

The Holiness of the Church: *Communio Sanctorum* and the Splendor of Truth

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Introduction

IN AN ANCIENT baptismal rite practiced in Syria, Egypt, and Africa, the bishop begins by asking the candidate, “*Credis in Deum . . . in Jesum Christum . . . ?*” and continues with: “*Credis in Spiritum sanctum in sancta Ecclesia?*”¹ The final three words of this last question most probably refer back to the previous two questions as well, thus implying that the Trinity is manifested in the life, worship, and teaching of the Church. It may be, however, that Irenaeus had a different understanding of the relation between the Holy Spirit and the holy Church in his famous phrase: “*Ubi enim Ecclesia, ibi et Spiritus Dei, et ubi Spiritus Dei, illic Ecclesia et omnis gratia.*”² In any event, certain realities mediated in these ancient expressions must be grasped if we are to move closer to a common understanding today of what it means to say that the Church is holy and that it is and bears within itself the *communio sanctorum*. The first of these realities is the oneness of the Church. Our belief takes place “in the holy Church,” not in the churches. Second, the oneness of the Church may be seen as the work of the Holy Spirit or of the whole Trinity.³ Third, the holiness of the Church lies in the fact that it has been made so by the one

¹ For a discussion of this text, see Henri de Lubac, *The Christian Faith: An Essay on the Structure of the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Richard Arnandez (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986).

² *Adversus Haereses* 3, 24 (PG 7, 966B). Cited in de Lubac, *The Christian Faith*, 204, n4.

³ Thus Cyprian describes the Church as, “de unitate Patris and Filii and Spiritus Sancti plebs adunata” (*De orat. dom.* 23; cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 4).

God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus holiness and oneness are two integral aspects of the Church's being.

In this brief essay, I wish to reflect on the mystery of the one, holy Church and seek to present an understanding of this mystery in such a way that we can appreciate the intimate connection between the splendor of truth and the radiance of this splendor as it appears in the *Communio Sanctorum*. As the encyclical itself expresses it:

The natural law “is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation.” He also did so *in the history of Israel*, particularly in the “ten words,” the *commandments of Sinai*, whereby he brought into existence the people of the Covenant (cf. Ex 24) and called them to be his “own possession among all peoples,” “a holy nation” (Ex 19:5–6), which would radiate his holiness to all peoples (cf. Wis 18:4; Ez 20:41).⁴

In this study, I wish to explore the intimate connection established by the encyclical between sharing in the holiness of God and the radiation of that holiness. To this end, I will proceed in two steps. I will first consider the biblical teaching on the mystery of God who is holy and the relation between this holiness and the holiness of his people. In this part of the study, I will enlist some philosophical and theological insights that can render more intelligible especially the New Testament teaching about our relation to God and his holiness. Then, in the second part, I will reflect on some modern discussions of the unity and holiness of the Church. In this I will present some characteristic Catholic understandings of the expressions *sancta ecclesia* and *communio sanctorum*.

I. The Holiness of God and of His People

Old Testament Teaching

A Sense of the Holy

It is a fact that we find in the Old Testament some vocabulary and attitudes in regard to the numinous well described by Hans Urs von Balthasar:

Along with the creature's primal intuitive knowledge concerning the abyss in being between a relative and an absolute, between the world of men and that of the gods, there also comes a primal concept of holiness:

⁴ *Veritatis Splendor* (VS) no. 12. The text quoted in the encyclical is from Thomas Aquinas, *In Duo Praecepta Caritatis et in Decem Legis Praecepta. Prologus*.

everything within the world that belongs to the realm of the divine or the god is radically “set aside” or “separated” from the world . . . and it is therefore dangerous for mortals to approach it.⁵

We see this natural intuition caught up into an understanding of God conferred upon Israel through revelation. Two things emerge as a result of this revelation. First, the notion of “holy” is first and foremost a *personal* attribute of YHWH and not a vague, numinous force that permeates the world of gods and men.⁶ Holiness, therefore, is the inner mystery of God’s unique being. Second, this personal God is creator, and that means he is unique:

The object of creation is without exception something outside the divine. The action of God as creator is directed exclusively to the world. God is outside creation; to be created means to be not-god.⁷

Glory is the outer manifestation of that mystery, and Name is the expression of his being that he shares with us a gift. Because of his generosity we are enabled to know something of God and indeed are taught to imitate him. I wish to give here a brief survey of some of the ways in which Israel thus understood and spoke of God and the mystery of his being.⁸

*How Israel Understood the Holy*⁹

The presence of God means the presence of the Holy. Places where God reveals himself are thus sometimes called holy. Moses is told, “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex 3:5; see Jos 5:15). In another place Moses says to God, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself charged us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain, and consecrate it

⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. VI: *Theology: The Old Testament*, ed. John Riches, trans. Brian McNeil, CRV and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) 61.

⁶ This is brought out well by Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), 270–82.

