

Komanchak, Collins, Lane, Editors:

Entry on 'Communion of Saints' and 'Community', From: The New Dictionary of Theology

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Christ and sentences are possible in which what strictly is true of only one nature is attributed to the other. This permits one to say, for example, that "the Son of God suffered on the cross" or that "Jesus is the one through whom the world was created."

See Jesus Christ

COMMUNION OF SAINTS

The Latin phrase, *communio sanctorum*, can be translated either as "the communion of saints" or as "communion in holy things." This underlying ambiguity in meaning is evident in the history and interpretation of the phrase in the creed.

Article of the Creed

It is not until the end of the fifth century that one finds *communio sanctorum* ("Communion of Saints") part of a christian creed. This insertion apparently begins in the West, particularly in southern Gaul. Nicetas of Remesia (D.S. 19) speaks of *communio sanctorum* in a way which scholars conclude implies a stabilized creed. Faustus of Riez (d. 490) and Caesarius of Arles (d. 542), both of southern Gaul, clearly attest to it as part of the creed in their area. In the seventh century it is found in Ireland; the Gallican Sacramentary of the same century evidences it, and traces of it are found in England in the ninth century. Nicholas I (856-867), it seems, brought about the adoption of *communio sanctorum* in Rome. Nonetheless, even in the twelfth century some creeds in Italy do not have *communio sanctorum* as an article. Eastern creeds do not contain *communio sanctorum*, so that one must conclude that it is clearly a western addition to the creed.

Two theories have been proposed by scholars for the appearance of *communio sanctorum* in southern Gaul: (a) *communio sanctorum* originated in the East

[probably Dacia] and was brought to the West. Harnack and De Morin have been leading advocates of this interpretation. Nicetas is eastern, i.e., Bishop of Dacia (presently Yugoslavia), and his instruction to the catechumens needs to be explained. (b) The second view is that its origin is western (southern Gaul) and was passed on to Nicetas, perhaps through Hilary (Kelly). Probably the exact origin of *communio sanctorum*'s admission into the creed will never be established.

Harnack also notes that the Gallican Church at that time was concerned about the "righteous dead," which would account for the appearance of *communio sanctorum* in southern Gaul. Others counter that *communio sanctorum* is not clearly denotative of the dead and a defense of a cult of the dead would have required a more precise term.

The position of Rufinus that each apostle contributed one of the twelve articles of the Apostles Creed, and therefore *communio sanctorum*, is totally unfounded, even though Sermon 240 of Pseudo-Augustine attributes *communio sanctorum* to Matthew, and Sermon 241 of Pseudo-Augustine attributes *communio sanctorum* to Simon the Zealot.

History of the Article

Even though the inclusion of *communio sanctorum* is late as an addition to some western creeds, and even though it did not become a part of the eastern creeds, *communio sanctorum* as a theological concept does indeed antedate its inclusion into the creeds and does have an eastern as well as a western base. However, in Greek, *communio sanctorum* is not a common expression. Still, in 388 one finds it in a rescript of the emperors Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius (Cod. Theod. 16, 5, 14). It seemingly refers to eucharistic communion. Later Eastern writers spoke of *ta agia* but also in reference to the eucharist. Basil, Isidore of Pelusium, Athanasius, and Pseudo-

Basil, refer *communio sanctorum* to a communion with the saints, i.e., holy persons.

In the western church *communio sanctorum* is rare prior to the end of the fourth century. Augustine, applies it to the eucharist. In Africa, during the time of Augustine, *sancta* (holy things) had frequent reference to the eucharist. However, Augustine also uses the term "communion of the sacraments." The Councils of Vienne (394) and of Nimes (396) use *communio sanctorum* in reference to the eucharist.

