

Unity and Diversity

Biblical Models for Partnership

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Published in: Mission Studies, Journal of the International Association of Mission Studies, Vol XIV-1 & 2 27 & 28, 1997

This article is a contribution to the biblical background for the concept of "partnership." It was originally presented as a paper in a consultation organized by the Danish Mission Society (DMS) in cooperation with Arcot Lutheran Church (AIC). Already in 1982--at the first meeting for the DMS-ALC Council of Partners--I had the opportunity to give a presentation on this issue. Part of this material is used again, but it is organized differently, and new insights are added.¹

There are several ways of looking at the Bible for insights on our issue. One way is to look at different stories about sharing. Another way is to look at various concepts which are related to "partnership." Stories and concepts are often intertwined. That is why I am using both methods.

No single Biblical word covers what we mean by "partnership." Many would relate partnership to sharing, but this again is a broad term. In what follows I shall examine some of the most important concepts, e.g. koinonia (often translated "fellowship" or community), covenant, body, holy communion and model.

In the title of this paper, I have used the word "model." It has a dual meaning. First, it refers to the fact that the biblical authors sometimes describe a story as a model for their (first) readers. This applies, for instance, to Jesus who washes the feet of his disciples, an act which is considered to be an example to follow (Jn 13:15). Another example is the Good Samaritan. At the end of the story Jesus says "Go, and do likewise." (Lk.10:37). Also, the fellowship of the first Christians in Jerusalem is seen as a model by the author.

Second, the word "model" can be used to bridge the historical gap between the texts and modern times. In other words, biblical stories and concepts can serve as "models" (paradigms, examples) for us today. They are in some sense normative--not that we just have to repeat what occurred in the first century. The story is a stimulus which helps us to find out what we shall do in our situation which is very much unlike the biblical situation(s). In this way the texts can serve as impulses and inspirations for new thinking.

Often, we think of partnership among Christians. This perspective, however, is too narrow. Our fellowship should be seen within a larger framework as is also indicated by the title of the WCC report on sharing resources: "Sharing Life" (van Beek 1989). This is also in line with the focus on "missio Dei" in recent missiology.

Theological Basis:

God's "Oikoumene" - The One Household of Life

In his contribution to the conference of The United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India in November of 1982, Bishop Dorairaj Peter has rightly emphasized that the primary basis of partnership is with God and God's Son. God wants partnership with human beings; therefore God created man and woman and worked actively with them, and continued in partnership with them also after the fall. God worked towards restoration of humanity to dignity and righteousness. For this purpose Jesus Christ was sent in order to bring people into the framework of the New Covenant and to be part of God's mission to build a new creation (Peter 1982: 1).

The oikoumene of God as the one household of life has become a catchword in recent ecumenical discussion. There is a close relation among ecology, economy and oikoumene. All three words come from the Greek word "oikos" which means "house" or "household." Seen in a theological perspective the three issues all point to the interrelatedness of God's work of creating, reconciling and redeeming. From the perspective of the Biblical traditions oikos can be understood first as the household in which God wants to give people access to life; second, it is the household of creation in which God wants God's creatures to live together in harmony; third, the oikos is the world that God wants to make into a home by establishing divine justice and peace among the peoples and nations.

There are at least two theological reasons for this focus on the "household of God:" First, we have seen a rediscovery of the ancient perichoresis, the fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity in reciprocal interpenetration, as a basic category for discourse about God, for clarifying the relation between God and creation, and for our concept of and the church (Raiser 1991: 92).

The social understanding of the three-in-oneness of God carries forward the social metaphor of the "household of God" and makes it possible to focus it more sharply, for it is not the monarchy of a ruler that corresponds to the Triune God; it is the community of men and women, without privileges and without subjugation . . . a community in which people are defined through their relations with one another and in their significance for one another, not in opposition to one another, in terms of power and possession . . . (Moltmann 1981: 99).

Secondly, there has been a clearer understanding of "ecumenical" as referring not only to the coming and being together of churches, but more biblically to the "whole inhabited earth" of men and women struggling to become what they were intended to be in the purpose of God. Ps 24:1 reads: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world (oikoumene) and they who dwell therein." As Israel's covenant partner God is guarantor of the life ordinances of the household of Israel and of the whole creation. The covenant, the Torah, can be seen as "house rules" for the "house of Israel," the aim of which is to enable all members of the household to live a properly human life (Raiser 1991: 88).

