

NOTES ON koinos AND THE koinōn- WORDS IN THE NT

F. Hauck has written a thorough article on the koinos, koinōn-, sunkoinōn- word-group for Kittel's TWNT. The study includes valuable sections on the background of use and connotation of the several words in classical and Hellenistic Greek texts, in Jewish literature of the Hellenistic-Roman period, and in the LXX.

There is no need to repeat Hauck's examples and conclusions here, but it may be well to emphasize two of his findings: There is nothing distinctively Christian about the ideal (expressed particularly in Acts 2.44 and 4.32) of common ownership of goods (pp. 790-796 ET), nor in Paul's concept (1 Cor 10.16-20) of a special kind of communion between a deity and his adherents in a cultic meal (pp. 799-803, 805-806).

Hauck presents three basic definitions for the koinōn-group of words: 1) "to share with someone in something" (pp. 804-808); 2) "to give someone a share in something"--a use Hauck finds to be rare in secular Greek (p. 808); and 3) "fellowship"--an absolute and abstract sense of the word koinōnia (pp. 808-809). His article classifies the NT instances of the word-group under the three definitions provided. The method provides a useful starting-point for study, but it does not adequately account for the extraordinary fluidity and richness of connotation comprehended by the several words. Hauck is aware that one meaning sometimes passes over into another (p. 807). But he does not stress enough the fact that multiple

connotation tends to be the rule rather than the exception, particularly in the undisputedly Pauline use, and that it is often impossible to determine what sense is primary in the context (e.g., in Gal. 2.9 is the deixias koinōnias a sign of concrete partnership, abstract fellowship, doctrinal détente, formal authorization, general solidarity, or material responsibility? Does it include all or some of these meanings? Which are intended, and which if any is primary?).

In the NT writings, ideas of partnership, participation, solidarity, unanimity, reciprocity, mutuality, material and moral responsibility, fellowship, and communion are expressed by the koinos and koinōn- words. The context is almost always parenetic, and under the umbrella of parenthesis hortatory and catechetical motives take turns or share space. It is extremely difficult to do justice in English translation to the range of meanings involved.

The relation of the koinōn- group to a concept of authority is elusive. In no instance in the NT does koinōnia or its affiliates appear in connection with words such as exousia, archē, or episkopē. Questions of authority are at stake in the first two chapters of Gal, but for Paul himself the deixias koinōnias of Gal 2.9 can scarcely have signified authorization at the hands of the "pillars". What the gesture meant to the Jerusalem apostles is an open question, but Paul insists that his authority is directly from God (cf. Gal 1.1;

1 Cor 1.1). The issue of authority is clearer in 2 Cor 8.23, where Paul refers to his agent Titus as his koinōnos; and in Philem 17, where partnership with Paul depends on following his instructions.

In Acts 2.42, a sense of authority may lie behind the phrase tē didachē tōn apostolōn kai tē koinōnia (cf. RSV translation); it is equally possible that tē koinōnia is to be taken by itself (cf. NEB, JB, TEV). In either case, most scholars agree that the section is a Lukan summary, at best an idealized reflection of earlier tradition.

koinōneō does appear in a sentence which includes an injunction about due care in the laying-on of hands in 1 Tim 5.22, where caution and moral probity are urged upon the persona assuming authority.

koinōn- words frequently appear in contexts related directly or indirectly to the content of the Christian proclamation. Instances reflect both beginning and developing stages of a sense of authoritative tradition. Content and koinōnia are quite closely related in Gal 2.9 (Paul's proclamation has been at issue); Phil 1.7 (the Philippians share the tasks of defense and confirmation of the gospel); Phil 2.1 (koinōnia pneumatos issues in unity and agreement); Acts 2.42 (the apostles' teaching precedes koinōnia); Acts 2.44; 4.32 (the believers are unified and have all things in common); Tit 1.4 (Titus is a true child in a common faith); 1 Pet 5.1

(exhortation is based on the dual claim of witness to the past and partnership in the future); 1 Jn 1.3 (the proclamation is the basis of koinōnia); 2 Jn 11 (doctrine sound or unsound is the basis of fellowship); Jude 3 (the "common salvation" bears a content); Rev 1.9 (John's tribulation is the result of bearing the word of God and the testimony about Jesus).

