S J
L T

Scandinavian Journal for
Leadership & Theology

2024
volume 11
www.sjlt-journal.com
ISSN: 1894-7875

On the formation of a pentecostal ecclesial identity in light of John Zizioulas' theology of communion

Øystein Udnes
Independent researcher; Ansgar University College

Abstract

This article explores the implications of John D. Zizioulas' theology of *freedom in communion* for the formation of a Pentecostal ecclesial identity. I examine the interplay between divine and ecclesial relations as presented by Zizioulas, considering individuality and communal identity within Pentecostalism. I call for a nuanced exploration of individualism that recognises its complexity, and I suggest that an integrated approach to individuality and communion can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of human identity and freedom within the Christian context. Furthermore, I address how a Pentecostal understanding of the Spirit's participation in ecclesial practices may impact the empowerment of church members, especially concerning spiritual gifts and leadership roles.

Keywords: Trinity, Church identity, Pentecostalism, pneumatology, ecclesiology, church leadership

https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v11.121

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists James Côté and Charles Levine (2016) contend that the narrative of a group's identity is a socially shaped reality, asserting that "when people are interacting with each other in symbol-based, collective activities, a byproduct of their communication with each other is a social construction of reality" (p. 44). Their perspective may also be related to the church, as the congregation, comprising its members, influences its narrative. However, within the context of the church, Côté and Levine's depiction falls short. Scripture and the Spirit's role in constituting and empowering the church provide extra and essential insights into comprehending its identity (Råmunddal, in Jenssen et al., 2017, p. 22). Consequently, theological considerations are needed to be conscious and appreciative of the ongoing formation of an ecclesial identity. In this article, I examine an understanding of trinitarian persons and relations and the possible effects on the development of a modern Pentecostal identity.

Obtaining a unifying Pentecostal identity seems complicated, given the variety and range of Pentecostalisms (Lord, 2012, p. 4; Anderson, 2004, p. 1). However, Pentecostal theologian Wolfgang Vondey (1999) states that there is a "neglect of developing a coherent *identity* of Pentecostalism" (p. 3, his italics). This paper seeks to present outlooks on a particular theology of divine and ecclesial communion that might contribute to the conversation.

Classical Pentecostalism is predominantly grounded on acts of faith, exemplified by what happened at Topeka Campus on January 1st, 1901. The students of Charles Parham were given the assignment to act upon their belief in Acts 2. As a result, many started to speak in tongues, an event regarded by many as the birth of the Pentecostal movement (Menzies & Menzies, 2000, p. 16). Others consider the story of William Seymour and the Azusa Street revival as the beginnings of Pentecostalism (Robeck, 2006, p. 8). In any case, early Pentecostals held together the restoration of the gifts of grace with an expectation of Jesus' imminent return. They aspired to be an authentic continuation of New Testament Christianity, acknowledging a post-apostolic prolongation of supernaturalism and holiness praxis (Archer, 2004, pp. 64, 98). Today, the expectation of Jesus' imminent second coming presumably does not characterise Pentecostalism as it used to (Hegertun, 2017, p. 259). Still, a perception that the church's primary mission is to reach the world with the gospel continues to fuel a Pentecostal ecclesial identity.

Central to a Pentecostal identity is pneumatological ecclesiology, which draws a connection between the Spirit and the church's behaviour and holds that we cannot conceive of communion with God without participating in God's fellowship through the Spirit (Chan, 2011; Hegertun, 2017, p. 146). Consequently, it is the Spirit who makes the realities of God evident in the life of the believer and the church. Correspondingly, Spirit baptism has traditionally been seen as a starting point and one of the main characteristics of a Pentecostal identity (Land, 1993, pp. 39, 82). Pentecostals hold that Spirit baptism is not just for personal edification but also for empowerment to be witnesses to the world (Macchia, 2006, p. 75). However, how Spirit baptism is being understood and explained has changed over the years, exemplified by Pentecostal scholar Terje Hegertun (2017), who claims that there is "no need to pray for a new Pentecost, but rather for a renewed filling of the Spirit already at work by its dynamic existence within the believers" (p. 94). Thus, being filled and equipped by the Spirit seems to epitomise a modern Pentecostal identity more than the initial Spirit baptism with tongues as evidence.

Either way, as mentioned, a Pentecostal identity rooted in pneumatological ecclesiology acknowledges the Spirit's central place in the church's life and ministry (i.e., ecclesial communion). Therefore, inquiries into the Spirit's participation in divine relations could shed

light on how a theology of divine communion impacts a Pentecostal ecclesial identity. Put in other words, the centrality of the Spirit in Pentecostalism gives rise to the following question: *How does an understanding of divine and ecclesial communion potentially affect the formation of a modern Pentecostal identity?*

To consider the above question, I discuss late Orthodox scholar John Zizioulas' views on divine and ecclesial communion. Even though Zizioulas does not represent a Pentecostal tradition, he has contributed significantly to theological discourse, and his outlooks on trinitarian doctrine offer a unique lens through which to examine a Pentecostal identity. Rather than suggesting a Pentecostal identity, this article aims to relate inferences from Zizioulas' theology to Pentecostal selfhood. Zizioulas goes deep into the intricacies of divine and ecclesial persons, nature, and relations, and therefore, I find his perspectives relevant to the task.

Protestant theologian Miroslav Volf (1998) and Pentecostal scholar Steven M. Studebaker (2012) delve into Zizioulas' understanding of the person of God and communion in ways that may shed light on an evolving Pentecostal identity. Therefore, I will engage with their assessments. First, I present Zizioulas' theology of trinitarian communion and how he relates this to human nature and relations. Then, in my critique, I discuss implications of Zizioulas' *human freedom in communion* for the formation of a Pentecostal identity and suggest that human freedom starts individually and finds its place in the community. Next, I consider how an understanding of the *individual in communion* may inform a Pentecostal identity and, subsequently, Pentecostal church practices. Finally, I comment on the relevance of the Spirit's constitutional role in the Trinity and the church for Pentecostal pneumatology.