The metaphor "household" also makes sense in the New Testament. It is used several times in the gospels. It is important to see that the liberating presence of God in the proclamation of Jesus should not only be presented in the image of the "reign" or "rule" of God, but also in the form found in the parables of the father of a great household, the host at the feast. Indeed, God the master and owner of the house, takes on in Jesus Christ the form of a servant, a slave in the

household, so as to be close to those who have been excluded from the "house of Israel." The metaphor opens up an understanding of the new status of the children of God: from being slaves and dependents in the house of bondage they become free persons and sons and daughters, members of God's household in their own right. Through the indwelling of the Spirit the community itself becomes a house, a dwelling for God (Eph 2:19ff.; 1 Pet 2:4ff.; Heb 3:11). The house or household structures of the early Christian community as God's extended family is also reflected in the use of the word "oikonomia" (administration of the household, welfare) to describe the principal form of service in the community, and when Ephesians speaks of God's plan of salvation as "oikonomia" (1:9-10), this should ensure that we not quickly forget the concrete care of the divine father of the whole household (Ibid.: 90).²

Models for Partnership

1. Covenant

The first model to be considered is the covenant, a concept which is widely used in the Old Testament, but also known in the New Testament, especially from the Eucharist. According to C. Duraisingh this concept is subversive in at least three ways (C. Duraisingh in van Beek 1989: 79-89).

First, the concept of "covenant" puts a question mark over against a bourgeois understanding of God who gives out of God's plenitude without pain or hurt to self. Instead, the idea of "covenant" insists that sharing life is definitional of God. This God is a God who refuses to play the role of the almighty, the all-sufficient and self-contained. Rather, this God expresses a need for love and for relationship.

Second, those who are involved in the sharing of the covenant are those who are not related to the power scale, not the landed people but the nomads and nobodies' society. Covenant partners with God are those who are at the underside of history.

Third, sharing within the covenant relationship does not dwell upon the movement from a stronger to a weaker partner as we often tend to interpret it. The primary emphasis is rather upon solidarity and total availability of each to the other. If we follow this model, Christian sharing does not mean from the "haves" to the "have-nots." Nor is there room for the language or the mind-set represented in the "donor-receiver" structures we are accustomed to.

There are, however, some weaknesses in this model. A covenant can turn into a contract. The prophets fight against this time and again. Another danger is the introversion of the covenant model in a small community.

2. Koinonia

If covenant is the major Old Testament model, "koinonia" is one of the most important New Testament models.³ The Greek term koinonia, frequently translated "fellowship," occupies a large place in many discussions of Paul's understanding of community. Paul uses the related adjectival noun "koinonos" a few times in the sense of "partner" in a joint activity (1 Cor 10:18ff.; 2 Cor 1:7 and 8:23; Philem 17) and the verb "koinein" five times meaning either

"having a share" in some activity (Rom 15:27; Phil 4:15; see Eph 5:11) or "making a contribution" of a financial or other kind (Rom 12:13; Gal 6:6).

Koinonia itself occurs some thirteen times, but, as with these related terms, the sense of participation in some object or activity is uppermost: for instance, the participation in the Spirit, in someone's faith, in Christ and his sufferings, in the work of the gospel, in financial contribution (see Phil 2:1; 2 Cor 13:13; Philemon 6; Phil 3:10; 1 Cor I :9; Phil 1:5; Gal 2:9; Rom 15:29), but not in the sharing of the people concerned directly with one another. Paul does talk about fellowship with one another in this more personal and intensive sense, but uses other words than koinonia to express it (Banks 1980:61).

The importance of "koinonia" is stressed in the Jerusalem Consultation of 1994:

“However, we realize that our present partnership is far from being satisfactory in view of the biblical concept of Koinonia. Koinonia according to the New Testament teaching is the new life and new fellowship given by the Holy Spirit in Christ. In Christ we are members of one body, bearing one another's burdens and sharing in God's gift of life for all. As recipients of God's gift we are called to participate in the life of each other by sharing Christ's self-emptying love through our own acts of love and sharing. In spite of our sinfulness, the presence of the risen Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit enable us to enter into a new fellowship transcending our selfish interests. This fellowship we experience most deeply at the Lord's table from which we are sent back into the world to be Christ's body, broken and shared for all (Jerusalem Consultation 1994: 3).”

In this statement the importance of the eucharist as well as the body is emphasized, so let us see at each of these concepts.

