything new—as though the elements were there and this power working in them, and only needed definite

¹ See THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for April.

² Gen. i. 1.

³ Gen. i. 2.