ZIZIOULAS' PRESENTATION OF DIVINE AND ECCLESIAL COMMUNION

Late Metropolitan John Zizioulas (1931–2023) is regarded as one of the most influential and well-known scholars of the contemporary Orthodox church. He is also highly appreciated for his ecumenical work bridging Eastern and Western faith traditions (Fox, 2001, p. 5). In his books *Being as Communion* (1985) and *Communion and Otherness* (2006), Zizioulas presents philosophical and theological perspectives on divine and human persons and communion.

Divine communion, as depicted by Zizioulas, is characterised by otherness (diversity) and togetherness (unity) (Knight, 2007, p. 1). By divine otherness, Zizioulas means that the Father, Son and Spirit are ontologically different from each other; they are unique identities (2006, p. 121). At the same time, Zizioulas (2006) holds that since the Trinity is ontologically relational, divine otherness is "*constitutive* of unity, and not consequent upon it" (p. 5, his italics). Accordingly, diversity within the Godhead abides in perfect communion with no conflicting interests.

In his writings, Zizioulas deals with aspects of trinitarian communion and their significance for ecclesial relations. He maintains that God's communion on earth, the church, is a reflection of divine communion and that the origin and measure of human otherness are the divine persons. Diversity and unity within the Godhead warrant human participation in the community through difference, Zizioulas holds (Knight, 2007, p. 2). Thus, to appreciate ecclesial diversity, one must first understand the correlation between otherness and communion in the Trinity. Thereupon, Zizioulas asserts that divine freedom (otherness) and communion (togetherness) is a model for human freedom and communion. More on this below.

One of Zizioulas' primary concerns is that human freedom is found only in communion. He offers that freedom is "not simply 'freedom of will'; it is the freedom to be other in an absolute ontological sense" (2006, p. 11). Thus, being *other* is part of being oneself. However, otherness must be qualified with communion, according to Zizioulas. Otherwise, it cannot generate a satisfactory culture; instead, it will engender individualism, with which people will not be fully happy (2006, pp. 13–14). Zizioulas ascribes individualism to the *Fall of man* and sees it as a person's need to separate from the community based on fear of the other. Furthermore, he suggests that fear of the other is a reality experienced in the church and argues that freedom is enabled, not restricted, by relationships with others—i.e., people who are uniquely different from one another (2006, pp. 1–3). Accordingly, Zizioulas (2006) holds that the Spirit's incentive is not to commission good, individual Christians but rather to create "an event of communion, which transforms everything the Spirit touches into a *relational* being" (p. 6, his italics). Thus, the freedom to be other is substantiated by the freedom to be relationally united in a community.

Classical Greek philosophy held that the divine nature, or essence, precedes the person of God, and some of the early church fathers adopted this thought (Zizioulas, 2008, p. 52). Consequently, within this view, God the Father is God because God the Father shares in divine nature. Likewise, the Spirit of God is God because the Spirit shares in divine nature. Contrarily, the Cappadocian fathers argued that the person of the Father causes God to be, not divine substance (Fox, 2001, p. 39). Therefore, the Cappadocians gave the divine persons ontological priority over essence or nature.

Following in the footsteps of the Cappadocian fathers, Zizioulas attempts to reverse the idea that nature precedes person. More so, rather than attributing existence to substance, Zizioulas ascribes existence to the will of the Father and advocates that the Son and the Spirit both proceed from the Father's will (1985, p. 41). In this sense, Zizioulas adheres to an Eastern theology that upholds the monarchy and primacy of the Father in trinitarianism (Zizioulas, 2006, p. 6; Kärkkäinen, 2002, p. 68; Studebaker, 2012, pp. 103–105, 128).

Zizioulas (1995) approves of the Cappadocian contribution mainly because of its "radical reorientation of classical Greek humanism, a conception of man and a view of existence" (p. 44). He bounces from the Cappadocian fathers' philosophical anthropology to defend a doctrine of the Trinity, which holds that the divine person is not secondary to God's being or nature (Volf, 1998, pp. 76–77). Therefore, the Spirit and the Son are defined by their relation to the Father as a person, not by their relation to divine substance. Contrarywise, unlike God, creation is limited by time and space. Consequently, Zizioulas holds that human nature is ontologically prior to personhood (2006, pp. 56, 166). Furthermore, Zizioulas contrasts the divine persons with created nature, suggesting that human freedom is freedom from nature and likeness with the divine persons (2008, p. 69). Thus, the task of humanity, as the image of God, is to be free from the necessity of nature since God is ontologically a person.

Another theological perspective offered by Zizioulas, which deepens his view on *otherness in communion*, is his understanding that *being* and *relation* are simultaneous; one does not precede the other (Knight, 2007, p. 2). In the same way as the person of Jesus Christ exists in inseparable communion with the Father and the Spirit, an individual of the church exists not separately from but simultaneously with the church's communion. Zizioulas (1982) names this as one of the fundamental paradoxes of Christology and pneumatology; "in him the One become Many and the Many becomes One" (p. 342). The one cannot exist without the many and vice versa, which is the basis for Zizioulas' idea of "the One and the Many" principle (1982, p. 68). Thus, Zizioulas (2007) holds that personhood is essentially relational and "cannot exist without communion" (p. 18).

Zizioulas' perception that personhood is principally relational resonates with late Catholic scholar Joseph Ratzinger's conception of the divine person as pure relation (2004, p. 187). Ratzinger, in addition, differentiates between divine and human personhood and claims that God as a person *is* relation; however, relation is added to humans (2004, p. 129). Discussing Zizioulas' theology of communion, systematic theologian Douglas Knight claims that Zizioulas never suggests that person is relation (2007, p. 4). However, Catholic scholar Patricia Fox understands that for Zizioulas, Christology without ecclesiology is inconceivable (2001, p. 80). Zizioulas (2010) himself states about Christ that if the church "disappears from his identity he is no longer Christ, although he will still be the eternal Son" (p. 300).

