

Work of Love: A Theological Reconstruction of the Communion of Saints**Leonard J. DeLorenzo****Publication Date**

02-02-2017

License

This work is made available under a Copyright Controlled by External Host license and should only be used in accordance with that license.

Citation for this work (American Psychological Association 7th edition)

DeLorenzo, L. J. (2017). *Work of Love: A Theological Reconstruction of the Communion of Saints* (Version 1). University of Notre Dame. <https://doi.org/10.7274/24732342.v1>

This work was downloaded from CurateND, the University of Notre Dame's institutional repository.

For more information about this work, to report or an issue, or to preserve and share your original work, please contact the CurateND team for assistance at curate@nd.edu.

LEONARD J. DELORENZO



WORK OF LOVE

A THEOLOGICAL
RECONSTRUCTION OF THE
COMMUNION OF SAINTS

WORK OF LOVE

WORK OF LOVE

*A Theological Reconstruction of
the Communion of Saints*

LEONARD J. DELORENZO

*University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana*

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556
undpress.nd.edu

Copyright © 2017 by the University of Notre Dame

All Rights Reserved

Published in the United States of America

LCCN: 2016053422

ISBN 13: 978-0-268-10093-3

ISBN 10: 0-268-10093-4

WebPDF: 978-0-268-10095-7

EPUB: 978-0-268-10096-4

∞ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

This e-Book was converted from the original source file by a third-party vendor. Readers who notice any formatting, textual, or readability issues are encouraged to contact the publisher at ebooks@nd.edu.

To Lisa

“Forever Amen”

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	<i>xi</i>
	Introduction	<i>1</i>
CHAPTER 1	Indefinite Article	<i>7</i>
	Looking Backward	<i>7</i>
	The Development of a Doctrine	<i>8</i>
	The Orthodoxy of the Body of the Faithful	<i>11</i>
	State of the Communion	<i>15</i>
	The Diagnosis	<i>20</i>
	Looking Forward	<i>22</i>
CHAPTER 2	Solitary Confinement	<i>24</i>
	Regarding Christian Hope	<i>24</i>
	Forgetting Death	<i>26</i>
	Interlude: Transgressing the Forbidden, Seeing the Invisible	<i>31</i>
	The Rilkean Opening	<i>32</i>
	The View from Heidegger	<i>49</i>
	Remembering the Forgotten Death	<i>59</i>
CHAPTER 3	Word of Life	<i>62</i>
	Toward a Christian Account of Death and Communication	<i>62</i>
	Karl Rahner: A Theology of Death within Christian Eschatology	<i>65</i>

	Joseph Ratzinger: Communication within Salvation History	74
	Hans Urs von Balthasar: Heeding Absolute Communication	81
	Given to Nothing: Creation and Resurrection	95
	The Word of Life	100
CHAPTER 4	Dispossessing Desire	103
	Becoming Fully Human	103
	Encountering the Risen Christ: The Beginning of a New End	105
	At the End of All Exploring: What Augustine Found	115
	Ontology by Desire	129
	Desiring God	134
CHAPTER 5	Bodily Memory	142
	A Fool's Errand?	142
	Ordering the <i>Commedia</i>	144
	The Communicative Nature	158
	The Space of Freedom	166
	The Church's Oblation	174
	Ascension, Assumption, and the Resurrection of the Body	185
CHAPTER 6	Work of Love	189
	Hastening to Wholeness	189
	The Coming of the Lord	191
	A Beautiful Pattern: The Aesthetic Pedagogy of the Book of Exodus	195
	Interlude: Glory as Dwelling, Dwelling as Communion	201
	Thérèse of Lisieux and the Beauty of the Earth	202
	Teresa of Avila and the Beauty of Carmel	209
	Mother Teresa and the Beauty of Calcutta	213
	Dorothy Day and the Beauty of New York	215

The Intermediate State and the Beauty of Wholeness	221
Liturgical Training and the Beauty of Prayer	223
God's People and the Beauty of Particularity	228
Conclusion	234
Notes	239
Selected Bibliography	303
Index	323

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing is often an experience of solitariness and yet all throughout writing this book I was aware of my dependence on those whose company I neither could nor ever would want to do without. Who I am, what I believe, how I think, and why I “do” theology are all tied up in my relationships with those who love me, inspire me, teach me, and hold me accountable to the gifts I have received. Truly, I am not myself by myself. Any good that I may have achieved in this work redounds to those who have shared and who continue to share their goodness with me. The greatest good I have received is the gift of faith, without which I would be incapable of doing theology at all. My first word of thanks must therefore go to my catechists and all those who formed me in faith.

My debt of gratitude to Cyril O'Regan is immense. Through countless discussions over the span of many years, my interest in researching this topic took shape while both the range of my considerations widened and the seriousness of my thought deepened. I have grown to admire Cyril for a great many things both within and outside academia, but above all I have come to admire his capacity for admiring others. Both his example and his interest in my work have encouraged me to become more generous and committed in kind. I am likewise grateful to Larry Cunningham, who opened his vast reservoirs of wisdom to me on all things related to the communion of saints. Larry read drafts of this work throughout my writing period and never failed to respond with constructive criticism that was in equal measures substantive and encouraging. I also had the good fortune to work with John Betz, whose very first topical conversation with me yielded one of the most important insights for what would later become the second and fourth chapters of this work. Along with Cyril and Larry, John provided helpful guidance as I explored

this topic theologically and otherwise. The unnamed scholarly reviewers who read and commented on my manuscript as it was being considered for publication offered remarkably helpful feedback that prompted me to improve this work in important respects. I am grateful for their thoughtful consideration of this work as well as for the work of all on the editorial team at the University of Notre Dame Press.

This work would not have been possible without the support of John Cavadini, for whom I have worked for more than a decade in the McGrath Institute for Church Life at Notre Dame. In addition to teaching me how to read Augustine, I am grateful to John for his confidence in me and for caring so deeply for my personal, professional, and scholarly development. This work is in many ways a fruit of the connection between the Church and the academy that I have learned to cherish from my work in the McGrath Institute for Church Life, where intelligent, generous, and innovative colleagues surround me on a daily basis. I do not take them or our work together for granted. I am uniquely indebted to the undergraduate students, high school students, and professional ministers with whom I have had the pleasure of exploring faith for more than a decade in the Notre Dame Vision program. Just about every facet of this theological work grew out of what I first learned and experienced in that community.