3. Body of Christ

The body is an organic metaphor which plays a significant role in Paul's letter, especially in 1. Corinthians. Its relation to the covenant-model can be described as follows: "The people of God become the body of Christ. We find the clue in 1 Corinthians 12: The outgoing, sharing Spirit of God constitutes the body and makes it dynamic. If 'covenant' is grounded in the outgoing love of God, the 'body' is grounded in the outgoing Spirit of God" (C. Duraisingh in van Beek 1989: 82-83).

The situation in Corinth drove Paul to see and articulate how the Holy Spirit makes it possible and necessary for the church to handle diversity in a creative manner. In the first four chapters he describes how the community is about to be divided into a number of parties (see esp. 1:10-13). The secular way of viewing division - Paul calls it the "carnal" way (1 Cor 3:1-3) - is to look at diverse teachings as people look at different schools of philosophy and ideology, often named after their teachers, be they Paul or Apollos, Plato or Aristotle, Luther or Marx.

But that paradigm does not apply to the church. Here the right paradigms are God's garden and God's building project where we are co-workers, all to be saved, even if we did not build so well: Or we are God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in us. So the worldly models do not apply. Paul's own model is developed more fully in chapters twelve to fourteen. In addition to the metaphor of the body of Christ he uses the model of "diversity and unity in the Spirit": "There are many gifts, but the same Spirit, varieties of service, but the same Lord, varieties of

actions, but the same God" who activates it all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (1 Cor 12:4-7; see Stendahl 1990).

The church is not just a body, but the body of Christ. And this makes a difference. Thereby this metaphor becomes a liberating metaphor. In the famous passage, 1 Cor 12:13-27 we read:

“Quite the contrary: those organs of the body which seem to be more frail than others are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we regard as less honourable are treated with special honour. To our unseemly parts is given more than ordinary seemliness, whereas our seemly parts need no adorning. But God has combined the various parts of the body, given special honour to the humbler parts, so that there might be no sense of division in the body, but that all its organs might feel the same concern for one another. If one organ suffers, they all suffer together. If one flourishes, they all rejoice together”.

What we see here is a reversal of values: those that are the weakest are to be valued the more. This is in line with the way in which Jesus liberated human beings. Another point to be noticed is the mutuality of relationships within the body: "So that there might be no sense of division in the body, but that all its organs might feel the same concern for one another." In this context we should also notice that the phrase "one another" occurs at least twenty-eight times in various manifestations: "admonishing one another," "bearing one another's burdens," serving one another," etc. (See Lohfink 1984: 99 -106) The key to the whole passage is found in 1 Cor 12:7: "To each is manifestation for the common good" (See Decke 1976: 43-44). Pluriformity is welcomed as long as it serves the fellowship.

In 1 Corinthians the body metaphor is used of one (local) congregation. But in later epistles (Ephesians and Colossians) it is used of the universal church. This allows us to give it a more universal meaning today. Furthermore, the congregation in Corinth is a paradigm not only for the Church but for all human community. If we apply the body metaphor on today's reality it is worth while listening to C. Duraisingh: "Using the body' image, we see that the North has been functioning like the stomach. We know what happens when too much food stays in the stomach for a long time: one becomes ill. The crisis of capitalism is a symptom of a deeper illness, to invest and hold capital will cause the stomach to ache. But it is through sharing that growth and healing take place" (C. Duraisingh in van Beek 1989: 85).

The idea of "bearing one another's burden" is developed a little further in Gal 6:2-5:

“Bear one another's burden, and so fulfil the law of Christ, for if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour. For each man will have to bear his own load.”

Philip Potter has pointed to an interesting paradox in the exhortations "bear one another's burden" and "each one will have to bear his/her own load." The difference lies in the words "burden" and "load". In Greek, “baros” (burden) often means oppressive weight of suffering. It is the state of being overburdened, of carrying an intolerable weight of anxiety, or of sin and weakness, or of physical or mortal pain which tends to crush one and weaken one's humanity, one's capacity to be fully oneself. The word translated load, “phortios” is associated with a ship's cargo or a soldier's equipment. It is the load which one is expected to carry as being proper to one's capacities vocation, tasks and responsibilities (WCC 1980: 30-31). So what Paul is saying

to the Galatians is that fulfilling the "law of Christ" demands that we begin and continue to bear one another's burdens when they are crushing our friends.