A CRITIQUE OF ZIZIOULAS' THEOLOGY OF FREEDOM IN COMMUNION

In this section, I discuss Zizoulas' understanding of divine and ecclesial communion and its implications for the formation of an ecclesial identity. Firstly, I question Zizioulas' theological sentiment against individualism and suggest that there are ways to legitimise a positive use of the term. Secondly, I look at consequences of correlating divine persons and relations, as Zizioulas does. Thirdly, I discuss Zizioulas' way of reducing human nature to something to be redeemed from in order to become more like God.

Human freedom in communion

In considering Zizioulas' notion of *human freedom in communion*, I begin by looking at his view on individualism. In many ways, the term has become an obstacle in today's society, a portrayal of the postmodern claim to focus on *me first*, then the collective. Zizioulas' understanding of human freedom in communion conceivably explains his bickering with a more Western conceptualisation of what may be called *individual faith*.

Admittedly, a predominantly individualistic approach to faith practices can reduce the church to a self-help institution where it is all about the needs of the individual. Contemporary Western Protestant theologians, such as Jürgen Moltmann (1992), affirm that God is not experienced merely individually but "socially too, in the encounter with others" (p. 220). Moltmann also asserts that it is the Spirit who calls and gives new life to the individual (cf. John 3:3–8) and that the believer overcomes sin and is empowered by the personal experience of the Spirit's power. However, the individual and social experience of God must not be turned into opposites; they are two sides of the same experience of life, Moltmann holds (1992, p. 221).

On that account, the personal experience of the Spirit cannot be viewed in isolation as something to benefit the individual only. Personal transformation and empowerment must, therefore, be understood eschatologically too, as God's way of preserving his people to reach the goal, which is heavenly glory (cf. Phil 3:14), while also equipping believers to complete the task given to the church, which is "the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace" (Acts 20:24).

Similarly, systematic theologian Clark Pinnock points out that faith is not only expressed individually, in the believer's heart, but needs a public witness (1996, pp. 116–117). Associate professor Lars Råmunddal states that the modern Western church tends to relate to God's word in a rather one-sided individualistic way, more concerned with personal edification

than the empowerment of the saints as a collective (in Jenssen et al., 2017, p. 46). Likewise, seeing the church as a collective and a community that grows, more than just emphasising individual growth, is a necessary perspective that has been marginalised, according to professor of practical theology Olav Skjevesland (2005, pp. 38–39). Thus, on the word of the above-presented perspectives on individual and communal faith, it is easy to agree with Zizioulas when it comes to the God-willed movement, through redemption, from separation to relation.

Nonetheless, it is viable to look at individualism also from a sociological and a historical point of view—not just theological. Sociologist Peter Berger sees booming individualism as a consequence of the secularisation of society, which by many is considered to be a result of the emergence of classical modernity during the 18th and 19th centuries through new technology, bureaucracy, and capitalism (Bruce, 2002, pp. 88, 94). Some sociologists of religion understand a modern interest in religion and spirituality as a "function of choice within a range of 'marketplaces', both material and conceptual" (Clarke, 2009, p. 694). Thus, more individual freedom may have boosted the growth of religious pluralism in the modern world. Church historian Ingunn Breistein (2003) contemplates whether religious pluralism in the age of modernity is a leading cause of secularisation. She concludes that pluralism does not necessarily lead to a decline in faith practices or privatisation of faith. However, the introduction of modernity "meant secularisation in the sense that the Christian religion lost its position as the centre of the social system" (Breistein, 2003, p. 42, my translation).

Traditionally, religious norms affected all levels of society, which, in a positive sense, created stability and predictability for the individual in its context. At the same time, the prevailing structures of societal communication/interaction limited the individual's freedom (Redfoot, 1986, p. 107). The modernisation of society can be said to have weakened these structures, leading to liberation from previous norm-setting social and ethical standards. The consequence was individual freedom detached from traditional moral principles. Thus, the modernised society presupposed individual choice previously determined by fate since destiny was being transformed into decision (Berger, 1979, p. 16).

When society is less bound by doctrinal and moral requirements and faith practices, more people will be inclined to challenge beliefs they once were expected to have. At the same time, this newfound individual freedom brought "a sense of disorientation and loneliness" (Berger, 1983, p. 179). Therefore, it may seem that an individualisation of faith led to a detachment from the Christian community. Such separation may have caused more people to be less concerned with the church and its significance than before, except perhaps on big occasions or in difficult times.

The above perspectives on individualism do not contradict Zizioulas' theological explanation of *human freedom in communion*. His position may even be strengthened by viewing individualism as a result of secularisation. However, Zizioulas' stance may give incentive to why people decide to part from the religious community since a flip side of his understanding can result in restraining human freedom. If the church community is *the* way to experience freedom, and the community (that is, its leaders and dominating culture) fails to recognise and embrace diversity (otherness) and instead imposes uniformity, the theology of freedom that Zizioulas posits may as well confine freedom rather than endorse it. In essence, a theology of human freedom kept within the bounds of the community (albeit unintended by Zizioulas) can inadvertently enable abuses of authority and the exercise of social control.

To avoid such adverse outcomes, we may add another perspective to Zizioulas' notion about freedom in communion, one that acknowledges self (the individual person) relating to the community. Correspondingly, I move from a sociological approach to understanding the advancement of individualism to an anthropological outlook on identity formation.

French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1992) states that the "genuine nature of narrative identity discloses itself, in my opinion, only in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness" (p. 140). According to Ricoeur, the interaction between the self and the community (in this context, the church) shapes our identity. Based on Ricoeur's twofold, yet concurrent, understanding of identity formation (Ystad, 1999, p. 183), embracing individualism grounded in a legitimate (theological) need to reunite with and understand *imago Dei* in a person's life seems plausible. Consequently, a distinction between individualism as egoism and individualism as realism could be obtainable, the latter understood as recognising a reality that exists (Lilleåsen, 2017, pp. 146–161).