I am likewise grateful to the members of Notre Dame's Department of Theology, where I studied and now have the privilege of teaching courses. My special thanks go to Mary Catherine Hilkert, Brian Daley, Matt Ashley, Bob Krieg, Jan Poorman, David Fagerberg, and Vittorio Montemaggi, among others, from whom I received a theological education of unsurpassed quality. I would be remiss if I failed to mention the inestimable influence of my colleague and closest friend Tim O'Malley, who, among other things, was a constant conversation partner at every phase of this writing project and whose own scholarship inspires admiration.

My final words of thanks go to those to whom I owe the most. I extend my deepest gratitude to my parents, who gave me life and whose confidence in me I have never doubted a day in my life. I offer my thanks to my brother Stefan, who always will be my "best man" and who teaches me how to be a better man. And to the Pendarvis family into which I

entered through marriage—to my mother- and father-in-law Betsie and John, my brother-in-law Justin, and my sisters-in-law Christi and Mary (along with spouses and those who will be)—I give thanks for the joy and privilege of sharing in the richness of their familial life, which has been, at times, without a ceiling . . . literally.

My final word of thanks goes to my wife Lisa, to whom I dedicate this work. If I have learned anything in contemplating the communion of saints it is that the life of the saints is a life of charity, wherein the good of another becomes one's very own good. If this is true, then I am blessed to share my life with someone who witnesses to the validity of sanctity every day. In addition to contributing to the life of the Church in her own way through her gifts of leadership in liturgical music and catechesis, Lisa was the one who, during all the many days that I researched and wrote, took the lead in caring for the more important things, namely our five beautiful children: Caleb Elijah, Felicity Thérèse, Josiah Xavier, Isaac James, and Gianna Magdalene. Life in our family is indeed a foretaste of the Heavenly City. For this and much more, thank you, Lisa.

+Advent 2016+

INTRODUCTION

The saints are good company. They are the heroes of the faith who blazed new and creative paths to holiness; they are the witnesses whose testimonies echo throughout the ages in the memory of the Church. Most Christians—at least most Catholics—are likely to have their own favorite saints: those individuals who inspire and console believers as they pray and struggle in the particular setting of their own lives. Much has been written about many of these saints and even, in fact, about sainthood itself; however, this work is not concerned with individual saints per se. What I seek to examine in the pages that follow is the *communion* of the saints, with the conviction that what makes the saints holy and what forms them into a communion is one and the same. Moreover, this communion is vital to the life of the faithful as well as to the meaning and destiny of all creation.

The saints testify to God's work of love as it draws to completion. They are the ones who desire, know, and will along with the content and style of God's own way of loving. This story of sanctity is enshrined in the creed Christians profess—specifically, the Apostles' Creed. In this symbol, the movement from who God is to what God has done gives way to the sanctification of life into which redeemed creatures are drawn. In this space, the saints stand as pedagogues who witness to the fullness of humanity in the culmination of God's action in the world. Put

another way, the saint is God's address: in the saint, God speaks to creation, creation speaks to God, God finds his creation present, and one finds the presence of God. In their fullness, then, the saints offer what they represent: the communion of human persons in union with the love of God. The saints, therefore, may only be apprehended in truth to the degree that they are known as partakers of communion. They embody an objective reality that demands a conversion to a distinctive mode of subjective apprehension. Those who wish to know and understand this holy communion must strain forward toward the way in which the blessed saints abide in love (see Phil. 3:13).

As persons defined by the movement of divine love, the saints share in the personhood of Christ. They are, as it were, the embodiment of the love of Christ, and the communion they share comes forth as a gift and requires a response. The gift is a unity that is not self-produced and the response is the desire for this union to be complete. The exchange in this giving and receiving communicates life as a being-with and a being-for, with the expression and constitution of the communion of saints as the accompaniment of one with and for another—unto all others. In this communication of life, the communion of saints emerges from a desire stronger than death.

Claiming that communion is stronger than death is no small thing. Surely this challenge can be ameliorated by either attenuating the meaning of communion or softening the closure of death; however, neither move is compatible with the Christian faith. Christianity is concerned with the proclamation of an unbreakable bond of communion that pierces through the soundless darkness of death. To *think* rightly about the communion of saints requires an unreserved confrontation with the meaning (or meaninglessness) of death; to *live* fully toward the communion stronger than death demands a disposition to hoping in what does not and cannot come from one's own power alone. Taking death seriously leads to reimagining the validity of acts of communication and the bonds of communion, and this renewal of the imagination is only possible according to the form and content of revelation. This is knowledge born in the valley of humility and it is the only path by which we can know the saints as they are, in communion.

The belief in the communion of saints belongs to the eschatological dimension of the Christian faith. It is, in other words, a matter of

hope. The dimensions of Christian hope are provided by and conform to the dimensions of Jesus Christ, who stretches the communication of the Word of Life to the limits of creaturely existence and indeed to the extreme distance of creaturely nonexistence in sin. In this work, I aim to present the *communio sanctorum* as an article of faith that is, as I state in chapter 3, “properly Christological in that it concerns the complete action of the Incarnation, pneumatological in that it pertains to the Spirit’s work of forming community in the bonds of charity, and ultimately Trinitarian in that it fundamentally entails graced participation in the divine life of persons-in-communion.” As appropriate to a theological inquiry, this treatment of the *communio sanctorum* begins with its incorporation as an article of faith in the Apostles’ Creed, proceeds to elucidate the meaning of what this article expresses with eschatological studies in theological anthropology and ecclesiology, and at last arrives at (or rather returns to) a more substantive understanding of sacramental and liturgical practice before explicating the communion of saints as a work of love. In what amounts to a distinctly Catholic construction, one may measure the ecumenical and perhaps even interreligious value of this book according to the degree to which I successfully show the coherence of the Catholic emphasis on communion, both in terms of the Church in via and in its eschatological fullness.