⁷ Claude Westermann, Genesis, vol. I/1, *Bibl. Kommentar Altes Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1974), 26.

⁸ I have left aside many other expressions wherein the “primal intuitive knowledge” shared by all human beings is also voiced. These are well treated by H.-P. Müller, “QDS,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Claus Westermann and Ernst Jenni (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1103–18.

⁹ With a few exceptions the quotations from the Bible in this essay have been slightly adapted by the author from the RSV. Those from other published translations are noted.

(*qidašto*—"make it holy").⁹ At the same Sinai incident Moses is commanded to "consecrate (*qđš*)" the people to prepare them for the coming of YHWH on the mountain (Ex 19:10), a command he also gives to the people to prepare them for the manifestation of YHWH in providing food for them (Num 11:18). The abiding of YHWH in the midst of his people perpetuates this sanctifying presence:

There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it (the tent of meeting) shall be sanctified by my glory [manifestation of my holiness]; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests (Ex 29:42–44).

This notion underlies the expression "holy assembly" (*miqr* [from the root *qr* "to call"] *qđs*),¹⁰ which occurs some nineteen times in the Old Testament, usually in connection with the phrase "appointed feast (*mw'd*) of/for YHWH." God's people are most themselves, they are in a particular way "holy" when they are assembled to worship and praise YHWH and know his presence in their midst. Thus, in the introduction to the list of appointed feasts (within which we find the expression "holy assembly" eleven times), we read: "Say to the people of Israel, The appointed feasts of YHWH which you shall proclaim as holy assemblies, my appointed feasts, are these" (Lev 23:2). Having been called by YHWH, the people belong to him and thus are holy: "For you are a people holy to YHWH your God; YHWH your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth" (Dt 7:6).

We see that YHWH will call himself Holy in order to indicate that he is "utterly other": "I will not unleash my anger I will not return to ruin Ephraim for I am God not man. In the midst of you, the Holy One: I do not come to destroy" (Hos 11:9). And this truth is proclaimed in Israel's life of praise: "There is none holy like YHWH, there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God" (1Sam 2:2). "Who is like you, O YHWH, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" (Ex 15:11). The notion that YHWH reveals or manifests his holiness by his "glorious deeds" is a central theme in the prophet Ezekiel.

¹⁰ It is important to note here that the Septuagint employs a neologism in order to translate *miqr* *qđš*, namely, *klētē agia*. This forms the basis for many Pauline turns of phrase as we will see. For more on this, see Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Adrian Walker and Geoffrey Webb (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 118–20.

As a pleasing odor I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations (Ez 20:41).

Sidon, I am against you and I shall show my glory in your midst. People will know that I am YHWH which I execute judgment on her and show my holiness in her (Ez 28:22, NEB).

The Lord YHWH says: When I gather the Israelites from the peoples among whom they are dispersed, I shall show my holiness in them for all the nations to see. (Ez 28:25, NEB).

I shall hallow my great name, which you have profaned among those nations. When they see that I reveal my holiness through you, they will know that I am YHWH, says the Lord YHWH. (Ez 36:23, NEB).

It is not only that God's actions reveal his holiness, the mystery of his being, but human actions reveal his holiness as well as reveal man to himself. As the encyclical expresses it:

What man is and what he must do becomes clear as soon as God reveals himself. The Decalogue is based on these words: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex 20:2–3). In the "ten words" of the Covenant with Israel, and in the whole Law, God makes himself known and acknowledged as the One who "alone is good"; the One who despite man's sin remains the "model" for moral action, in accordance with his command, "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19:2); as the One who, faithful to his love for man, gives him his Law (cf. Ex 19:9–24 and 20:18–21) in order to restore man's original and peaceful harmony with the Creator and with all creation, and, what is more, to draw him into his divine love: "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:12). (*Veritatis Splendor* no.10).

Negatively, our failure to obey obscures the holiness of God. Moses is told that he will die before entering the Promised Land, just as Aaron has already died: "because both of you broke faith with me in the midst of the people of Israel at the waters of Meri-bath-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; you did not manifest my holiness in the midst of the people of Israel." (Dt 32:51; see Num 27:14).¹¹ The notion that by responding to YHWH's offer of a covenant the people become "to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6) means that they are to manifest God's holiness by

¹¹ It is probable that Moses' sin on this occasion was to arrogate to himself the saving power, the holiness of YHWH. He is told in Num 20:12: "Because you did not believe/trust me so as to manifest my holiness in the sight of the Israelites, you will not lead this community into the land I am giving them."

keeping faith with him. This extends to each individual Israelite who is told, “You shall be holy for I, YHWH, your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2 *et passim*), which is to say, the Israelite by his actions becomes more and more like God. The significance of this refrain is well expressed by John Hartely whose words can serve as a summary of our consideration:

Israel is to be *qdš*, “holy” because Yahweh, her God, is *qdš*, “holy” . . . Holiness is the quintessential quality of YHWH. In the entire universe, he alone is intrinsically holy. The nominal sentence, YHWH is holy, points in this direction. That God is holy means that he is exalted, awesome in power, glorious in appearance, pure in character. God’s holiness is contagious. Wherever his presence is, that place becomes holy. Since Israel’s holiness is learned and is derived from YHWH, the command for Israel to become holy is expressed in a verbal sentence; the use of the verb *yhy* “be, become,” captures the maturing dimension of holiness on the human plane. Being YHWH’s representative on earth, Israel is to evidence in her community characteristics that are similar to God’s.¹²

Holiness in the New Testament

The fact of Christ, one Person in two natures, literally a hypostatic union, creates a new category and thus gives new understanding to all of the Old Testament. In the light of Christ risen from the dead the entire understanding of holiness acquired in the Prior Testament is enshrined, deepened, and carried to a higher plane. The Incarnation is not merely a piece of new information to be placed in pre-existing categories. Rather, knowledge of this reality changes all that we previously knew. When Helen Keller, blind, deaf, and apparently dumb, first perceived the relation between words and things, as her teacher, Anne Sullivan, traced the letters “water” on her hand as water was flowing over it, a new dimension of being was disclosed to her, not just a new thing.¹³ The Incarnation is a disclosure of an even greater magnitude.

It was already perceived, for instance, that the unity of God’s people derived, not only from the fact of a common revelation and a common worship, but also more profoundly from the fact that “God is one.” In the light of Christ it was further understood that the oneness of the Church is caused by the fact that it shares in a mysterious way in the very unity of God himself. The holiness of God, the mystery of his triune being, is

¹² John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, ed. David A. Hubbard (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 312.

¹³ I owe this clarifying example to Robert Sokolowski, *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 201.

the reason for the holiness and thus the unity of the Church.¹⁴ We have seen that the people are never more holy as a people than when they are gathered together to worship and praise God and know his presence. Now that Christ is among us we understand that holiness is realized in that act in which God's people, in the Holy Spirit, gather and celebrate in sacrament that communion of persons that shares in the very communion of the Trinity.

Since the being of God only exists in three hypostases, we must understand God to be relational in his essence: the eternal, freely willed relationality of the Father is the personal source of the Son and the Spirit who are equal to him in an infinite movement of freedom and love. Holiness, the mystery of God's inner being, is, therefore, a mystery of communion.

In the following section, I will look briefly at the ways in which the New Testament predicates holiness of the Father, the Son, and especially the *Holy* Spirit. I will then look at the ways in which the endowment of "holy" is predicated of the Church. We will then finally be in a position to reflect theologically on the mystery of the Church as holy.

The Holy God in the New Testament

The New Testament does not apply the term "holy" with great frequency to the Father or to Jesus his Son, and some of these New Testament usages clearly cite or reflect the Old Testament. In order to understand the latter, we must bear in mind the entirely new dimension of reality opened up to the New Testament community by the resurrection of Christ. In this new dimension not only the teaching of the Old Testament, but even the words of Jesus himself now reveal their true inner meaning. Before this event, who could have ever imagined the true identity of the Father and the depth of intimacy to which he calls us with himself? Who could have understood the meaning of Jesus' use of the word *Abba* before Jesus' glorious resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Or again, who could have understood the meaning of the exhortation expressed in the words of Leviticus 11:44 (19:2, etc.), "Be holy as I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16)? We must surely hear this exhortation within the entirely new context of those who were ransomed by the precious blood of Christ, who was known before the foundation of the world but revealed in the final time (see 1 Pet 1:17–21). We will return to this.

God the Father is called "holy" (*agios*) in the lines immediately preceding those just cited from the First Letter of Peter: "but as he who called

¹⁴ For a development of this theme, as well as Jewish and Hellenistic expressions of divine unity, see Francis Martin, "Pauline Trinitarian Formulas and Christian Unity," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 199–219.

you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct . . ." (1 Pet 1:15). Mary sings that "his name is holy" (Lk 1:49), Jesus addresses him as "holy Father" (Jn 17:11), and the Book of Revelation tells us of "the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all round and within, and day and night who never cease to sing, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Rev 4:8).

Then we see how Jesus is addressed in Peter's act of faith: "and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:69). John surely intends this in its most solemn sense, as opposed to the demons quoted in Mark 1:24 and Luke 4:34.¹⁵ The angel tells Mary that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and "the child to be born will be holy, he will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Jesus himself is "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 4:1), anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism (Acts 10:38; Lk 3:22) in such a way that his works manifest his unique holiness. Peter, like Isaiah, when confronted with such a manifestation of holiness is brought to confess his sinfulness (Lk 5:8; Is 6:5). Peter tells the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "you denied the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14), a title whose full meaning is now revealed since Jesus has been "instituted Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness due to resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4). Thus, John receives instruction: "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens'" (Rev 3:7). Finally, believers are told, "But you have an oil of anointing from the Holy One, and you all have knowledge" (1 Jn 2:20).¹⁶

It is significant that the Spirit of the Father and the Son is called the *Holy Spirit*, using an expression already present in the Old Testament.¹⁷

¹⁵ I say "as opposed to the demons" reported in the Synoptic tradition. What the Evangelists, at level three of the tradition, intended is more likely to be ironic: what the demons confessed was true in a way they could not suspect.