On the one hand, realism pertains to a revelation, or discovery, of redeemed human nature: the new person (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:9–10; Rom 12:2). Realism, then, becomes an acknowledgement that *I* (that is, every human being) is created in the image of God, different, unlike any other, with unique attributes, personality traits and character. Such acknowledgement resembles well with Zizioulas' understanding of divine and human otherness.

Egoism, on the other hand, becomes the individualistic need to put *self* in the centre, without God, which is an expression of the desire of the unredeemed person to free *I* from the significance of the collective and also from God. From this perspective, realism does not reinforce the individual's discharge from their context (community); instead, it reassures the constitution of everyone's true self. Consequently, in my view, it should be possible to approach individualism in a way that serves the common good (cf. Tangen, 2012, pp. 32–33).

All of the above suggests that a one-sided approach to a complex matter may lead to drawing conclusions that narrow our understanding. Individualism can be what Zizioulas says it is; however, it can also be a gateway to seeing individuals for whom God created them to be: important individual members of a greater collective whole. When *self* finds its place in communion, individualism need not threaten the values and purposes of the community, but rather, it may bring strength to it through diversity (cf. Archer, 2020, pp. 41–43). However, if self finds its place only in communion, as Zizioulas bespeaks, individual needs, gifts and callings can diminish and be constrained for the sake of the community.

Person and relation

Next, I consider how Zizioulas harmonises person and relation. Studebaker problematises Zizioulas' view of the ontologically relational God as a person, particularly when the Father is regarded as the source of the other two members of the Trinity. According to Studebaker (2012), a relational Trinity characterised by reciprocity implies that "the identities of the Son and the Spirit cannot be informed primarily in their "ontological derivation" from the Father because such a status is decidedly nonreciprocal and thus nonrelational, at least in an interpersonal sense" (p. 133). Studebaker asserts that nonreciprocal personhood cannot lead to dynamic and reciprocal interpersonal relationships. Thus, aligning ontological monarchic personhood with mutual relations appears implausible.

Also, if personhood coincides with relation, as Zizioulas indicates, then fatherhood assumes primacy within the Trinity, with God the Father carrying ontological precedence. As previously mentioned, Knight might argue that such interconnection of person and relation misinterprets Zizioulas' theology. However, if Christ ceases to be Christ without the church, Zizioulas' integration of person and relation may be perceived as instructive for ecclesial relations in a way that limits an unfolding of the otherness he emphasises. One consequence may be that church leaders and members conform to and imitate an ontologically relational God in a manner that grants leaders ontological authority over church members.

Accordingly, Volf (1998) holds that if we define personhood merely as relation, it may cause us to think that a person exists *only* in relation to others. Therefore, Volf (1998) suggests that the trinitarian persons must also be conceived as subjects, meaning that the work of God is "not to be attributed to the one undifferentiated divine essence, but rather proceed from the divine persons" (p. 205). Referring to Moltmann (1993), Volf argues that person and relation are complementary, and none precedes the other (1998, p. 172).

On the one hand, Volf seems to consent to Zizioulas' presentation of *otherness in communion*. He, like Zizioulas, understands ecclesial personhood as an image of divine personhood. Volf (1998) affirms a similarity between divine and ecclesial personhood: "Like the divine persons, so also ecclesial persons cannot live in isolation from one another" (p. 206). On the other hand, Volf distinguishes between the ontologically communal God and the ecclesial community, which is by will and covenant. Thus, as ecclesial persons, human beings exist in communion with the church and God by the will of God and our free participation in this communion. Another distinction Volf makes is the mutual interiority within the Trinity (perichoresis) as subjects, which is impossible with human persons, as one person can never indwell another person as a subject (1998, pp. 210–211). Also, God's otherness is reinforced by his ability to indwell human persons as subjects, which is not reversible (although Zizioulas might contest such a notion from the standpoint of *theosis*, as discussed by Kärkkäinen, 2004).

Studebaker questions Volf's separation of what the persons are from their personal identities (2012, p. 135). However, if person and relation are seen as complementary, as Moltmann and Volf suggest, fatherhood is not *the* defining ontological quality of divine personhood. Thus, when understanding the church as mirroring trinitarian relations, it is legitimate to say that the church is to reflect the reciprocal communion of love that describes divine relations. Consequently, church structure should not be seen as a manifestation of the person (i.e., the body of Christ) but rather as a way of organising the church (Migliore, 2004, p. 255; Volf, 1998, p. 240). This has implications for our understanding of the indisputable value of a human person, regardless of contribution or participation in a church community.

Person and nature

Following the above considerations, I now elaborate on Zizioulas' distinction between person and nature. Zizioulas contextualises the earlier-mentioned Cappadocian contribution in a way that helps us understand the ideas they were fighting at the time. Zizioulas' settlement with the classical idea that nature precedes person is appreciable. When God's person is highlighted, the nature of God, described in terms of substance (*ousia*), is of less significance (Wilks, 1995). Therefore, what matters in understanding the identity of the church—as it is created in God's likeness—is the person of God, who does not exist in isolation but in relation. Zizioulas' emphasis on the relational God is a valuable contribution to trinitarian doctrine, and it helps us relate to God as a person and not merely metaphysically as a being or substance.

Nevertheless, Zizioulas sees trinitarian relations as asymmetrical; therefore, church relations must also be asymmetrical (Volf, 1998, p. 78). It is reasonable to suggest that Zizioulas' theology of the Trinity and his anthropology are built on a patristic *Weltanschauung*, a point of reference based on societal structures and theological perspectives prevalent at the time of the church fathers and later (McGrath, 1990, p. 86). Thus, when Zizioulas argues that an ontological hierarchy within the Trinity is transferable to church relations, this tells the leaders and members of a congregation that church hierarchy is God-ordained (Udnes, 2023). Consequently, members of a particular church may be inclined to accept that their leaders have the authority to make and implement decisions without their consent.