Chapter 1 is primarily dedicated to measuring the parameters of my project. To begin, I trace the path by which the *communio sanctorum* traveled from the practice of faith to a declared article of faith that was incorporated into the baptismal creed. In the name of the Triune God, the faithful ultimately profess belief in what the sanctification of life in union with God begins to look like, specifically in the third part of the creed under the belief in the Holy Spirit. The incorporation of the *communio sanctorum* into the creed results from the Church’s growing recognition that exercising communion with the saints is intrinsic to the one faith it professes. In diagnosing the contemporary situation, though, I contend that while there is certainly something like a notional assent to the doctrine’s claim to the uninterrupted union among the saints, what remains obscured or, more poignantly, under-considered, are the twin questions of why and how the modern person is to believe in the communion of saints in deed as well as in word. In short, I argue that the Christian imagination in the modern period is ailing from the reduction

of faith to the boundaries of reason and the exiling of God from the workings of the world into a remote realm of impenetrable mystery into which the dead disappear. The twofold challenge to fully professing belief in the communion of saints is therefore epistemological and theological—that is, it concerns our ways of knowing and the manner of believing in who God is. I contend that the (un)reality of death shows the urgency and baldness of both dimensions of this challenge.

In chapter 2, I interrogate the modern notions of death. I begin with a socio-historical analysis of the development of customs relating to the phenomenon of death and the correlative ways in which the surviving community treats the dying (and the dead). I observe how these modern approaches to death both promote and derive from an impetus to isolate individuals from one another. I then take up a poetic proposal to something like a secular analogue to the communion of saints in the work of Rainer Maria Rilke. What the Bohemian-Austrian poet shows is the promise of a fertile imagination that nonetheless fails because of the content of what informs his imagination. The treatment of Rilke helps us to see that both the energy and the content of an imagination are crucial to properly forming the eschatological imagination. In the latter part of the chapter, I examine modern secular philosophical approaches to death, most notably Martin Heidegger's but also with an eye toward Friedrich Nietzsche. On the one hand, my task in this chapter is to critique the prevalent inclination to ignore death and the concerted refusal to say anything about it. On the other hand, my task is also to critique the tendency to say too much about death in the wrong way. This treatment of the distinctively modern approaches to death thus leaves us in search of an account of death that depends on neither ignorance nor mythology.

In due course, I present the death of Jesus Christ as the key to the true meaning (or meaninglessness) of death. His death is the unadorned foundation upon which communion is built. In chapter 3, I thus begin to recast death in Christian terms, leading ultimately toward the goal of asking the question of the human person in a theological register. To do so, I pursue a Christological keynote by following the Incarnate Word to the extreme creaturely distance from God in the state of being dead; only thus may we more adequately apprehend the gift of life that is given in his Resurrection. In the course of this pursuit, I consider the human

person according to such questions as the relationship between freedom and subjectivity, time and eternity, and individuality and sociality. I also seek to locate my inquiry within the biblical narrative and especially ancient Israel's developing belief in the resurrection of the dead. As the beginning of the constructive portion of my work, this chapter commences the exploration of communication and communion in three interrelated spheres: communion among the dead (chapter 3), communication from the blessed dead to the living (chapter 4), and communication of the living among themselves and to the blessed dead (chapters 5 and 6).

Chapter 4 subsequently focuses on the desire to show how communion extends from the dead to include the living (i.e., those still on pilgrimage) across the chasm of death. I begin with a theological exegesis of the Resurrection appearances as recorded primarily in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of John. My aim is to elucidate how the unfathomable act of God in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ first critiques and then transforms the desires of those to whom the risen Christ comes. I then proceed, in the chapter's second section, to move in the opposite direction to study how the quest to discover the truth of one's own existence is oriented to the discovery of the unsolicited gift of God's mercy. Augustine's *Confessions* is my primary text for this purpose. I carry forward what I gain in the early sections of the chapter to build toward a theological anthropology in which the natural desire of the human person is transformed by and according to how God freely fulfills this desire. Henri de Lubac's modern retrieval of Augustinian theology provides much of the impetus for this task, which leads me, in the chapter's end, toward a substantive description of the saint as the one whose desire is fulfilled in willful conformity to God's own way of giving in Christ. I contend that on this eschatological horizon the truth of human persons is revealed in full.

In chapter 5 I situate the communion among created persons within the communion of God in the body of the Church. To do so, I first turn to Dante's *Commedia* as part of a larger attempt to respond to the prevalent suspicion of hierarchically ordered relations, most especially in the work of other contemporary Catholic theologians who are likewise interested in recovering a more robust eschatological imagination. I argue that Dante presents a compelling image of eschatological relations that

redounds to the original social order of humanity according to God's act of creation. I examine the eschatological dimensions of the theologies of creation from Augustine and Karl Rahner, respectively, in order to advance my thesis. From there, I explore three journeys "from freedom to freedom" in an attempt to connect the issue of creaturely dignity to the future to which God calls his beloved. In the chapter's concluding pages I draw out the pneumatological and Christological dimensions of the communion of saints in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church, which is itself dependent on the gift of God's own communion.

Throughout these chapters I seek to develop and defend the thesis upon which this theological reconstruction of the communion of saints builds: love works in community, for communion, or not at all. In the sixth and final chapter, I seek to observe this dynamism as the logic of Scripture itself, which is incarnate in Christ and becomes the very movement by which his saints are transformed in building communion. Beginning with the prologue to John's Gospel and connecting to the narratives of Jesus's transfiguration, I eventually examine how Moses prefigures Christ in the role he assumes and prefigures the saints in the work he inspires. What we see in anticipatory fashion in Moses approaches fulfillment in particular saints, who witness to the efficacy of divine mercy that redeems and sanctifies creation. We will study four such figures in this line of sanctity: Thérèse of Lisieux, Teresa of Avila, Teresa of Calcutta, and Dorothy Day. Based on the logic of Scripture that becomes the grammar of communion in the saints, I then make a statement about the theological question of the intermediate state before concluding with a reflection on the prayers concerning the dead in the Church's liturgy and, subsequently, the concrete devotions of the faithful that testify to the unrelenting particularity of God's love for particular persons. In learning to perceive how the saints embody the work of love, we draw closer to apprehending how the communion that the saints build becomes the eschatological fulfillment of Christ, who is *the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things not seen* (Heb. 11:1, NAB).