¹⁶ Some commentators would see the title "Holy One" as being applied here to the Father, but the context and general tone of the passage favor seeing the risen Jesus as the "Holy One." See Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary*, trans. Reginald and Ilse Fuller (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 142–43.

¹⁷ "Paul's experience of God as Spirit, as mysterious vivifying and inspiring power, was of a piece with the experience of *ruach* attested by Moses (2 Cor. 3.16) and the prophets before him. That experience could be more clearly defined and recognized by reference to Christ, as the Spirit of Christ. But it was not another Spirit, which was so designated, only the Spirit of God, the Spirit given by God. If the character of Christ had now defined the character of the Spirit, it was the Spirit of God which was so defined." James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 717.

Jesus is conceived by the action of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:35), in his ministry is anointed by God with this same Spirit (Acts 10:37–38; Mt 3:16, par.), and now raised to the right hand of the Father, “he received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father and has poured him out” (Acts 2:33). The Spirit is mentioned with the Father and the Son in two texts that accent the unity of the Church (1 Cor 12:4–6; Eph 4:4–6); it is in their threefold name that the baptismal mandate is given (Mt 28:19); and it is through Christ, in one Spirit, that we both (Jew and Gentile) have access to the Father (Eph 2:18). Indeed “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body . . . and we all drank of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12–13). It is the one Spirit of the Father and the Son who gives access to the mystery of their being and thus makes the Church both one and holy. We will see how prominent is the unifying and sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit as we now discuss how the Church is holy.

One Holy People

I have already pointed out that the Septuagint, by coining a new phrase, *klētē agia*, to translate the Hebrew expression “holy assembly,” provided Paul with vocabulary to express part of his understanding of the church. In writing to the Corinthians, he first calls himself a “called apostle (*klētos apostolos*) of Jesus Christ,” and then describes them as the “Church (assembly/*ekklēsia*) of God at Corinth, made holy in Christ Jesus, “holy called ones” (*klētiōs agiois*)” (1 Cor 1:2). Much of the same vocabulary is found in the opening lines of the Letter to the Romans, and in the Letter to the Colossians.¹⁸ The influence of the Septuagint phrase as adapted by Paul is certainly one of the sources of his ability to call Christians “holy/*agioi*” (Rom 8:27–28, 16:2; 1 Cor 6:1–2; Eph 1:1; etc.).

If we strive to grasp more deeply what is implied in the call of God, we will be able to more adequately understand the New Testament teaching regarding the holiness of the Church. This call, in effect, is made up of two realities: the sanctifying work of Christ on the cross and the action of the Holy Spirit in bringing people into touch with this work. This rhythm of the work of God is well expressed in the teaching of the First Letter of John (5:6): Jesus Christ *came*, that is, he accomplished the work of redemption, and the Spirit *bears witness*, that is, he brings people

¹⁸ In Romans: *klētos apostolos*, which is then specified as “set apart for the Gospel of God” (1:1), *klētoi Iēsou Christou* (1:6), *agapētois Theou*, *klētos agiois* (1:7). In Colossians 3:12, “Put on then as the *eklektōi tou Theou*, *agioi kai ēgapēmenoi* . . .” elect of God For a complete treatment of this theme, see Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, trans. Geoffrey Webb and Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959).

to know and be transformed by that work. Or again in the words of the Letter to the Hebrews (9:13–14): “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those defiled sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more the blood of Christ who by the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, will purify your conscience from dead works for the worshipping of the living God?” Christ offered himself by the “eternal Spirit” who in this sacrifice accomplished what the “eternal fire” did in the old sacrificial system.¹⁹ The transforming fire of the Spirit who moved Jesus to die in an act of love is the one who animates those who, “baptized into his death,” now walk in newness of life/Spirit (Rom 6:3–4, 7:6).