Furthermore, Zizioulas posits that since humans are created, human nature is ontologically prior to personhood (2006, p. 166). Within this presumed tension between God's person and human nature, Zizioulas attempts to bring light to the field of soteriology by using anthropological terms. He asserts moral attributes to created human nature by holding that *nature* is less than *person* and something to be *freed* from to become like God, who is person-relation (Adkins, 2023, p. 14; A. Torrance, 2020, p. 30; on deification (*theosis*), see Lossky, 1974, 1997). Hence, Zizioulas (2008) gives the impression that created nature is something to be rescued from (i.e., transformed from) and holds that only as a person can a human being "become a person in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity" (p. 69). This notion is intriguing yet perplexing, equating human nature with sinful nature.

Conceivably, Zizioulas seeks to clarify that original sin corrupted created nature, thus necessitating redemption for human nature. A noteworthy implication of Zizioulas' contemplation is that human nature is not good. However, our only nature is the one God created, and "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). According to Genesis 1:26, God made human beings in his image, in his likeness. The Hebrew word for image (*tselem*) comes from a root word meaning *shade* and is translated as *representative figure* or *image*. The word likeness (*demûwth*), used in the same verse, means *resemblance, model, manner,* or *similitude* (Strong's numbers 1823, 6754).

Moreover, God gave humans a physical body and breathed into them the breath of life (Gen 2:7). Therefore, our whole being is created by God. He did not make our bodies a shell to put his image in (Pannenberg, 1994, pp. 206–207). The breath (*neshâmâh*) of life can be translated as *soul* and *spirit* (Strong's number 5397), indicating that God imparted some of his manner and character into the human soul and spirit.

After God had created male and female, he blessed them and said: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). Genesis 2:15 states that Adam was to work and care for the garden. This mandate to reign and care for God's creation expands our areas of responsibility to include our immediate surroundings and the earth we live in (cf. Jakobsen, 2024). Consequently, humans are given dominion over creation, but the authority given comes with responsibility (Milne, 1982, p. 100). Systematic theologian Emil Brunner calls this responsibility *restricted freedom*, as the freedom humans possess is meant to respond to God and glorify him (1953, p. 56).

Without delving into the debate over whether human nature is entirely or partially depraved due to the Fall, I maintain that a sinful person can still respond to God's universal grace (on Arminianism vs. Calvinism, see Olson, 2006). Consequently, broken humanity is being restored and reconciled with God-imparted human nature through redemption and sanctification. Therefore, in my view, the tension is not between created nature and the person of God, but rather a sinful person with a human nature who needs salvation from sin and death that hinders a relationship with God (cf. Farrow, 2007, pp. 121–122).

When created nature is understood as something to be liberated from, so that a human as a person can relate to divine personhood; this can lead to the notion that congregants' performance—what they achieve—is more important than just being present in the church community. The consequence can be an expected loyalty, where church members assume they must contribute to feel valued (Udnes, 2023). Thus, when human nature is seen as less than personhood, as Zizioulas postulates, it can lead to existentialism (A. J. Torrance, 1996, p. 290). If congregants understand themselves and the church community through the lens of roles and achievements rather than just who they are as created beings, this may also be a concern for the modern Pentecostal church in developing a church identity—more on this in the section below.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FORMATION OF A PENTECOSTAL ECCLESIAL IDENTITY

In what follows, I relate Zizioulas' theology of divine and ecclesial communion to the development of a Pentecostal identity. I do so by comparing Zizioulas' understanding of how the Spirit participates in the Father's will with how the church partakes in divine will. Then, I discuss possible implications of Zizioulas' coherence of divine person and relations for ecclesial relations and participation in a Pentecostal church context. Finally, I give some attention to how a Pentecostal identity can be strengthened by a pneumatological ecclesiology that recognises the participation of the Spirit in all areas of congregational life.

As presented, Zizioulas affirms the relational Trinity—a divine communion of love. The Father wills the church; however, the church is instituted by Christ and constituted by the Spirit, Zizioulas holds (1985, pp. 132, 136, 140; cf. Kärkkäinen, 2002, p. 110). Accordingly, the constitution of the church is not merely an event of the Spirit but a trinitarian event in which the Father, the Son and the Spirit participate. In this way, Zizioulas brings the Father and the Son 'closer', so to speak, to the birth and preservation of the church than some of the other defenders of a hierarchical Trinity do.

Furthermore, Zizioulas insists that the Spirit proceeds from and shares in the free divine will of the Father, a characteristic which, for Zizioulas, qualifies the Spirit as a divine person (1985, p. 41**)**. Thus, Zizioulas attributes hierarchy to divine persons and their relations. A consequence is that although the Spirit (as an ontologically divine person constituting and preserving the church) shares in the Father's will, the Spirit is still subject to the Father.

However, it seems contradictory that the Spirit shares in the Father's will and is subordinate to it (cf. T. F. Torrance, 1996, p. 186). Some would claim this is not a contradiction and that the Spirit can partake in the Father's will and still abide or submit to it. Systematic theologian Wayne Grudem supports such a view when he argues that:

> There has been eternally a unique role that belonged to the Father, a role that included activities of initiating, planning, originating, directing and having primary authority, and that the Son and the Spirit always fully agreed with these directives and, when the appropriate time came, willing and joyfully carried them out. (Grudem, 2012, p. 224).

Allegedly, Grudem emphasises that the Father is the initiator, and the Spirit (and the Son) agrees and carries out the Father's plan. However, his perspective appears inconsistent with the concept of perichoresis, wherein the Spirit is understood to indwell the deity with the Father and the Son. Pertinent queries arise: If the Spirit shares in the divine will, what necessitates the Spirit's concurrence with the Father? If, as Grudem postulates, the Spirit fully partakes in and willingly submits to the will of the Father, at what juncture should we deem the Spirit equally engaged, and when does the Spirit assume a subordinate position to the Father's will?