INDEFINITE ARTICLE

Looking Backward

The “communion of saints” is a definitive mark of the Christian imagination conformed to the mystery of salvation: the communion of holy persons invites and demands an act of faith for Christian belief to build toward completion. In fact, it is the exercise of fidelity to the promises of Christ in the face of death that gave this expression its primary meaning for Western Christianity. This meaning was carried into and is now borne by the Apostles’ Creed, “the most universally accepted creed in Western Christendom.”¹ Every saint has a history and so does the article of faith that attests to the communion in which they share. The lives of saints arise from the work of God in the world while the article symbolizing their communion arises from the Church’s reflection on the life of faith in the Spirit.

Why this article of the “communion of saints” does not appear either in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed or the Old Roman Creed is a question whose answer at once signifies the hope that springs from the merits of Christ and the deficiency of this hope, by and large, in the modern world. Put another way: as certain communities in the Early Church confronted death through the practice of faith, the belief in the communion of saints was espoused, and as death is avoided, ignored, or parodied in more contemporary times, the essential meaning of the

communion of saints slips away. The sober confrontation with the meaning (or meaninglessness) of death forces the issue of the validity of the communion of saints. Death provides the occasion for asking the question of the saints' communion in the proper terms; therefore, the primary issue in the communion of saints is not actually death, but rather divine freedom. In the silence of death, the Word of God speaks anew. Accordingly, the axial conviction around which this present work turns is that the communion of saints is intrinsically and inextricably connected to the love of Christ: the Incarnate Word.

While the two following chapters deal with death more directly in preparation for hearing this Word aright, this chapter begins by tracing the development of the doctrine concerning the communion of saints from the experience of the faithful into the baptismal creed. From there, I attend to the ecclesial pronouncements from the Second Vatican Council that confirm the perennial validity of the belief in sharing of communion among members of the Church who abide on both sides of death, so to speak. In the final sections of the chapter I diagnose the current state of notional and real assent to belief in this unbroken communion of saints in the modern milieu in order to ultimately identify the precise problematic with which the remainder of this work is concerned. Through the turns of this chapter, I seek to elucidate how the communion of saints—both as a reality and as a stated article of faith—grows from and shapes a Catholic ethos, as well as how the flagging vitality of belief in this communion in the practice of the faithful signals the diminishment of the faith itself.

The Development of a Doctrine

The term “communion of saints” most likely came from the East, where the meaning of the expression was clear. In Greek, *koinonia ton agion*—the equivalent to Latin’s *communio sanctorum*—unmistakably indicates “participation in the Eucharistic elements.”² To this day priests in the Byzantine liturgy lift up the consecrated gifts and exclaim, “Holy things for the holy people,”³ further locating the central meaning of the communion for the Eastern Church in the sharing of the Sacraments.

In the West, however, there was much greater fluctuation in the meaning of *communio sanctorum*. Upon close inspection of the historical evidence as to what primary meaning the phrase carried as it was incorporated into the Apostles' Creed, "the inescapable conclusion," as one prominent scholar puts it, is that, "so far as the creed is concerned, the dominant conception, at any rate between the fifth and eighth centuries, was 'fellowship with holy persons.'"⁴ It is during these very centuries that certain Christian communities first enacted the meaning of the *communio sanctorum* as they practiced their faith and reflected on the death of the martyrs.

The Apostles' Creed is itself an elaborate form of the Old Roman Creed, from which all variant baptismal creeds derive. Evidence of the final form of the Apostles' Creed dates to the first half of the eighth century, while its adoption into the Roman baptismal rite likely did not occur until at least the middle of the ninth century.⁵ Prior to these dates, the first surviving creed to attest to the presence of *communio sanctorum* is the formulary on which Nicetas of Remesiana commented in the fourth century.⁶ Extant documents from this period point to the Gallic regions of Western Europe as the place of origin for the meaning of *communio sanctorum* as it was eventually carried into the Apostles' Creed. As distinct from most of the other statements of faith that were incorporated into the creeds in the Early Church—and particularly those creedal statements that developed in ecumenical councils—the development and the incorporation of *communio sanctorum* seem to have taken place without a polemical situation or crisis of heterodoxy to spur its definition. Instead, this article developed through devotional faith practices of Christian communities in Gaul.

As J. N. D. Kelly argues, the intensity of faith of particular Christians, in a particular era, in this particular region, helped the article of *communio sanctorum* to gain recognition as intrinsic to the faith:

The fourth century witnessed an enormous expansion of the devotion which the Church had paid to its saints and illustrious dead from the earliest times. Even at the beginning of the third century the author of the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* assured his readers that his purpose in writing out what had happened was to enable them to enjoy communion with

the holy martyrs and through them with Jesus Christ. . . . It is evident that in the fourth century the consciousness of communion with the redeemed in heaven, who had already tasted of the fullness of the glory of Christ, was as real and as rich in hope to the theologians as to circles of ordinary Christians. Thus, although it involved no polemical *arrière pensée*, “communion of saints” gave expression to conceptions which were very vividly present to the minds of fourth and fifth century churchmen, particularly in those regions of Western Europe where . . . the Apostles’ Creed was molded into its final shape.⁷

What we hear from Kelly is that the occasion for the articulation of this article as part of the creed arose from the devotions to the blessed dead that were abundant and thriving in the regions where the Apostles’ Creed developed. In other words, as the faithful exercised the faith into which they were immersed at Baptism, they applied this faith to the veneration of first the martyrs and then other holy witnesses. Only after this application of the faith was exercised did it come to be recognized as normative for the faith. Devotion drew out orthodoxy.