The New Testament expresses in several different ways the fact that by his death out of love Jesus has reconciled us to God and sanctified us. There is first of all the rhythm of “love—give himself over” that we find in Galatians 2:20: “The life I now live in the flesh, I live in faith, faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself over for me.” This is repeated in Ephesians 5:2 and applied to the obligation of husbands to their wives in Ephesians 5:25. We read in John 14:31 that Jesus goes to his passion in obedience to the Father and to show the world his love for the Father: “But that the world might know that I love the Father; and as the Father commanded me, so I do . . . rise up, let us go from here.” Jesus’ self-gift to the Father merited his exaltation, which consisted in rendering his humanity apt to reveal his divine Personality: “And therefore God exalted him and gave him the Name that is above all names, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess to the glory of God the Father that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil 2:9–11, cf. Is 45:22–25). This act of love, accomplished in the fire of the Holy Spirit, makes Christ’s blood capable of purifying our conscience from dead works in order to serve the living God. Because he possesses a body, Christ is able to give human, historical existence to the will of God: “In this will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10). For this reason Paul tells us: “The body is not for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. . . . You have been purchased at a price, therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:14, 20). We are holy, we belong to God, we are the people he has acquired (Eph 1:14) and we join those in heaven who sing: “Worthy are you to receive the scroll, and to open its seals because you were slain and purchased for God with your blood from every tribe

¹⁹ See Albert Vanhoye, “Esprit éternel et feu du sacrifice en He 9,14,” *Biblica* 64 (1983): 263–74.

and tongue and people and nation; and made them for our God, a kingdom and priests, and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev 5:9).

This action of God in Christ changes us. Our holiness is not that of an external adherence to God's people at worship, rather, "we are the true circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, who boast in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). Christ dwells in us by faith and the Spirit of God is in our inner being (Eph 3:16–17; see Rom 8:10–11). This means that we have been called into "participation in his Son" (1 Cor 1:9) and we have "participation in the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:13; see Phil 2:1).²⁰ This participation extends to sharing in the sufferings and resurrection of Christ: "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and participate in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10–11; see Rom 8:15), which means that Paul's wounds are "the brand marks of Jesus" (Gal 6:17),²¹ and that we are "always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Cor 4:10).

The Church's union with Christ is set forth even more powerfully with the use of the analogies of vine and branches, temple, and most important, body. In this last predication, which is Pauline, it is revealed to us that we are physically joined to the Holy One (Jn 6:69; 1 Jn 2:20; Rev 3:7, 16:5) and make one reality with him. This fact is the basis for Christian chastity (1 Cor 6:12–20), it is the source and reason for Christian *agapē*, and for good order in the community (1 Cor 12–14), it is the context within which we offer our whole selves (*sōmata*) to God as a "living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God," and practice mutual love and concern (Rom 12:1–2, 3–8, 9–21). Not only have we received from his fullness (Jn 1:16), but this fullness from him who is the Head "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love (Eph 4:15). We are thus parts of him and parts of each other (1 Cor 12:12–31). This union is not only spiritual, it is human, that is, it involves the physical dimension of our personality as well as the spiritual (see

²⁰ For an ample treatment of these texts and a justification of the above translation of *koinōnia*, see J. Y. Campbell, "Koinōnia and Its Cognates in the New Testament," in *Three New Testament Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), and the discussion in Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 561–62, 616–17.

²¹ Robert Jewett comments on this text, "Already it is evident that the body of man, the focus of suffering in this world, was viewed by Paul as the sphere where Christ's rule becomes visibly evident." Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971.)

Heb 2:14–16). Failure to recognize this, failure to “discern the Body,” has resulted in “many of you being ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying” (1 Cor 11:29–30).

Marriage, Communion, and the Splendor of Truth

It is particularly in the spousal mystery that the relation between holiness and communion shows us the perfective nature of truth: Truth desired and received becomes a value, and as a value it becomes a force, a power:

In a particular way, it is *in the Crucified Christ* that *the Church finds the answer* to the question troubling so many people today: how can obedience to universal and unchanging moral norms respect the uniqueness and individuality of the person, and not represent a threat to his freedom and dignity? The Church makes her own the Apostle Paul’s awareness of the mission he had received: “Christ . . . sent me . . . to preach the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. . . . We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:17, 23–24). *The Crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom, he lives it fully, in the total gift of himself* and calls his disciples to share in his freedom. In a particular way, it is *in the Crucified Christ* that *the Church finds the answer* to the question troubling so many people today: how can obedience to universal and unchanging moral norms respect the uniqueness and individuality of the person, and not represent a threat to his freedom and dignity? The Church makes her own the Apostle Paul’s awareness of the mission he had received: “Christ . . . sent me . . . to preach the Gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:17, 23–24). *The Crucified Christ reveals the authentic meaning of freedom, he lives it fully, in the total gift of himself* and calls his disciples to share in his freedom. (*Veritatis Splendor* no. 85)

The mystery of the physical union of Christ and his Body is important for our understanding of the holiness of the Church. We will reflect briefly on the most mature expression of that union as set forth in the Letter to the Ephesians 5:21–33.²² We may first note how the holiness of

²² The lines which follow are adapted from Francis Martin, “The New Feminism: Biblical Foundations and Some Lines of Development,” in *Women in Christ. Toward a New Feminism*, ed. Michele Schumacher (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 141–68.

the Church is directly attributed to the act of love in which Christ died, a theme we touched upon above:

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself over for her that he might make her holy, purifying her in the washing of water, with a word, that he might present to himself the Church resplendent, not having spot or wrinkle or anything of the sort, but that she be holy and without fault. (Eph 5:25–27)

This is an eschatological vision of the completed work of Christ: the Church, his bride “holy and without fault” thus realizing the eternal plan of the Father (see Eph 1:4). This plan is being worked out even now, and that is why the Church is incipiently holy: The believers are called “holy” nine times in this Letter alone,²³ and their corporate reality is called a “holy temple” (Eph 2:21). The theme of bride is then developed, indicating that the holiness of the Church lies fundamentally in its physical and spiritual union with Christ. Thus we read in the lines that follow:

Even so husbands are obliged to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh; rather, he provides and cares for it just as Christ [does] for the Church, because we are parts of his Body (Eph 5: 28–30).

We may ask why the norm for this love of husband for wife, is given not only as that of the love of Christ for the Church, but is also presented as “love for their own [*εαυτῶν*] bodies.” I believe that behind these lines stands an Old Testament anthropology that looked upon unity between human beings as grounded on the fact that they share “flesh” (*basar*). The concept moved in concentric circles. Humanity as a whole can be called “all flesh,” and this outer circle becomes progressively denser until the immediate family is considered to be sharing the same flesh. Thus, the laws against incest in Leviticus 18 begin with the enigmatic phrase (literally): “No one shall approach any flesh of his body/flesh (*basar*) to uncover nakedness (i.e., have sexual relations). I am YHWH.” This is further specified by specific instances of what “flesh of his body/flesh” may mean. For example, “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness” (18:6). “You shall not uncover the nakedness of the wife of your father, she is your father’s nakedness” (18:7). “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother’s sister because she is your mother’s flesh” (18:13).

²³ Eph 1:1, 15,18; 2:19; 3:8,18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18.

It is clear from this that there are degrees of what we would call consanguinity, which the Hebrews considered as “con-fleshness.” The source of consanguinity is marriage. That is why when a man marries a woman they become “one flesh.” A development of this notion is found in the phrase (literally) “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” and similar expressions that indicate the familial bonds, either very close or, at least among Israelites, which form the basis for a covenant.²⁴ Both expressions “one flesh” and “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” occur in Genesis 2:23–24, texts alluded to in the Ephesians passage we are considering. When we add to this the fact that there was no current word for “body” in Hebrew, we realize that the substitution in Greek of the word *sôma* (body) where *sarx* (flesh) might be expected would occasion no surprise. Paul, in fact, when he loosely cites Genesis 2:24 in 1 Corinthians 6:16 speaks of “one body”: “Do you not know that anyone who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body [with her]? For it says, ‘the two will become one flesh.’”

The lines in the passage that we are studying now are based on just this type of thinking and reflect, I think, the fundamental source of Paul’s description of the Church as the Body of Christ. What the Ephesians text does here is render more explicit the equation Body/Flesh = Bride, which Paul has already exploited in 2 Corinthians 11:2–3: “I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Time does not allow us to develop this line of thought here, but it is important to consider some of its anthropological implications in regard to the notion that the Church is the Body of Christ.²⁵

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh. This Mystery is great: for my part, I am speaking in reference to Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31–32)

Without any indication that he is citing a biblical text, probably because he considers it too well-known, the author, with slight variations from our present Septuagint text (Gen 2:24) begins, “For this reason.” The reason given in the text is that as the Lord God (*Kyrios o Theos*) leads the

²⁴ For a complete treatment of this point, see Maurice Gilbert, “‘Une Seule Chair’ (Gen 2,24),” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 100 (1978): 66–89.

²⁵ For an initial development of what I hope to treat at greater length in another study, see Paulus Andriessen, “The New Eve, Body of the New Adam,” in *The Birth of the Church* (New York: Alba House, 1968).

woman to Adam, he exclaims, "This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because from her man (*andros*) she was taken." In the Ephesians text, the reason referred to is that Christ provides and cares for his own flesh, the Church, because we are parts of his body.

The Genesis text continues to speak of a man leaving father and mother, which is an aspect ignored by Paul who puts the accent on being joined to his wife so the two become one flesh. The physical union between Christ and the Church is precisely the great Mystery, as the author explicitly says, and it is precisely that union, which forms the model for husband and wife, and is itself the living source of the love that binds them together. As Pierre Benoit expresses it:

In this union (between Christ and the Church), which is the model for human marriage, and which is not endowed with any less physical realism, the "mystery" of the Genesis text is fully realized and definitively clarified.²⁶

We may ask why, after citing the Genesis text with the intention of applying it primarily to the union between Christ and the Church, the author calls it a "mystery." Some commentators point to the fact that *raz* and *sod*, the semitic terms that lie behind the New Testament *mysterion*, can sometimes mean the secret meaning of a text and they apply that meaning here.²⁷ But the author's point is that the *mysterion* is an aspect of God's plan now revealed. He is insisting on the analogical relation between the union of husband and wife, who become one flesh and the union of Christ and the Church who form one flesh. The "mystery" is not primarily in the text but in the realities it is mediating to us. To employ Augustine's phrase: "*In ipso facto, non solum in dicto, mysterium requirere debemus.*"²⁸

With the creation of the New Man/Adam by Christ's act on the cross (see Eph 2:15) it becomes apparent, as Heinrich Schlier expresses it, that, "In Adam as the original (*ursprünglichen*) man, the creation of God, the future Christ is already hidden, but really present. Christ is the revealed,

²⁶ "Corps, Tête et Plérôme dans les Épîtres de la Captivité," in *Exégèse et Théologie* 2 (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 107–53, at 135.