The lack of coherence in Grudem's claim becomes clear when divine communion is compared to ecclesial communion. As presented, Volf (1998) asserts that divine persons differ from humans because mutual indwelling is restricted to the deity. Since no created person can indwell another, a person is separated from others in a way that does not apply to the Trinity. Volf's point draws attention to the following question: How can the church relate to the Spirit as the one who constitutes and preserves the church if the Spirit shares in the Father's will and yet is subordinate to it?

One way of approaching the above questions is to consider how the church participates in God's will (Eph 4:24; Rom 12:2). A Pentecostal theology holds that the church partakes of the eternal life of the Godhead through faith in Jesus Christ and his righteousness and the baptism and sanctification of the Spirit (Rom 3:22–26 and 8:2–11; cf. Kay, 2009). However, suppose the Spirit's realisation of divine will in believers is understood to be an act of obedience of the Spirit to the Father's will, as Grudem implies. In that case, the church presumably assumes a trinitarian hierarchical order, where the Spirit administers and distributes divine will to the church (cf. Zizioulas, 2008, pp. 132, 149–150).

A potential concern is that a perceived allocation of divine will might be regarded as disproportionately influential or elevated within the hierarchy of church leadership. The assumption that leaders are closer to God—or more connected to God's will—may arise. Such perception may cultivate a sense among congregants that they are less mature when it comes to partaking in divine communion. Furthermore, when church leaders are understood to be the propelling authority, it can reinforce the idea of the unassailable leader. This is an issue that ought to concern the Pentecostal church as it seeks to shape a contemporary ecclesial identity.

Moreover, a doctrine of the Trinity that understands divine relations as asymmetrical and hierarchical presumably shapes how the church views the Spirit's participation in ecclesial practices. Zizioulas (2006) maintains that the church's ministry "involves *charismata* of the Spirit, and *charisms* involve variety and diversity" (p. 8, his italics). Thus, different church members represent different gifts and ministries. Zizioulas does not emphasise a hierarchical order of spiritual gifts, yet he points to the bishop's authority to protect ecclesial unity. The church cannot exist without the bishop, Zizioulas holds, and there should be only one bishop in each church, ensuring that diversity of gifts and ministries does not lead to division and independence (2006, p. 8). Consequently, Zizioulas assumes a high degree of responsibility on the bishop to maintain unity in the church and govern the church's charismata.

Transferred to a Pentecostal church context: an agreed-upon ecclesial understanding (i.e., a church identity) that sees leadership (particularly the senior pastor) as administers and governors of charismata can give the impression that congregants are less capable of being led and equipped by the Spirit to minister in and through the church. To avoid such a dichotomy of empowerment, the endorsement in Ephesians 4:12, "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up," should be applied in light of Paul's consideration: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm" (2 Cor 1:24).

The above consideration does not exclude the need for guidelines and leadership that set healthy boundaries for church practices. As mentioned, organisational structure and leadership involvement are necessary to organise church life. However, as professor of leadership Jan Inge Jenssen (2018) points out, leadership style and structure need to be flexible, and the goal is "to create a climate or culture that encourages people to discover their gifts and create spaces or arenas for developing and practising a variety of gifts, including the development of leadership skills" (p. 12). Thus, when overseeing charismata in a broader sense (not just implying charismatic gifts), leadership has authority; however, this authority comes with a responsibility to care for the church (see the earlier-mentioned remark that Adam was appointed to tend the garden).

Now, to the connection between divine and ecclesial relations and how it influences congregational perceptions of authority and participation in the church. Volf, as demonstrated, asserts that the divine persons and relations are complementary, signifying trinitarian unity. Therefore, we may say that the Trinity exists as distinct persons. However, since their relation conditions the Trinity as three persons and vice versa, they are, in essence, one God.

If personhood and relation are simultaneous, as Zizioulas holds, God the Father *is* fatherhood, and consequently, he is superior to the Son and the Spirit. However, when existing as Father (person) *and* fatherhood (relation), as Volf suggests, God the Father remains distinct yet unified with the other two members of the Trinity. Compared to ecclesial relations, a person remains an individual in solitude; however, they are fulfilled in communion with others. Thus, it is essential to value and care for individual needs as well as collective objectives. If not, a Pentecostal congregation, when characterised by vision-bearing leadership and servant-willing church attendants, risks that congregants stop considering their own needs in different seasons of life and go too far in maintaining a *whatever-it-takes* mentality. Therefore, a Pentecostal identity influenced by collectivism (in contrast to individualism) could diminish the individual congregant to a task-oriented participant rather than a uniquely created and gifted person who contributes through their presence and involvement in the Christian community.

Closing the discussion of this article, I briefly comment on how pneumatology relates to church practices and missiology. A Pentecostal tradition with roots in pneumatological ecclesiology acknowledges the Spirit's central place in the constitution and the life and ministry of the church (Chan, 2011). In this manner, Eastern theological tradition, including Zizioulas' pneumatology, resonates with a Pentecostal understanding of the crucial role and participation of the Spirit in and through the church (cf. Kärkkäinen, 2002, p. 110).

Volf (1998) maintains that the gathered community of believers is not a human substructure or construct in which the Spirit occasionally operates; rather, the Spirit indwells the church. With this in mind, suppose the church assumes congregational authority to allow or not allow the Spirit to participate in the church's life and ministry. If so, such a notion can constrain the Spirit's activity in the congregation (Udnes, 2023, p. 76).

Studebaker (2012) seems to contradict the above conjecture by arguing that the "Spirit's eschatological role in the biblical drama of redemption suggests that the Spirit has a constitutional role in the immanent Trinity" (p. 95). Thus, he holds that the immanent Godhead becomes a trinitarian fellowship in the person of the Spirit. Studebaker's bold claim opens a more extensive discussion. Nevertheless, a Pentecostal theology of the Trinity that acknowledges the Spirit's constitutional role in divine communion reinforces a Pentecostal commitment to the constitutional role and continuing participation of the Spirit in ecclesial communion.