In the creed, *communio sanctorum* is associated with the Holy Spirit. Already in Hippolytus we find: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, and the holy Church and the resurrection of the body?" In doing this Hippolytus attests to the theological connection of Spirit/Church/Risen Body, which will become one of the bases for subsequent interpretations of *communio sanctorum*. In the East, a major theological position was: "What is not assumed is not saved." There is a fundamental communion (*koinonia*) between God, the source of all holiness, and what is sanctified (saved). Eastern theologians, such as Cyril of Alexandria and Athanasius, make this a touchstone for christology and soteriology. The incarnate Logos is not only holy but holy-making (sanctifying). The presence of the incarnate and risen Logos in the church is the basis for communion with holiness. In Eastern thought this is accomplished through the Holy Spirit of Jesus. This theology of *ta agia* antedated the formula *communio sanctorum* and gave a basis for its subsequent interpretation. Since *communio sanctorum*, in the trinitarian creed structure, is associated with the Holy Spirit, it must be seen against the pneumatology of the early centuries.

In the West, Faustus of Riez interpreted *communio sanctorum* as a cult of the holy dead; a homily from the same

period connects it with the cult of relics. A Pseudo-Augustine sermon of the sixth century reads: "The communion of the saints signifies that we form a society with the saints who have died in this faith, and which we have received, and that we are with them in a communion of hope" (Ser. 242). *Ta agia*, although it has not lost totally its neuter meaning of holy things, begins to take on a personal meaning, "holy persons."

During the early Middle Ages most of the authors (e.g., Alcuin, Rhabanus Maurus, Walafrid Strabo) followed the Pseudo-Augustine approach, i.e., a personalizing of *sanctorum*. Ivo of Chartres nuanced this so that *communio sanctorum* referred to a communion in the sacraments, in which those saints who have departed from this life in the unity of faith also take part (Ser. 23). Jocelin of Soissons repeats Ivo. A few, however, continued to stress the neuter interpretation of *sanctorum* (Abelard, John Fecamp). Bernard of Clairvaux interpreted *communio sanctorum* as an interchange of merit with the saints in heaven. Peter Lombard concurs in this interpretation.

Alexander of Hales viewed *communio sanctorum* as both a sharing in the sacraments and a sharing in a relationship with all the members of the church, Albert the Great picked up the sharing in the sacraments, but also mentions a sharing of one believer in the holy elements of another believer, a combination of both person and things. Thomas Aquinas tended to a more neutral interpretation, namely, a sharing in the holy elements of the church, but he included at least indirectly a sharing between persons. For Thomas this communion is based on Jesus Christ.

In the counter-reformation period, a polemical aspect was given to *communio sanctorum*, namely a communion with the pope (Bellarmine). Stress was also

placed on a sharing of good merits by the souls in purgatory (Canisius). This rather moral and apologetic approach was continued by others (Alexander, Sailer, Drey, Hirscher), but through J. A. Moehler and later Jungmann a mystical communion was emphasized.

Contemporary Interpretation

Communio sanctorum has not been a major focus, but in the wake of Vatican II some theologians, such as W. Breuning, attempted to relate it to the church as a basic sacrament, and even Jesus as the primordial sacrament. This has given it a strong christological and ecclesiological base. Already Pius XII had related *communio sanctorum* to the Mystical Body teaching on the church. One could say that fellowship with Jesus is the basis for fellowship in the church and in the kingdom. Such fellowship with Jesus is concomitantly fellowship with the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit of Jesus which founds the church. This theological interpretation helps to understand the reason for locating *communio sanctorum*, in the creed, in the section dealing with the Holy Spirit.

Nonetheless, one must say that for today's theology a clearer connection between *communio sanctorum* and the kingdom is needed. Up until now the stress, both in Catholic and Protestant interpretation, has been on the church, not on the kingdom. Vatican II teaches that the church and the kingdom are not coterminous, and therefore there must be a communion in the holy: (a) outside the Roman Catholic Church; (b) outside the christian church generally; (c) outside the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and therefore in the area of other world religions as well.