Closely related to the model of the church as 'one body' is the model of the church as a 'new humanity'. This is seen from Eph 2:14-16:

"For he is himself our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them; for he annulled the law with its rules and regulations, so as to create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace. This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, on which he killed the enmity" (NEB).

This famous passage reflects on how Gentiles have become the heirs of the covenant of promise and part of the People of God. But the text goes further than that. It describes this "incorporation" - in the full sense of the word, that is "becoming part of the body" - not only as an "addition," but as a creation of a new reality, of a new body and a new person (Eph 2:15), in and by Jesus Christ (Stendahl 1977: 124).

To be sure, these statements of concrete groups (Jews and Gentiles) serve to guard against a false individualizing and spiritualizing of the idea of the body of Christ (See Rader 1972: 208). The joining of the two into "one new" whole shows that neither of the two can possess salvation, peace and life without the other. Jews need Gentiles and Gentiles need Jews. People need people, if they will be saved at all. In other words: the new person is created to be a social being (Barth 1959: 124f.).⁴

Eph 2:14-16 has a parallel in the baptismal formula in Gal 3:28. Justification means reconciliation. And reconciliation does not eliminate diversity. It only unites diverse people: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

The various divisions are of different nature. Unity at the national and cultural level is different from unity at the biological level. And this again is different from what unity implies with respect to social and economic problems. It is my point that social divisions are sinful in contrast to national and biological differences. With reference to the two first pairs in Gal 3:28 it is worthwhile to quote P. K Jewett: they are "not distinctions which enrich fellowship, but division which destroys fellowship by leading to hostility and exploitation - these have no more place in Christ" (Jewett 1975: 14).

The three pairs of Gal.3:28 point to only three of the greatest separations and sources of inequality in the ancient world, but today it would be legitimate to broaden the perspective and say that this baptismal formula implies that all superior-inferior relationships are overcome in the body of Christ (Scroggs 1977: 44).

The reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles can be seen as prototype (or model for the reconciliation of other groups. Gal 3:28 expresses the early Christian vision that all existential divisions are overcome in Christ. This is a theological truth even if the church and even if Paul himself was slow, resistant and hesitant to the full realization and implementation of it. Applied to the contemporary scene, this means that it is the task of the churches to affect reconciliation in all areas of life (Barth 1968: 241f.).

4. The Eucharist

The language describing the church as the body of Christ is also operative in connection with one of the most powerful symbols of sharing and partnership: the 'eucharist' (Nissen 1984: 159ff).

"The bread which we break, is it not a participation (koinonia) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (1 Cor 10:16-17).

The eucharist is "a holistic and costly model for sharing life in community" (Duraisingh). And precisely for this reason the apostle Paul was angry when the Christians in Corinth showed disrespect for this model for sharing. The background is as follows:

At that time the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the context of a common meal. Probably the congregation met in the houses of the wealthier members. It is likely that these members provided the food necessary for the common meal and the Holy Supper. In 1 Cor 11:17-34, Paul seems to indicate that the Corinthians thought that the sacred meal made them participants in Christ. Paul believed this too (1 Cor 10:16). Evidently the Corinthians concluded that since this is the case, it does not matter whether everyone was there or not. Each group enjoyed the sacred meal whenever it was ready.

Paul, however, disagreed strongly: "it is profound misuse of the Lord's Supper that you eat" (11:20). According to Paul, what was being celebrated at Corinth was not really the common meal that united the Christians into one congregation, the body of Christ (1. Cor 11:17). Rather, he insisted, only when persons of diverse social standing become one body, could the meal become a true sign of its unity in Christ (Keck 1976: 98-99).

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded (11:23-25) in order to remind the Corinthians of the significance of the death of Jesus. By saying "you proclaim the Lord's death," Paul tells his readers that to "make Eucharist" is on every occasion to renew one's acceptance of serving love. Christians cannot witness to the charity of the Lord and at the same time maintain the old barriers between poor and rich.

The passage of 1 Cor 11:17-34 throws light on the nature of sharing. Sharing begins at the Lord's table, and "in its beginning, sharing is not a matter of one giving to another, but of all receiving together" (Early 1980: 22).