If Kelly’s argument is indeed well founded, then we may readily conclude that “the fellowship with holy persons” that these Gallic Christians practiced was a fellowship with martyrs they had known in their time, or the memory and testimony of whom were offered to them on behalf of their own or other Christian communities (as in the case of Perpetua and Felicitas). In these martyrs they saw the power of the Christian faith spoken unto death, and their reverence for these martyrs was their own affirmation of the validity of the promises of Christ, a promise that redounds throughout the Gospels, that *whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die* (John 11:25–26, NAB). They saw the martyrs as living testaments to belief in Christ: these were the ones who allowed their deaths to become the capstone of their witness. So when the Gallic Christians began to venerate other holy witnesses—those whom presumably they had known or whose stories of faith were, again, handed on through the Christian communities—they exercised their imaginations to recognize that a life lived in faith was itself a witness to the validity of the promises of Christ, even when that life of faith did not end in martyrdom *per se*.

In either case, these Christians practiced the Christian faith in life and especially in the confrontation with death, and they allowed the dimensions of the faith they practiced to expand into a veneration of the blessed dead in virtue of those promises of Christ to which they remained steadfast. In doing so, they did not invent a new aspect of the one faith; rather, they allowed the meaning of the one faith to unfold in their lives. As one commentator suggests, “Perhaps the communion of saints could not be properly and fully understood from the beginning, because the impact of Christian martyrdom in the church was yet to be experienced fully.”⁸

The Orthodoxy of the Body of the Faithful

While it is likely common for one to interpret a creed as that which sets and maintains the normative elements of faith so that adherents may assume these elements into their practice of the faith, the history of the development of *communio sanctorum* shows a different side. What this history helps to reveal is how the practice of faith contributes to the development of the doctrines themselves. Attending to this double-sided nature of doctrine, Jaroslav Pelikan observes that “It is the purpose of ‘doctrine’ in all the creeds and confessions of faith, and in all the periods of church history, to promote, strengthen, and regulate, but also and first of all to articulate . . . ‘the orthodoxy of the body of the faithful’ in the church.”⁹ Pelikan borrows the phrase “the orthodoxy of the body of the faithful” from John Henry Newman, who argued for the relationship between, on the one hand, the legitimate authority of the Church to codify what it believes, teaches, and confesses, and, on the other hand, the authority of the body of the faithful who are active subjects and, in the words of Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians, *members of one another* (4:25, RSV).¹⁰

Pelikan follows Newman’s lead to contend that when a teaching is set down in a creed or confession,

[it] is not replacing or even correcting or revising or amplifying what the laity have in fact been believing and teaching all along, though perhaps without really knowing it. It is simply articulating and defending this

against recent heretical adversaries, or it is making it more precise by the adoption of a more technical theological vocabulary, or it is transposing it from the implicit to the explicit and from the unconscious to the conscious. Therefore the laity are still confessing their own faith in this text.¹¹

In light of what was noted above regarding the absence of heterodox opposition or polemical *arrière pensée* pertaining to the incorporation of *communio sanctorum* into the Apostles' Creed, the teaching on the communion of saints corresponds to the last instance Pelikan mentions. By including *communio sanctorum* as an article of faith in this creed, the Church took what was implicit in the application of the faith and made it an explicit element of the faith itself. This articulation came through recognizing the importance of what was first a practice of the faith, and not through the clarification of the orthodoxy of the faith against a heterodox misinterpretation.

The placement of *communio sanctorum* as one of the last articles recited in the Apostles' Creed further indicates what kind of article it is, for the creed itself internally operates according to what we might dub a narrative logic. What is proclaimed in the creed is already, and quite significantly, a development of belief from what is professed to what is lived. Though Pelikan does not directly consider how the creed testifies to the relationship between the profession of faith and the embodiment of faith on the part of believers, he does speak to the development of Christian creeds from an even more primitive creed. Observing this development can serve as preparation for exploring the narrative logic of the Apostles' Creed itself.

In his treatment of the rules of faith in the Early Church, Pelikan claims that the primal creed "behind and beneath all the primitive creeds of the apostolic and sub-apostolic era" is in fact Israel's great prayer, the *Shema*.¹² Christian faith stands in continuity with this foundational Jewish belief that *The Lord our God is one Lord* (Deut. 6:4, 5–9; 11:13–21; Num. 15:37–41, RSV). Upon the testimony of Jesus himself, this foundation remains intact. As Pelikan notes, when Jesus was asked to identify the most important commandment, he responds with the *Shema*: *Hear, O Israel: the Lord, our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all*

your strength (Mark 12:29–30, RSV). Pelikan thus sees the *Shema* as a primitive, even foundational creed upon which the creeds of the Christian faith build and develop. The doctrine of the Trinity, which is itself both the deepest content and the structural framework of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Apostles' Creed alike, remains in continuity with what the *Shema* professes even as it develops beyond the *Shema's* eloquent terseness. The belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which the Christian creeds present, "keep[s] the monotheism of *The Shema* intact and inviolate [as its] root assumption."¹³

The Christian doctrine of God as Trinity develops from Israel's monotheism: the Jewish doctrine of God's oneness. Not only is Israel's entire story predicated on this basic truth that it claims, but the Christian story also stands upon the claim to the absolute sovereignty of *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* (Acts 3:13; cf. Matt. 22:32; Exod. 3:6, RSV). Of course, the Christian story moves beyond the Jewish story in claiming Jesus Christ as the Son of God and thus God's definitive self-revelation in history. For this reason, the second part of the Apostles' Creed—like the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed—rehearses what the apostles witnessed as the mystery of the life, death, and Resurrection of the One who was called the Father's beloved Son at both his Baptism (Mark 1:11; Matt. 3:17; Luke 3:22) and his Transfiguration (Mark 9:7; Matt. 17:5; Luke 9:35). Whereas the first part of the creed names the first person of the Blessed Trinity the sovereign Lord who is the origin of all things—in direct continuity with the *Shema*—this second part of the creed names the second person of the Blessed Trinity as an object of Christian belief and in so doing takes his personal history as the culmination of the salvation history of God's people. The mystery of the life and person of Jesus Christ is thus professed as the power and the mercy of the one God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:24). The story of Israel's faith is carried forward and culminates in the Incarnate Word.