To do this, one must distinguish between the "core" meaning of *communio sanctorum*, which one can consider "defined" due to its incorporation in the creed, and the theological interpretation,

which is not defined.

Like other articles of the creed, there is a certain indefiniteness about the statement of *communio sanctorum*; cf., e.g., the credal statements on salvation, which are general: "Christ died for us." Over the years, many theological positions on the meaning of this phrase, none of which are creedally defined, have taken place. Ghellick noted this when he wrote: *communio sanctorum* "is one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the whole Creed." Lamirande continues this line of thought: "Not history or contemporary theologians or the magisterium have succeeded in giving a precise definition to the article. Since its first appearance, there have been a number of interpretations; not one of them has proved able to oust the others." One thing is clear, however, unless *communio sanctorum* is rooted in a solid christological base, it will have little meaning within the ecclesiological spheres.

See *Church*

J.P. Kirsch, *Die Lehre von der Gemeinschaft der Heiligen im christlichen Altertum* (1900). P. Bernard, "Communion des Saints," *DTClII* (1908). H.B. Swete, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints* (1916). F.J. Babcock, "Sanctorum Communio as an Article of the Creed," *JTS*, 21 (1919). H. Seesemann, *Der Begriff der Koinonia im Neuen Testament*, (1933). J. de Ghellick, *Patristique et moyen-age*, I (1949). J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 1950. A. Piolanti, *Il Misterio della Comunione dei Santi nella Rivelazione e nella Teologia* (1957). G. Morin, "Sanctorum communione," *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses*, 9 (1904). E. Lamerande, *The Communion of Saints*, trans. A. Manson (1963). P.A. Liege, *Catholicisme* (1949).

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COMMUNITY

According to Webster's Dictionary, a community is a body of people having common organization or interests or living in the same place under the same laws. The German philosopher Max Scheler would refine that definition by

distinguishing a community from a family and from a corporation. A community is like a family in that relationships between members of the community are basically personal in character rather than impersonal; it is unlike a family in that the association between members of the community is based on free choice rather than common ancestry. Contrarily, a community is like a corporation (*Gesellschaft*) in that membership is based on free choice, but unlike a corporation in that it is person-oriented rather than task-oriented. The ideal community is, accordingly, a free association of individual persons who prize their interpersonal relationships more highly than any other goal or value which they might otherwise achieve in living and working together. As such, person and community are correlative concepts: to be a true person is to be a member of a genuine community.

What remains ambiguous, however, is the notion of the community itself as a specifically social reality. Scheler, for example, refers to it as a *Gesamtperson* (totality-person) which in its being and activity resembles an individual person. Implicitly, therefore, he is thinking of community in organismic terms. That is, like Plato and Hegel in their respective theories of the state, Scheler conceives the community as a supra-individual person with a mind and will of its own which is in some sense distinct from the minds and wills of its individual person-members. The community, accordingly, enjoys a theoretical priority over its members which in some cases might be used by unscrupulous individuals as a justification to exercise totalitarian control over the others in the name of the common good. The other classic approach to the ontological reality of the community, however, has equally grave limitations. Philosophers and sociologists who conceive the community to be

nothing more than a functional unity created by the dynamic interplay of already existing individuals run the risk of so emptying the notion of the common good of any real significance and value that rugged individualism or a *laissez-faire* approach to community life is the inevitable result.

Clearly needed is a mediating third position which would make evident the ontological status of the community as a specifically social reality without compromising the independence and integrity of the person-members. Josiah Royce, teaching at Harvard at the beginning of this century, argues in *The Problem of Christianity* that a community is a social process (literally, a "time-process") which has a corporate identity in some sense distinct from the life histories of its members, taken singly. The history of the United States, for example, is not simply reducible to the sum total of the lives of all its individual citizens. More importantly, however, he specifies that this time-process is a communal process of interpretation which arises naturally out of the ongoing exchange of "signs" by the members of the community with one another. That is, each of the community members is continually engaged in the effort to establish their identity within the group. As such they are obliged to interpret whatever happens to themselves and formulate a response in terms of some appropriate word or deed. Others perceive these "signs" and, in turn, must respond with signs representing their interpretations of what is transpiring between them. Thus their efforts to communicate with one another through the exchange of signs or individual interpretations of various events spontaneously brings about the reality of the community as a communal process of interpretation. Out of this communal process, moreover, come by degrees all the trappings of civilized existence: language, culture,

political and social institutions, etc.