Another question to consider is whether gifts of grace, as a characteristic of pneumatological ecclesiology, are linked to individual and collective needs to a greater extent than before and not as much to the church's missional purposes. If so, it may be due to a contemporary Pentecostal belief that the sense of urgency is not as strong as it was in the past (Hegertun, 2017). Also, it could be a consequence of the modern church's commitment to communicating the gospel in ways that are perceived to be relevant to people who are not used to being in church (Carson, 2005; Kyle, 2018). Thus, practising spiritual gifts (esp. revelatory gifts, i.e., tongues w/interpretation, prophetic words, and words of knowledge) may be toned down in church settings with non-believers present.

The latter observation may be connected to the advancement of modern Western Pentecostal churches that purpose to be attractional (or invitational) rather than missional (Roxburgh & Boren, 2009, p. 19; Råmunddal, 2023, p. 190). The invitational, service-centred church will name it necessary to facilitate church services in a manner that makes it feel safe for non-believers to attend. Thus, modern Pentecostal congregations seem to give more room for practising spiritual gifts in other settings than the main worship service. This could be in dedicated prayer meetings, home groups or other gatherings where most attendees are regular churchgoers.

These last considerations need to be empirically backed up, and, therefore, they should be counted as observations only and not descriptive of a modern Pentecostal ecclesial identity. However, suppose the local congregation embraces a pneumatological ecclesiology where the Spirit participates in all spheres of the church (including administration, hospitality, practical service, and the practice of charismata). In that case, it seems plausible that the congregation expects the Spirit's intervention in every area of congregational life and mission.

CONCLUSION

A traditional Pentecostal identity is based on an experiential and theological understanding that the Spirit constitutes, fills, equips and sends the church. In this article, I have sought to demonstrate how the Pentecostal church's understanding of itself may be influenced by trinitarian considerations, taking into account John Zizioulas' perspectives on divine and ecclesial communion.

In Zizioulas' theology, personhood is not isolated individuality but relational existence. Drawing on the Cappadocian fathers, Zizioulas suggests that personhood is inherently relational, defined by one's participation in the communal life of the Trinity. In a broad sense, the Pentecostal movement reflects a communal identity grounded in the relational nature of the Trinity. The fellowship among believers is thus seen as mirroring the divine community of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Consequently, human persons find fulfilment not in isolation but in communion with others.

The communal aspect of personhood in Zizioulas' theology finds resonance in Pentecostalism, where the Spirit is experienced collectively, advancing a sense of shared identity and mission. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual experiences of the Spirit within classical Pentecostalism intersects with Zizioulas' understanding of individuality within the context of communal freedom, challenging modern-day Pentecostals to navigate the tension between individual spirituality and shared communal life.

However, Zizioulas' emphasis on freedom in communion may downplay the significance of individuality, which I have addressed in this article. While Zizioulas' theology offers valuable insights into the nature of communion and personhood within the church, it also raises important questions about the balance between individual agency and communal identity, as well as the role of authority and empowerment within ecclesial communities. Moreover, Zizioulas' way of holding together divine persons and relations to the point where they merge and are seen as totally inter-connected raises practical concerns regarding individual expressions of faith, participation in the church, and personal connection with God. Thus, I have suggested that individual faith and participation should be celebrated in the Pentecostal church as expressions of diversity and the uniqueness of each member of the local congregation.

Furthermore, I have touched on how perceptions of the Spirit's participation in and through the Pentecostal church potentially form its ecclesial identity. In pneumatological ecclesiology, the Spirit is seen not only as a divine force but as a distinct person within the Godhead, actively engaging with believers in empowerment, guidance, and spiritual gifts. Thus, trinitarian pneumatology and ecclesiology will presumably continue to shape Pentecostal church practices and the expectation of ongoing spiritual experiences.

Moving forward, I propose a need for further exploration and dialogue within both theological and ecclesial contexts to discern how best to integrate a theology of communion into the formation of a robust and holistic Pentecostal ecclesial identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adkins, R. L. (2023). *Trinitarian Pneumatological Personhood and the Theology of John Zizioulas*. Pickwick Publications.

Anderson, A. (2004). *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*. Cambridge University Press.

Archer, K. J. (2004). *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*. T&T Clark.

Archer, K. J. (2020). Pentecostal theology as story: Participating in God's mission. In W. Vondey (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (pp. 40–50). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507076-6

Berger, B., & Berger, P. L. (1983). *The War over the Family: Capturing the Middle Ground*. Anchor Press.

Berger, P. L. (1979). *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*. Anchor Press.

Breistein, I. F. (2003). *«Har staten bedre borgere?» Dissenternes kamp for religiøs frihet 1891–1969*. [*"Does the State Have Better Citizens?" The Dissenters' Fight for Religious Freedom 1891–1969*]. Tapir Akademisk Forlag.

Bruce, S. (2002). The curious case of the unnecessary recantation: Berger and secularization. In L. Woodhead (Ed.), *Peter Berger and the Study of Religi*on (pp. 87–100). Routledge.

Brunner, E. (1953). *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption. Dogmatics:* Vol. II. Wipf & Stock.

Carson, D. A. (2005). *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications*. Zondervan.

Chan, S. K. H. (2011). *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine. Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series*, Volume 38. Deo Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004397149

Clarke, P. (Ed.). (2009). *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*. Oxford University Press.

Côté, J. E., & Levine, C. G. (2016). *Identity Formation, Youth and Development: A Simplified Approach*. Psychology Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203767047

Farrow, D. (2007). Person and Nature: The Necessity-Freedom Dialectic in John Zizioulas. In D. H. Knight (Ed.), *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church* (pp. 109–124). Ashgate Publishing.

Fox, P. A. (2001). *God as Communion: John Zizioulas, Elizabeth Johnson, and the Retrieval of the Symbol of the Triune God*. Liturgical Press.

Grudem, W. (1994). *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Zondervan.

Hegertun, T. (2017). *The Spirit Driven Church: Signs of God's Graceful Presence*. Pickwick Publications.