In naming the third person of the Blessed Trinity as an object of Christian belief in the third part of the creed, the Church acknowledges the gift it has received. The gift comes in the person of the Holy Spirit, who falls upon the disciples at Pentecost (see Acts 2:1–13). It is the Holy Spirit who makes the disciples partakers in the mystery of the Father and the Son. As F. J. Badcock notes, "The work of salvation is stated to be

accomplished in our Lord by the end of the second paragraph,” and for those who see an inner logic to the structure of the creed, the third part concerns the bestowal of “the benefits won by Christ.”¹⁴ The creed’s third part carries forward the belief expressed in the first part as to the unoriginate Father who is the origin of all things, as well as the belief in the second part as to the sonship and lordship of Jesus Christ, who accomplishes salvation. The third part concerns the life of the Holy Spirit, who brings creation to fulfillment and communicates salvation.

Under the belief in the Holy Spirit, we find doctrinal statements regarding the things that the Spirit brings about in the communication of divine life. At the mention of the Holy Spirit, the creed itself opens up to include the effects of God’s self-giving. In articulating these things as dimensions of its one faith, the Church professes what participation in the life of the Triune God means—that is to say, the Church acknowledges what the sanctification of life in union with God begins to look like. With the creed, the faithful claim that because the Holy Spirit is given, *the holy catholic Church* comes into being, *the communion of saints* is summoned, *the forgiveness of sins* is offered, *the resurrection of the body* safeguards the validity of history and of all creation, and this share in God’s life is radically open-ended as *life everlasting*. In the third part of the creed, the Church reads forward the narrative it has received regarding the sovereignty of God the Father and the salvific mysteries of Jesus Christ the Son. The belief in the Holy Spirit brings about the renewal of the imagination of “the body of the faithful” in conformity with the love of Christ. With this imagination, the faithful see and profess the graced nature of their own lives through the work of God. This profession is an elaboration—based on the witness of the life of faith—to what was already presented in the *kerygma*: that “the Holy Spirit” is the one “who inspired ancient prophets and whose breath is the life of the holy church.”¹⁵ The breath of the Spirit fills the body of the Church.

Pelikan identifies what I have here called “an elaboration” with terms Thomas Aquinas offers in the first part of the *Summa Theologica*, where the Angelic Doctor treats the doctrinal development of the Spirit’s procession from the Father and the Son.¹⁶ Aquinas argues for the continuity of orthodox teaching in the Christian creeds even as they undergo change through clarifying statements or additional phrases. The changes

do not lead to the formulation of new creeds, but rather make explicit what was implicit in the faith expressed in the earlier creed. “The underlying presupposition for Thomas here is the continuity of orthodox teaching and therefore the presence already from the beginning, though only implicitly, of doctrines that subsequently become explicit.”¹⁷ In line with this Thomistic principle, we may see *communio sanctorum* as a doctrine that was recognized as always already part of orthodox teaching when it was incorporated into the Apostles’ Creed at a comparatively late date. This addition, which, as we have seen, comes about through the intensity of devotional practices of Christians particularly in a certain region during a certain era, further defines the one faith that was handed down from the apostles. It so happens that this specific article required additional time for the experience of the Christian community—and especially the phenomenon of martyrdom—to illuminate this dimension of orthodox belief.

State of the Communion

Communio sanctorum was first believed implicitly and practiced devotionally—almost instinctively—before it was confessed explicitly and handed down in the creed. Upon reflection, the Church recognized the practice of exercising communion with the saints as intrinsic to the one faith it professed, and thus incorporated this dimension of life in the Spirit into the final section of its baptismal creed. Even today, when the profession of faith is made prior to the rite of Baptism in the Catholic Church, the final affirmative responses to the interrogations of faith lead to the celebrant’s announcement that “This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The communion of saints is an element of that faith which the Church proudly professes.

The most recent ecumenical council confirms this truth. In the Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church—Lumen gentium*—the Church is proclaimed to be composed of a “union of wayfarers with the brothers and sisters who sleep in the peace of Christ” and that “this union is reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods.”¹⁸ The Church recognizes that “some of [Christ’s] disciples are pilgrims on

earth, others have died and are being purified, while still others are in glory.”¹⁹ Though death separates the wayfarers from those in the glory of heaven and those being purified after death, the council acknowledges that the faith it inherits and now professes entails belief in a “living communion”²⁰ between the living and the (blessed) dead—that is, the council espouses belief in an interchange between different spheres of existence. It teaches “that the authentic cult of the saints [consists] . . . in a more intense practice of our love.”²¹ The practice of love unfolds as the living communicate with the saints through giving thanks to God for them, accepting their ancestors’ faith as their own, asking for their help through prayer, remembering their lives and witness, and joining them in the praise of God in the liturgy.²²

Although it does not use the phrase “communion of saints” in this document, the council does describe and vouch for the practice of communion, which, as the council attests, has always been a part of the faith. As though it were intentionally giving a defense of the development of orthodox teaching from its implicit reality to explicit declaration, the council announces that

The church has *always* believed that the apostles and Christ’s martyrs, who gave the supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely united with us in Christ; it has *always* venerated them, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels, with a special love, and has asked piously for the help of their intercession. Soon there were added to these others who had chosen to imitate more closely the virginity and poverty of Christ, and still others whom the outstanding practice of the Christian virtues and the wonderful grace of God recommended to the pious devotion and imitation of the faithful.²³

The practice that began in the first few centuries of the Church of venerating the blessed dead and exercising communion with them—a practice that was formally recognized as proper to the faith itself in conformity with belief in the Holy Spirit who unites the living and the dead through the merits of Christ—is here proclaimed as original to the Christian faith from its inception.