1 Cor 11 is an example of a physical expression of fellowship. In what follows I shall give other examples.

5. The Societas

A special partnership developed between Paul and the Philippian church, the only church from which Paul received financial support (See Koenig 1985: 71-73; Russell 1981: 49f.). Its regularity derived from the trust that he and his supporters had pledged to one another, a trust that took the form of a Roman trade institution called the 'societas'. This was a contractual agreement by means of which members contributed their property, labor, skill, status, and so on, toward the achievement of a common goal (Sampley 1980: 11-20, 5177). Apparently, Paul's societas came into being during his first visit when the Philippian church was founded:

“And you Philippians yourselves know in the beginning of my preaching of the gospel when I left Macedonia no church entered into partnership (koinonein) with me in giving and receiving except you only, for even in Thessalonica you sent me help once and again (Phil 4:15-16).”

Both sides considered this relationship to be a mutual one: for the Philippians as well as Paul it was a "giving and receiving". What then did the Philippians receive? One obvious answer would be their new life in Christ and the nurturing of it under Paul's leadership. But this is not all. They have a "partnership in the gospel" (Phil 1:5) Which means that they join in the triumphant work of God to redeem the entire world (e.g. Phil 2:5-11; 3:10-17). Their voluntary agreement to support Paul grants them a special status in his work: to be with him in his words and acts and sufferings, wherever these occur, "to advance the gospel" (Phil 4:12-14; i :12).

Furthermore, the partnership has the form of a three-way reciprocity. In Phil 4:17-19 Paul gives expression to the idea that the contractual relationship between himself and the Philippians is really a compact made by both parties with God. The Philippians have sent their gift to Paul, but by virtue of their special partnership in the gospel, they have really sent it to God (see Phil 4:18).

We do not know exactly how Paul and the Philippians entered into this special partnership. The apostle does not believe it to be normative for all congregations founded by him (4:15-16; 1 Cor 9:12-18). It must have appeared to both parties as a charismatic gift/task granted specifically to them (See Rom 12:8).

6. The Collection

Paul's collection for the poor in Jerusalem is described in various passages (1 Cor 16:1-4; Rom 15:24-32; Gal 2:9-10), but most in detail in 2 Cor 8-9. Here it is impossible to deal with all aspects of this "first interchurch aid project" (H.-R. Weber), but I shall make some remarks in relation to 2 Cor 8-9.

First, we can see that the collection is to be inspired by the example of Christ.

For you know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been: he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich (2 Cor 8:9).

The determining factor is always what God has done in Christ. "It is giving that enriches, not keeping! Christ being rich, did not cling to his riches" (Phil 2:6; see Nürnberger 1978:166).

Secondly, in these chapters there is a strong urge towards equalization of income. This point is underlined by the NEB which translates 2 Cor 8:14: "It is a question of equality." The Greek word "isotes" is a key word in the whole passage. The basic idea is that of the Jubilee, the aim of which was distributive justice (Crosby 1977: 156; Sider 1977: 109).

The third thing to notice is that the collection should be done voluntarily (2 Cor 8:2; 9:7). As K. Nürnberger says: "Considering the fact that, not to have makes one happy, but to give and take, i.e. share - is it really so incomprehensible that the Macedonians were begging for the privilege of taking part in this relief work (2 Cor 8:4)" (Nürnberger 1978: 167). Although no orders are given about the extent of individual contribution, the moral pressure on the Corinthians is nevertheless very strong.

Fourthly, it is pointed out that God will supply the needs of human beings. Reference is made to the Exodus account (2 Cor 8:12-15).

It is surprising that in the arguments put forward in 2 Cor 8-9 Paul does not mention the word "money." For him the criterion for helping needy Christians is the manifestation of grace. The collection is seen as the result of the grace of God. The relationship with God should be reflected in relationships with one another. A sharing in Christ leads to a sharing with each other. This is what Paul calls "fellowship" or community (*koinonia*). It is a question of a community which includes both material and spiritual things. A church without this kind of community is no longer the body of Christ; it is spiritually dead.

7. Material and Spiritual Fellowship in Jerusalem

Another concrete example of sharing is the community of Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-47; 4:31-37) The basis for the much discussed "communism" in Acts was redistribution to take care of people's needs. The following points can be made on this fellowship:

First, the practice of the first Christians in Jerusalem could be seen as a step from the economy of having to the economy of giving. This step was inspired by the teaching and ministry of Jesus himself (See Kappen 1977: 87ff.).

Second, this common ownership of goods "reflects at the material level the kind of spiritual communion which should prevail in the Church" (Santa Ana 1977: 40). Furthermore, it is obvious that the transformed economic relationship among these Christians is closely related to "the phenomenal evangelistic outreach" (Sider 1977: 99).