In an extended and less direct sense, the context relates koinōnia to some aspect of doctrinal content in the following instances: Rom 11.17; 15.27; 1 Cor 1.9; perhaps 1 Cor 9.23; 2 Cor 9.13; Gal 6.6; Phil 1.7; 3.10; 2 Pet 1.4. koinōn- words appear in catechetical contexts--as part of the proclamation itself--in 1 Cor 10.16, 18; Heb 2.14; 1 Jn 1.6, 7.

koinos and the koinōn- words very often appear in a context of suffering and tribulation. The redemptive significance of the death of Christ relates to the koinōn- group in 1 Cor 10.16; Heb 2.14; 1 Jn 1.7. Christians participate in the sufferings of Christ in 1 Cor 10.16; 2 Cor 1.7; Phil 3.10; 1 Pet 4.13. Participation in glory is related to witness of and to Christ's sufferings in 1 Pet 5.1. Christians share one another's afflictions in 2 Cor 8.4; Phil 1.7; 4.14; Heb 10.33; Rev 1.9. Blessing is the invariable result of such partnership is suffering. In the contexts of 2 Cor 1.7; Phil 3.10; 4.14; 1 Pet 5.1 a certain authority is imputed by implication to the subject or witness of the sufferings.

Almost half of the Pauline instances of koinos and koinōn- words appear in reference to or in contexts related to material partnership and sharing: Rom 12.13; 15.26-27; 2 Cor 8.4, 23; 9.13; Gal 2.9-10; 6.6; Phil. 4.14-15; cf. 1.5. In 2 Cor 8.4; 9.13, koinōnia is closely related to diakonia.

Paul sometimes emphasizes the voluntary aspect of material sharing (cf. Rom. 15.26; 2 Cor 8.4), but he expects it as a normative response (cf. 2 Cor 9.13), and he avails himself of both authoritarian and persuasive tactics to bring the reluctant Corinthians to participation (1 Cor 16.1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). Like chapel in seminary, care for the material needs of fellow-Christians is obligatory but not compulsory.

It is interesting to note that Paul permitted only the Philippians to subsidize his own ministry.

The material side of koinōnia is present in 1 Tim 6.18, and probably in Heb 13.16. koinos is used to describe the ideal of community of goods in Acts 2.44; 4.32.

The moral demands of Christian fellowship and the necessity of avoiding fellowship with evil are made clear in a number of pareneses: 1 Cor 10.20; 2 Cor 6.14; Phil 2.1; Eph 5.11; 1 Tim 5.22; 6.18; Heb 13.16; 1 Pet 4.13-15; 1 Jn 1.6-7; 2 Jn 11; Rev 18.4. The contexts of the koinōn- words of Rom 11.17 and 1 Cor 9.23 include a certain moral content. And the participation of Christ in human nature (flesh and blood) and human participation in the divine nature (phusis) have moral implications in Heb 2.14-18 and 2 Pet 1.4.

koinōnia has to do with table fellowship in 1 Cor 10.16-21 and Acts 2.42, 44-46. The koinōnia of Gal 2.9 is soon disrupted by an incident involving table fellowship (Gal 2.11ff.).

1 Cor 1.9; 10.16; 1 Jn 1.3 make explicit the implication of virtually all the koinos and koinōn- occurrences: Christ is the basis of Christian fellowship. The Spirit is active in it (Rom 15.27; 2 Cor 13.13; Phil 2.1). It is intimately related to grace (2 Cor 8.4; 13.13; Gal 2.9; cf. Tit 1.4). The Christian is in koinōnia with Christ and his brother, called into that koinonia by God and activated in it by the Spirit.

I remain fuzzy on the relation of koinōnia to authority in the NT except in the broad sense that both koinōnia and authority reside in Christ. koinōnia in the NT has more to do with stance and hope and deeds than with structures of authority.

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