Through the council, the Church speaks with authority regarding the truth and importance of this union that “is in no way interrupted”²⁴

between the living and the dead who share in the love of Christ. Whereas once this union existed in the practices of the faithful who clung to the promises of Christ without an explicit doctrine to define this dimension of faith, in the present age the doctrine is clearly established not only as an article recited in the baptismal creed, but also through the authoritative teaching of an ecumenical council. While now that which was once absent—the doctrine—is clearly present, the question becomes whether that which was once present—the practice—remains so. Is that which is confessed explicitly supported in the practice of faith of the modern Christian?

In an essay dealing with this very chapter of *Lumen gentium*, Karl Rahner indicates that the *Constitution* is attentive to the teaching of the Church but not to the practice of the faithful regarding this teaching:

By these statements—this is the message of the decree whether explicitly or implicitly expressed—the situation is made clear. We can and should venerate the saints. The only thing left for us to do is to respond with the reality with which we have been presented in the appropriate manner, and in fact to venerate the saints. At this point, however, it may appear to the man of our own times that one factor of decisive importance has been overlooked, namely himself. In other words the question has not been answered as to why and how he, in view of his own special peculiarities, can achieve any kind of relationship with the world of the saints even though the objective reality of this world is not denied.²⁵

According to Rahner's assessment, the "man of our own times" does not find in this teaching of the Church the means, the motivation, or the grist for the imagination that will lead him, in his unique particularity, into a lived relationship with the blessed dead. Even when this Christian joins in the Church's liturgy and, partaking in the Sacraments, shares in the "spiritual goods" or "holy things" of the Church's communion, he does not easily conceive of himself as participating in a communion with the saints *per se*.

Unmistakably, the council confirms the objective fact of a communion that binds together the Church's pilgrims with those in the glory of heaven and those in the state of purification. In Rahner's view, however, it does not answer the twin questions of why and how the modern

person actually venerates the saints. These questions point to an even more fundamental twofold question: why and how do we believe in the communion of saints? Even though this belief has been exercised throughout the centuries within the Church and, by at least the middle of the ninth century, was explicitly articulated as an article of faith, what has yet to be satisfactorily accomplished is a systematic theological account of why and how this belief is intrinsic to the Christian faith as such. This theological account is neither the source of the practice of faith nor a necessary prerequisite for an articulation of faith; rather, the theological account helps tie together the practice and the articulation so that when the former is flagging—as Rahner suggests it is in the modern age—the theology can explicate what is professed, thereby revealing once again what has always been proclaimed.²⁶ Theology, in this case, assists doctrine in directing the very practice that gave rise to the doctrine in the first place.²⁷

Rather than dealing with either distinct individuals or an abstract communion, veneration of the saints is concerned with relating to particular persons bonded together in communion. The communion in which the faithful profess belief as *communio sanctorum* is a communion of holy persons who, according to *Lumen gentium*, are united to both the Church's pilgrims and those undergoing purification after death. What is as-yet theologically underdetermined is how that which makes these particular persons holy is precisely that which forms them into one communion. In other words, what unites them as a communion and what makes them holy is one and the same: the love of Christ that becomes their own way of loving.²⁸ The unique particularities of these holy persons were, each in their own way, conformed to and transformed by the love of God in Christ. At the same time, though, this transformation that brought them into the union of one body, for holiness, which is the graced sharing of divine life, is impossible in isolation. Holiness entails communion, for holiness is given in the Spirit, who is the communion of the Father and the Son given over to the world.²⁹ As an article of the Christian faith, *communio sanctorum* at once indicates the unsubstitutable particularity of holy persons, their communion in Christ through the Spirit, and the bonds that unite them. As noted above, in the East it is on the bonds—especially the Sacraments—that the primary emphasis

of the “communion of saints” has traditionally been placed. In the West, however, the most universal of all the Christian creeds—the Apostles’ Creed—presents the article as that which arose from the veneration of holy persons. It is this practice that the Church says the faithful can and should continue today.

Communing with the saints is not an arbitrary recommendation; rather, it is essential to professing and practicing the Christian faith in its fullness. For when the Church announces its saints, it proclaims the permanent validity of the humanity of Christ and the real, historical efficacy of the Incarnation. On this point, Rahner seeks to make the connection between the pronouncement of sainthood and the mystery at the heart of the Church:

When the Church declares someone to be a Saint, this is much more a necessary part of the Church’s realization of her own being . . . she must be able to state her holiness in the concrete. She must have a “cloud of witnesses” whom she can indicate by name. She cannot merely maintain that there is a history of salvation (without it being known exactly where it takes place with real, final success), but she must *really relate* that very eschatological history of salvation which she is herself. The prize of her actual Saints belongs to her innermost being and is not merely something which she “also” achieves “on the side,” something which has been inspired by a purely human need for hero worship.³⁰

In Rahner’s estimation, this is important because the heart of the Christian faith is the Incarnation of the Word of God, who was not merely “at one time of decisive importance for our salvation . . . he is *now* and for all eternity the *permanent openness* of our finite being to the living God of infinite, eternal life.”³¹ The union of divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus of Nazareth is the once for all event of salvation that, through the Spirit, is a mystery contemporaneous with all of history.

In recognizing the holiness of its own members, the Church confesses the truth of the Incarnation: that the humanity of Christ was neither temporary nor simply apparent. The humanity of Christ was and is real; it was and is the same humanity that the members of the Church possess. To see the holiness of its own members, the Church sees

the merits of the life, death, and Resurrection of the Incarnate Word in human history.³² For, as noted above, the third section of the creed contains the statements of belief that pertain to the Holy Spirit, who makes present the saving mysteries of Christ (recited in the second part of the creed) and thereby opens creation to participation in divine life. The Church's saints are both beneficiaries and heralds of this work of sanctification. Their communion with one another and eschatologically with the whole Church is guaranteed in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The status of *communio sanctorum* is at once a Christological and a pneumatological matter. It is Christological in that it concerns the full reach of the Incarnation to humanity—and indeed creation—as such, and it is a pneumatological matter since it arises from the activity of the Holy Spirit to communicate the merits of the Incarnation to the world. Veneration of the saints is an act of fidelity to the promises of Christ through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.³³ The saints are icons of God's Triunity, for they receive the eternal love of God the Father in their conformity to the mysteries of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, as they share in the communion of the Holy Spirit.³⁴