Third, for Luke it makes a radical difference whether people are guided (or controlled) by the Holy Spirit or by the money. Other passages in Acts indicate this difference. In Acts 8:4-25 Luke points out a contrast between the money-making magus (Simon) and the apostle. The magus makes money by trafficking in the supernatural. The apostle has no money. He is poor, but he makes many rich. Thus, possession of the true Spirit of God is accompanied by the readiness to give away money - and the gift of the Spirit itself - freely.

To sum up, in Acts 2 and 4 Luke visualized a community where the members are sharing the common resources. It is an example of how the first Christian community began to practice the Jubilee.

8. Conciliar Fellowship

The distribution of goods to the needy, however, also created problems among the first Christians. According to Acts 6:1-6 a crisis developed between the Hebrews - probably Jewish Christians who spoke Aramaic as a badge of their Jewishness - and the Hellenists (Jewish Christians) who preferred to converse or would only converse only in Greek. The latter group seemed to have a faith that made universalistic claims. There were tensions between the two groups and these came to a head in the failure of sharing the common goods. The Hellenistic widows were neglected in the daily distribution from the common fund.

The conflict between the two groups in all likelihood goes deeper than just economic inequality. There are substantial cultural, and theological differences between the two groups. Some would

even speak of a schism within the first Christian community - between a conservative and a liberal Christianity, the one holding fast to received tradition and the intuiting that traditions need to be revised in light of changing circumstances (See Dunn 1977: 268-275).

However, there is another way of approaching the text. One can inquire about the intention of Luke in reporting the events. Whatever the historical background, did Luke want to depict early Christianity as a kind of "conciliar fellowship"? Such fellowship should then be defined as a form of unity in which the varying types of ecclesial bodies continue to exist side by side in each local situation, fully recognizing one another (See Newbigin 1977: 1 17).

L. Vischer has discussed the text from this point of view. He thinks that Acts 6 provides an example of how conflicts in a congregation are faced and solved at an early stage. If differences are accepted, conflicts can often be prevented. Furthermore, this story indicates that the creation of a new system of representation in many cases can prevent conflicts from becoming extended (Vischer 1974: 10).

The so-called "Council of Jerusalem" in Acts 15 is another example of conciliar fellowship. The interpretation of Acts 15 has pointed to many historical problems. It is unclear whether the text refers to the same incident as Gal 2:1-10. Many scholars consider the two meetings to be identical. But then we must ask why Luke said that the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas and "some men from Judea" over circumcision was unanimously solved at the Jerusalem council when at the same time we hear nothing in Acts of the subsequent confrontation between Paul and Peter at Antioch, a confrontation which Paul considered with the utmost seriousness (Gal 2:11-14; see Dunn 1977: 353).

The conclusion seems to be that Luke wanted to stress the unity to such a degree that some deep divisions are toned down. For us this it is the intention which provides a model for conciliarity. According to Acts 15 "it was agreed that different parts of the one Church, remaining in full communion, would pursue the one world mission along different paths and in different styles" (Faith and Order 1974:6). In this respect conciliarity means "a way of describing a certain kind of church life - at every level, in which a total mutual acceptance is combined with a deep respect for the "otherness" of those who share the same fellowship but fulfill its obligations in different ways" (Ibid.).

9. Criticism of the "rule of reciprocity"

It is natural that partnership discussions are dominated by mutuality. The question, however, is how much it should be dominated by "the logic of equivalence" or "the rule of reciprocity." Reciprocity is a concept which plays a significant role in most social relations today. This was also the case with classical antiquity. Many social relations had the form of patron-client relationship. In this context it is interesting to note that Jesus criticized the widespread "rule of reciprocity."⁵ An example of this is his parable in Lk 14:12-14. This parable is a break with the idea of paying back, and so are many other sayings of Jesus (e.g. Lk 6:30.35). It is especially Luke who stresses this. He warns against seeking consolation in riches by a refusal to give freely without hoping for repayment. The point is, intimates Luke, in letting your riches go, don't hope for more of the same in return (Piper 1979: 157-162). H. Moxnes observes:

To give without expecting a return means to interact in such a way as not to make the recipients one's clients! . . . Patron-client relations were held together by reciprocity within a structure of

great inequality in terms of resources and power. In Luke's "economy of the Kingdom" human beings cannot play the role of a patron in its traditional form. Instead, they are asked to give without restrictions, to redistribute without making the recipients their clients. Similarly, the recipients are not bound in gratitude or loyalty to the wealthy who give them gifts. God is the only patron; consequently God will give rewards, and repay the wealthy for their gifts to others (Moxnes 1988: 157).