Jakobsen, M. (2024). Evangelical Ecotheology: How the Resurrection Entails Creation Care. *Studies in Christian Ethics*. https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468241233176

Jenssen, J. I. (2018). Leadership and church identity: A discussion of how leadership in the local church can help to realize the true nature of the church. *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology*, *5*. https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v5.33

Jenssen, J. I., Råmunddal, L., & da Silva, A. B. (2017). *Perspektiver på menighetsutvikling og endringsledelse,* del III. Kompendium for Master i ledelse og menighetsutvikling. [*Perspectives on Church Development and Change Management,* part III. Compendium for Master in Leadership and Church Development]. Ansgar Teologiske Høgskole.

Kärkkäinen, V.-M. (2002). *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective*. Baker Academic.

Kärkkäinen, V.-M. (2004). *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification*. Liturgical Press.

Kay, W. K. (2009). *SCM Core Text: Pentecostalism*. SCM Press.

Knight, D. H. (Ed.). (2007). *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*. Ashgate Publishing.

Kyle, R. G. (2018). *Popular Evangelicalism in American Culture*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315098913

Land, S. J. (1993). *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. Sheffield Academic Press.

Lilleåsen, R. (2017). Kritisk realisme og gudsmøtet. [Critical realism and encountering God]. *Teologisk Tidsskrift* (2), 146–161. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1893-0271-2017-02-05

Lord, A. (2012). *Network Church: A Pentecostal Ecclesiology Shaped by Mission*. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004225480
Lossky, V. (1974). *In the Image and Likeness of God*. SVS Press.
Lossky, V. (1997). *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. SVS Press.
Macchia, F. D. (2006). *Baptized in the Spirit*. Zondervan.
McGrath, A. E. (1990). *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Menzies, W. W., & Menzies, R. P. (2000). *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience*. Zondervan.
Milne, B. (1982). *Know the Truth*. InterVarsity Press.
Moltmann, J. (1992). *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*. SCM Press.
Moltmann, J. (1993). *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Fortress Press.
Nichols, T. L. (1997). *That All may be One: Hierarchy and Participation in the Church*. The Liturgical Press.
Olson, R. E. (2006). *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. InterVarsity Press.
Pannenberg, W. (1994). *Systematic Theology*. InterVarsity Press.
Pinnock, C. H. (1996). *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. InterVarsity Press.
Ratzinger, J. (2004). *Introduction to Christianity*. Ignatius Press.
Redfoot, D. L. (1986). Excursus: The problem of freedom. In J. D. Hunter, & S. C. Ainlay (Eds.), *Making Sense of Modern Times: Peter L. Berger and the Vision of Interpretive Sociology* (pp. 101–118). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032714646-8
Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*. The University of Chicago Press.
Robeck, C. M., Jr. (2006). *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement*. Thomas Nelson.
Roxburgh, A. J., & Boren, S. (2009). *Introducing the Missional Church: What It Is, Why It Matters, How To Become One*. BakerBooks.
Råmunddal, L. (2023). *Ordet som vokser. Hvorfor evangeliet alltid må sette agendaen i kirken*. [*The Word that Grows. Why the Gospel must Always Set the Agenda in the Church*]. SJLT Publishing. https://doi.org/10.53311/pub02
Skjevesland, O. (1995). *Det skapende ordet. En prekenlære*. [*The Creative Word. Homilitics*]. Universitetsforlaget.
Studebaker, S. M. (2012). *From Pentecost to the Triune God: A Pentecostal Trinitarian Theology*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Tangen, K. I. (2012). *Ecclesial Identification Beyond Late Modern Individualism? A Case Study of Life Strategies in Growing Late Modern Churches*. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004184800
The Holy Bible, New International Version. (2011). Zondervan.
The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. (1996). Thomas Nelson Publishers.
Torrance, A. J. (1996). *Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation*. T&T Clark.
Torrance, A. (2020). *Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198845294.001.0001
Torrance, T. F. (1996). *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons*. T&T Clark.
Udnes, Ø. (2023). Trinitarianism and Pentecostal Ecclesial Practices: A Review of a Hierarchical Model of the Trinity. *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology*, *10*, 65–81. https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v10.103
Volf, M. (1998). *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
Vondey, W. (1999). Pentecostal Identity and Christian Discipleship. *Cyber*, 6.
Wilks, J. (1995). The Trinitarian Ontology of John Zizioulas. *Vox Evangelica*, 25, 62–87.
Ystad, H. H. (1999). *Paul Ricoeur: Eksistens og hermeneutikk*. [*Paul Ricoeur: Existence and Hermeneutics*]. H. Aschehoug & Co.
Zizioulas, J. D. (1982). The Ecclesiological Presuppositions of the Holy Eucharistic. *Nicolaus*, 10.
Zizioulas, J. D. (1985). *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. SVS Press Books.
Zizioulas, J. D. (1995). The doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The significance of the Cappadocian contribution. In C. Schwöbel (Ed.), *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Acts* (pp. 44–60). T&T Clark.

Zizioulas, J. D. (2006). *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. T&T Clark.

Zizioulas, J. D. (2008). *Lectures in Christian Dogmatics*. T&T Clark. https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567705112

Zizioulas, J. D. (2010). *The One and the Many: Studies on God, Man, the Church, and the World Today*. Sebastian Press.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV (2011).

Øystein Udnes (1970). MA in Practical Theology (Leadership and Church Development), BA in Pastoral Theology, and BA in Social Work. Christian counsellor, worship leader, teacher and elder in different Free Evangelical and Pentecostal churches since 1992. Currently leader and teacher in a public Local House of Prayer in Oslo. Manager and supervisor in public health and social care services for more than twenty years. oysteinudnes@gmail.com.

Udnes, Ø. (2023). Trinitarianism and Pentecostal Ecclesial Practices: A Review of a Hierarchical Model of the Trinity. *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology*, *10*, 65–81. https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v10.103