The problem of the why and how of the modern Christian's veneration of the saints—and, furthermore, the why and how of belief in *communio sanctorum*—is thus an issue that bears directly on belief in the Incarnation. The most complete account of the mystery of the Incarnation will be the one that sees also the effects of the Incarnation on real, historical human beings as part of the eternal mystery of the person of Christ. This account will not only bear upon professions of faith, but also upon practices of faith. The theologian's role is therefore to assist in the illumination of the full mystery of the Incarnation, which, in this instance, means explicating why and how the *communio sanctorum* is inextricably enfolded within Christ's person, who is identical with his salvific work.³⁵

The Diagnosis

Even though the work of Karl Rahner will not provide all the resources necessary to complete this theological task, the late Jesuit theologian does much in terms of first perceiving the problem at hand and then

beginning to diagnose precisely what ails the modern Christian in his approach to the saints. In his aforementioned essay on *Lumen gentium* and the veneration of the saints, Rahner makes two significant claims regarding the challenges modern persons face in practicing communion with the saints. The first problem relates to what might be called the triumph of Kantian epistemology. For Immanuel Kant, knowledge is restricted to the phenomenal realm. Whatever may or may not exist beyond or behind what appears cannot itself be an object of knowledge and therefore is not accessible to reason. Such a view disallows any kind of true eschatology, for eschatological assertions are based in faith regarding things not seen but for which one hopes (see Heb. 11:1).³⁶ Rahner observes that this kind of epistemological restriction is not simply an issue of philosophical perspective, but also and especially operates in the practice of the faithful—that is, it shapes their own imaginations. It is certainly the case, he contends, that the modern Christian is unable to venerate the Church's saints and thus open herself to "prayerful communication" with these persons *as persons* since the modern Christian no longer even seems "to have any sense of being actively in communication with [her] own dead."³⁷ All the dead—even those closest to the Christian in her own life—have passed beyond the veil of death and thus are not present in the phenomenal realm, where they can be known and called upon.³⁸ "It is not," Rahner continues, "that we contest the fact that they are, in principle, living on in the presence of the God of the living, but so far as we are concerned they are not alive. They have been, so to say, completely and totally removed from our sphere of existence."³⁹ Kant's legacy looms in the modern Christian imagination, where death serves as an absolute epistemological and experiential boundary.⁴⁰

A second and, in Rahner's words, "more radical reason" for the decline in the veneration of the saints has to do with the way Christians in the modern age conceive of God.⁴¹ In a world that has become vast and moves along at an increasingly frenetic pace, the modern person is inundated with sensory images and unending parcels of knowledge. God does not appear alongside these many things as something or someone to be known. As the world becomes ever more profane in the everyday experience of the everyday person—including the everyday Christian—God seems ever more distant and incomprehensible in his remote

transcendence. “God is,” Rahner concludes, “to a large extent, experienced as the silent mystery, infinite in his ineffability and inconceivability.”⁴² God does not conform to the modern person’s common ways of knowing and so God is not known except as unknowable. The problem with the veneration of saints, then, is that the modern Christian imagines that it is “into this silent, unfathomable and ineffable mystery that the dead disappear. They depart. They no longer make themselves felt. They cease any further to belong to the world of experience.”⁴³ Even if the Christian of today searches for her beloved dead, her “gaze [meets] only with the darkness of the divinity in which nothing can be distinguished any longer.”⁴⁴

Rahner bemoans this modern tendency to construe an abstract God who absorbs everything else—even the entire world—into his sheer absoluteness. This is a form of pantheism that would seek to erase the distinctions and particularities of creation itself—the very peculiar concreteness God’s Word assumed in the Incarnation—and therefore the distinctions and particularities of the saints are erased along with it.⁴⁵ The alternative to this tendency cannot, however, be a kind of polytheism (or Gnosticism) in which God and the world stand in opposition, with the saints then belonging *either* to the principality of the world *or* to the power of God.⁴⁶ The problem Rahner sees is in the false choices of holiness as absorption into God or individuality without union. As it stands now, the modern Christian seems to treat the dead as if they disappear into God, who absorbs them in his all-consuming silence, while the world progresses onward as if God were absent.

Looking Forward

Between these ailments of the Christian eschatological imagination—the epistemological horizon and the theological problem relating to the notion of God—a common factor is death. What Rahner is pointing to is that, in general, Christians in the modern period do not seem to be able to both cling to the hope of new life in the Resurrection of Christ *and* confront death as the real and total end to human life. In functionally abiding by something like Kant’s epistemological restrictions, Christians

fail to allow the promises of Christ, which are known in faith and not strictly by reason, to shape their belief and religious practice. Rather than seeking to pull the blessed dead back within the boundaries of what we can see and know according to the strictures of the epistemology of rational empiricism, communication with the dead in Christ requires the openness of faith to receive them with the eternal love in which they now participate.⁴⁷ Only by heeding the concrete historicity and hermeneutical priority of the fullness of the Incarnation—including and especially the Paschal Mystery—can Christians approach their own death and the death of others with the correct posture. Following Christ leads one not away from death, but through it to new life; and only against the backdrop of death is the content of Christian hope fully disclosed. Consequently, the uninterrupted union in Christ between those still living and those who have died is a matter of communication that passes through death. In order to take the eschatological truth of the communion of saints seriously, the Christian must at once observe the totality of death and cling in faith to the Resurrection. This challenge sets the agenda for the remainder of this work.

The underlying purpose driving this first chapter was to begin to establish a set of relationships: the relationship between the practices and the definitions of faith; the relationship between implicit and explicit orthodoxy; the relationship between theological explication and the congruence of Christian profession and enactment; and the relationship between human death and Christian hope. It is the last of these relationships that will move us into first the sobering analysis of modern approaches to death and then on to the rigorous contemplation of the content of Christian hope from which the constructive portions of this work arise. In subsequent chapters, I hope to show that despite the individualizing, deafeningly silent thrust of the modern approaches to death, the desire for the fullness of life is a desire for communion that comes from Christ himself, in whose body the Spirit re-members all the saints.