This model of economic interaction has important consequences for social relations. It is a form of giving which makes other people free. It does not bind in servitude or gratitude to other people. All gratitude is to be directed towards God.

Education for Partnership

The Bible does not offer a prefabricated model or models for our use. The variety of situations, historical events, sociopolitical factors and ecclesial traditions make it almost impossible to construct a structural model which would fit every type of situation (See Fuliga 198 I:171). The Bible offers instead a variety of models, each of which can serve as an inspiration in our own context. In addition to the models mentioned above one can point to the partnership between Paul and his Hellenistic congregations. The partners were not linked by ties of organization, but rather by common faith and calling. Pastoral visits, exchange of letters of spiritual counsel, mutual intercessions and the occasional provision of a gift or a loving gesture constituted their ecumenical linkage. Let me conclude this reflection on biblical models of partnership with a brief discussion of several themes closely related to our topic.

1. Giver and Receiver

The first point is about the relation between giver and receiver. Is it helpful in our present situation to speak of donors and receivers? In my opinion we cannot omit this language, but we can learn something from the way in which Paul dealt with this problem.

Among rich Christians today much time and energy are used in motivating people to give as much money as possible. It is interesting to notice that this was not the problem for Paul. For him the most difficult thing about the collection seemed to be the question of how the poor in Jerusalem would receive the gifts of their fellow-Christians. Therefore he asked the Roman Christians to pray that this service "might find acceptance" in Jerusalem (Rom 15:31). In fact, the most urgent question regarding this first interchurch aid project were these: how to give without humiliating and without creating dependency and how to receive in freedom without resentment (H.-R. Weber in WCC 1980: 35).

Paul knew very well that money can have a demonic effect. Money can lead to mistrust and suspicion. Then it is not an expression of solidarity. Rather it is an instrument for domination and dependency. This is just what Paul experienced in connection with the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. Therefore he was careful to avoid misunderstandings. The congregations should give voluntarily. They should make their own decisions as to which persons should be appointed as delegates. In short, the money should be an instrument of love, not of power (Vischer 1974: 18).

The basic problem is how to balance self-reliance with sharing. The problem is two-sided. On the one hand the rich (the donor) must recognize that even charity can become an instrument of

sin. All too often the relation between rich and poor has been a one-way street. Such giving only reinforces the dominance of the rich and the dependency of the poor. Furthermore, the donor is protected from making total sacrifice to which Christ is calling his followers (WCC 1980: 18). The poor, on their side, are often reduced to mere receivers. In many cases they are considered to be worth nothing and as having nothing to contribute.

Giving involves the whole person. One of the problems in the aid given by the rich to the poor is precisely that the rich make a contribution without sharing in the sufferings of those who receive. They give their money, but not their hearts. In many cases the poor have more to give than the rich. One example of this is the Christians in Macedonia who in spite of deep poverty were rich in giving (2 Cor 8:1 ff.). The same applies to the widow who is contrasted with the rich people in Lk 21:1-4. And a similar note can be made in relation to the feeding of the multitude, which in fact was a two-fold miracle. As S. Parmar says: "It is indeed a miracle that the multitude was fed out of very limited resources. But the greater miracle is that those who had the original limited resources had the faith to surrender them. We are called to give not only out of our abundance, but out of our scarcity" (Quoted in WCC 1980: 11).

2. Mission and Money

Any relationship between rich and poor churches must deal with the problem of mission and money. Here there is no room to go into depth with this major issue which is closely related to the debt crisis (Bonk 1991). But here are a few reflections.

In the Bible we have a paradigm or vision of great importance: the Jubilee. The Jubilee is a biblical utopia. "a passion for things yet to be," and a critical approach to things "as they are" (Arias 1984: 44). I have already touched upon this concept in my analysis of the collection and of the fellowship of the first Christians in Jerusalem, but are a few additional remarks.

In a story usually entitled "the dishonest steward" (Lk 16:19) Jesus talks about a man who remitted the fruits of usury to the farmers whom he had previously exploited in his own interests. He was not dishonest, because he restored exactly, what in Israel was, strictly speaking, obtained by breaking the law, namely interest on loans. So, the man is not "a dishonest steward," but an "economist of injustice." He was wise because he sought the solution to his problem outside the system of Mammon.