In the same book, Royce also makes clear that in his judgment Christianity is the world religion *par excellence* because of its doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. That is, Christians are thereby encouraged to believe that the forgiveness of sins and/or salvation is to be achieved not simply through a person's individual relationship with God but also and more significantly through an intensified life in community with other believers as members of Christ's Body: in the first place, the Church as the Beloved Community of Interpretation; but, in the end, all of humanity as the Universal Community of Interpretation. The familiar christian precept to love one's neighbor as oneself should then be understood as the mandate to remain in communication with others through the exchange of signs and thus to perpetuate the reality of church and civil society as interrelated communities of interpretation. Only thus will the Kingdom of God be revealed in its intended fullness, namely, as a Universal Community of Interpretation or, perhaps more precisely, as an overarching community of subcommunities, each of which is involved through its person-members in the task of articulating its corporate self-identity while remaining aware of its interdependent relationship with other communities at work on the same task.

Even if one has reservations about this speculative attempt to reinterpret christian charity, first, as loyalty to the communities of one's choice but ultimately as loyalty to the worldwide community of humankind, Royce's basic hypothesis that Christianity is a religion based on an ideal of life in community seems well grounded. Admittedly, some christian denominations give the impression of being more group-oriented than others. Roman Catholicism, for example, with its strong sacramental life and clearly defined moral code has traditionally

placed heavy emphasis on disciplined group behavior, above all, regular participation at Sunday Mass. Yet Protestant denominations, on the contrary, might well claim that their own more loosely organized, democratic approach to church life actually fosters a stronger sense of community among its members. In any event, Royce's claim is that Christianity has a divine mission to foster worldwide community through the example of its own members' active participation in community life. Included in this mission, of course, must be the further mandate to establish communities based on justice and equality rather than on power and privilege. But the very willingness to remain in communication with those who interpret reality differently from oneself and to seek with them grounds for common action is the indispensable precondition for the establishment of true justice and genuine equality within any community.

Curiously missing in Royce's theory is any significant reference to the Trinity as a community of three divine persons. In *The Problem of Christianity*, to be sure, Royce calls attention to the lack of a fully developed theology of the Holy Spirit which he sees as essential to the understanding of the workings of the Christian community, the idea that the worldwide Community of Interpretation might somehow participate in the primordial Community of Interpretation constituted by the divine persons presumably did not occur to him. Juan Luis Segundo in *Our Idea of God*, on the other hand, argues that the traditional notion of God as a single, self-sufficient personal being has contributed notably to the spirit of rugged individualism in Western culture. For, to be like God is thus to be self-sufficient, independent of others. The concept of God as a community of three divine persons who are sympathetically involved with men and women in their struggle to

form and maintain stable forms of community life, however, would set forth the opposite ideal of interdependence as the perfection of human existence. By implication, then, the mission of Christianity to promote worldwide community will not be satisfactorily carried out until Christians themselves internalize the notion of God as a community of divine persons who offer salvation to their rational creatures in the form of intensified life in community.

See Church

John MacMurray, *Persons in Relation*, London: Faber & Faber, 1961. Ernest Ranly, *Scheler's Phenomenology of Community*, The Hague: Nijhoff Press, 1966. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968. Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., *Our Idea of God [A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity, Vol. III]* Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974. John P. Schanz, *A Theology of Community*, Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1977. Joseph A. Bracken, *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process and Community*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *Community: A Trinity of Models*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1986.

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