It is in this story that we meet surprising statement: "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon" (Lk 16:9). However, the point is that abundance lies in friendship. The steward does not simply attempt to correct his past, but he now places his hope in a kind of partnership with these poor farmers rather than in Mammon. He looks for his future security not in new accumulation of capital, but in the making of friends.⁶

Any relation between rich and poor must be seen within the context of guilt and blame. The rich are those who can blame others and who also have the means (power, money) to make that blame stick. And the poor are those who are "stuck" with the blame (powerless without money). They become easily the scapegoats of society. In this way the relation between the two partners often becomes a vicious circle of guilt. The only person who can break through this blaming mechanism is Jesus Christ. He the Reign of God, which means forgiveness to those become scapegoats. And he did so by becoming a scapegoat himself, by living in solidarity with those who had "stuck" by that blame (Working Papers 1981: 9-10).

3. Towards the "Oikoumene of Solidarity"

At the beginning of these reflections, I spoke of awareness of the inhabited earth as an interrelated whole. When the one world is experienced as a closed system of domination and dependency, this awareness can be oppressive and paralyzing in its effects. This experience is not new. In the New Testament, particularly in the Book of Revelation there is a critical perception of the imperial oikoumene as a threatening reality.

It has again become relevant today to recall this early Christian insight into the ambiguity of the oikoumene. We are facing two types of oikoumene: the "oikoumene of domination" and the "oikoumene of solidarity" (Raiser 1991:64-65). The first type threatens to make the earth uninhabitable. Here the world is seen as the marketplace where everyone takes care of himself or herself; and the "survival of the fittest" is the rule. By contrast, in the Bible, the principle is the survival of the weakest (Haan 1988: 41). Our task is to support this principle and thereby develop "the oikoumene of solidarity."

The alternative to mistrust and paternalism in the relation between rich and poor is not independence and self-sufficiency; it is interdependence. And interdependence comes with a deeper understanding of unity in Christ. Mission is inseparable from unity, and unity is far more than a question of structures. It has to do with willingness to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep. It has to do with listening, giving and forgiving (R. Padilla in WCC 1980: 44).

Sharing what is necessary to life and standing by one another in solidarity are two of the basic requirements for living in any household or family. The relations between members of the household obey a different logic from that prevailing between social, economic, and political structures: instead of the logic of power and the defense of property, the ruling logic here is the logic of solidarity and sharing (Raiser 1991: 107).

To reach this sharing and solidarity it is necessary to commit oneself to education for partnership. As Letty M. Russell has noted, partnership in the light of the gospel always "draws us together in common struggle and work, involving risk, continuing growth, and hopefulness in moving toward a goal or purpose transcending the group. By definition, partnership involves growing interdependence" (Russell 1981: 29).

Notes

1. See also the ecumenical documents WCC 1980, Nordic 1985, and van Beek, ed. 1989.
2. Within God's "household" economy, ecology and oikoumene are concerned with particular questions. The question of economy is: Will everyone in the household get what it takes to live? The question of ecology is: Will nature be given its rights or must it protest by dying, thereby cutting off the existence of human beings? The question of oikoumene is: Will the world become mutually habitable by the peoples of the earth? Will all people be able to live in the world as a home? See Meeks 1989: 34-35.
3. It might be more correct to speak of koinonia as a concept rather than a model, since the term covers several of the other models. The WCC report "Sharing Life" (van Beek 1989) has a section entitled "A Common Discipline of Ecumenical Sharing" (Ibid.: 36-58). Here the authors

speaking of a call to koinonia and the "model of sharing." It is stated that "perhaps the strongest biblical paradigm of sharing is the eucharist Through this shared communion with Christ we enter into communion with one another. This is what constitutes the Christian community, the koinonia. It belongs to the essence of the church to be a community of sharing" (Ibid.: 41).

4. One should notice that in Eph 2:19-22 we find the multi-faceted metaphorical language of the house and the household. Members of God's household "have access to the Father in the one Spirit" (Eph 2:18).

5. God views reality in a way different from the "logic of equivalence." God's logic is one of excess, generosity and abundance - the "logic of grace." See Russell 1981: 157-162.

6. See Haan 1988: 53-54. A. Paoli says that "without reb man's hands riches become the riches of unrighteousness, and: what he has and giving to the poor becomes an escape. The c the sure test, is to 僧ake friends.' For every decision that does not result in love is wrong at its very root" (Paoli 1973: 149).