²⁷ This is the position of Raymond Brown in his fine study, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 65.

²⁸ On Psalm 68 (*Patrologia Latina* 36,858). For a number of patristic texts on this same theme, see Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism. Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot Sheppard and Sister Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 165–70.

original man . . . in the creation is already hidden the redemption provided in Christ.”²⁹ Adam, as Paul tells us was the “type” (*typos*) of the one to come (Rom 5:14), who is the “second man (*anthrōpos*), the one from heaven” (1 Cor 15:47). While these texts place the accent on Jesus Christ as the individual man who recapitulates the reality of the “first man,” our Ephesians text reminds us that as we now see Christ, the “second man,” we understand that creation itself is a prophecy of redemption. This means that in the corporate reality of man and woman, as Genesis describes it, is already present in a proleptic symbol—the unity of Christ and the Church:

On the day when Elohim created *'adām* he made him in the image of Elohim; male and female he created them, and he blessed them and called their name *'adām* on the day they were created (Gen 5:1–2).

As it requires male and female to make up God’s creation, *'adām*, so it also requires Christ and the Church to make up God’s new creation, the Christ (see 1 Cor 12:12; 1:13[?]).³⁰ The great mystery, therefore, is in the *fact* of Christ’s physical union with the Church, a union effected by the Holy Spirit. This is the deepest source of the Church’s holiness.

That all of the great work of Christ actually exists now in an actual and historical dimension is due to the action of the Holy Spirit. At baptism believers receive the Holy Spirit in their hearts: “he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (1 Cor 1:11; Eph 1:13; see Rom 5:5); “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” so that we can, with all truth, pray and relate to the Father as Jesus did and does. Because the same Spirit dwells within us, the Church is one and holy:

The Father and the Son wanted us to enter into communion with each other and with them through what is common to them and wanted to join us together as one through that Gift that they both possess together, namely the Holy Spirit, God, and Gift of God. It is in him that we are reconciled with the Deity and that we enjoy the Deity.³¹

²⁹ *Der Brief an der Epheser: Ein Kommentar* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1958), 278. The translation is basically that of Barth, *Ephesians* 2, 643, n141.

³⁰ Gordon Fee, one of the few commentators to comment on 1 Cor 12:12, says that the phrase “so it is with the Christ” is a form of metonymy: “Thus, ‘Christ’ means the church as a shortened form of the ‘body of Christ.’” This is true as far as it goes, but what could Paul possibly mean by employing such a shortened form at all? See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 603.

³¹ St. Augustine, *Sermon 71, 12, 18* (PL 38,454), cited in Yves Congar, “The Holy Spirit Makes the Church One,” in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Seabury, 1983), 23.

The Spirit co-institutes the Church as Christ institutes it, that is, because of the Spirit, the Church brought into existence and made one and holy by Christ, actually *lives* its existence authentically: It is actually one and holy.³² Just as it is because of the action of the Holy Spirit that Christ in his human nature exists, so it is because of the same Holy Spirit that the Church in its actual human and historical nature exists. This mystery of the action of the second and third Persons of the Trinity characterizes all their activity outside the Godhead in both creation and redemption. The Spirit hovers over creation and over the people (Gen 1:2; Ex 19:4; Dt 32:11) and thus the word addressed by God has its effect: There is light, there is a people made one by being addressed as one.³³

It is in this light that we can understand the New Testament teaching in regard to the Holy Spirit and the Church. Having been baptized in one Spirit into one Body (1 Cor 12:13), we have “participation in the Spirit” (2 Cor 13:13; Phil 2:1; see above), and “he who cleaves to the Lord is one Spirit with him” and becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:17, 19). It is by the “ministry of the Spirit” that God’s people are formed (2 Cor 3:4–11). They are justified and sanctified “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). Indeed, “when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us . . . in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and *renewal in the Holy Spirit*, which he poured out upon us richly *through Jesus Christ our Savior*” (Tit 3:4–7).³⁴ I will end this all too brief section with a quote from *Lumen Gentium* (no. 8), which may serve to sum up a Catholic understanding of the Spirit and the Church.

Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ’s Spirit who vivifies it by way of building up the body (cf. Eph 4:16). This is the unique Church of Christ, which in the Creed we avow to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic. After his resurrection our Savior handed her over to Peter to be shepherded (Jn 21:17).

³² The term “co-institute” is found in Yves Congar, “The Church is Made by the Spirit,” in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Seabury, 1983). For a development of this notion using the term “constitute,” see John D. Zizioulas, *Being As Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

³³ For a study of this rhythm in the theology of St. John, see Ignace de la Potterie, “Parole et Esprit dans S. Jean,” in *L’Évangile de Jean. Sources, Rédaction, Théologie*, ed. M. de Jong (Gembloux: Duculot, 1977).

³⁴ These last two texts are illustrative of the rhythm, “institute–constitute” mentioned earlier.

II. Communion of Persons and *Communio Sanctorum*

In this part, I wish to reflect briefly on three aspects of holiness and unity as they are relevant to our understanding of the holiness of the Church. First, I will discuss the priority of ontology over morality in a consideration of personal holiness. I will then place the discussion within the context of the relational character of the human person: the Body of Christ as holy. Finally, I will look at what the traditional understanding of *communio sanctorum* can add to a more profound grasp on the note of “holy” as applied to the Church.

Moral Actions and Ontological Change

It is simply a matter of common wisdom that a person becomes virtuous or vicious as a result of a consistent series of repeated decisions. Unfortunately, this wisdom was not sufficiently operative in the course of the last few hundred years of Christian moral thinking, which contented itself with the question “What is the law?” rather than the ancient and much more profound question “What must I do in order to arrive at the goal of my life and find happiness?”³⁵ As Josef Pieper once expressed this basic law of moral action: “Human activity has two basic forms: doing (*agere*) and making (*facere*). Artifacts, technical and artistic are the ‘works’ of making. We ourselves are the ‘works’ of our doing.”³⁶ The consequence of recent law-based moralism (as opposed to morality) has been that we read the New Testament exhortations to a holy life as having little to do with the objective state of our being. Yet, what the New Testament teaches us is really that our actions are meant to flow from our ontological union with Christ and to increase our participation in his life by yielding to the activity of the Holy Spirit moving us to acts of love.³⁷ If holiness is a share in the mystery of God’s being, then, in our own case as well, it is an ontological reality.

I believe that this is the intent of the famous statement in 2 Peter 1:3–4: His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for

³⁵ For a history of this situation and an analysis of its causes and remedies, see Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, trans. Mary Thomas Noble (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

³⁶ Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Lawrence E. Lynch, Richard and Clara Winston, and Daniel Coogan (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 29. Consider this remark by Karol Wojtyła: “The self constitutes itself precisely through the acts proper to man as a person.” Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), “The Person: Subject and Community,” *Review of Metaphysics* 33 (1979/80): 273–308.

³⁷ I have developed this point using the ancient concept of the imitation of Christ in Francis Martin, “Historical Criticism and New Testament Teaching on the Imitation of Christ,” *Anthropotes* 6 (1990): 261–87.

life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by means of which he has bestowed on us his precious and magnificent promises, that through them you may become sharers (*koinōnoi*) of the divine nature having escaped from the corruption that is in the world as a result of desire.

The phrase “sharers of the divine nature,” while it borrows its terminology from Jewish–Hellenistic mysticism, refers to the common New Testament theme that we have become children of God, animated by his Spirit (Rom 8:5, 14–17; Gal 4:6); that we have fellowship (*koinōnia*) with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn 1:3); that a Christian is a sharer (*koinōnia*) in the glory to be revealed (1 Pet 5:1). With such parallel expressions available (see Col 2:9 *plēroma–peplērōmenoi*) it is exaggerated reductionism to restrict this text to similar expressions elsewhere in extra-biblical literature when the precise point is to show that now in Christ these aspirations have been fulfilled.

Peter teaches us that our holiness comes from knowledge of the One who has called us to his own glory and excellence and that our immortality is fundamentally a share in his own. The text goes on immediately to urge us to supplement our faith with virtue, our virtue with knowledge, and finally our godliness with brotherly affection and our affection with love (see 2 Pet 1:5–7). Our acts therefore are changing us and bringing us into a deeper participation in the divine nature. I recognize that most modern commentators tend to avoid this line of thinking being content to point out the relation in Jewish–Hellenistic mysticism between immortality and sharing in the divine nature. I think, however, that the massive patristic tradition cannot be ignored here. As J. N. D. Kelly puts it:

His [the author’s] tentative ideas, however, were destined to provide a firm scriptural foundation for the vast theology of redemption by the divinization of human nature which, beginning with Clement of Alexandria, was to dominate the patristic centuries and remains immensely influential in large sections of the Church down to the present day.³⁸

While the text from 2 Peter is helpful it is not necessary in order to establish the point that holiness for the Church and for all the persons who make up the Church is an ontological quality and not merely a moral quality. Before passing on to consider the intrinsically relational quality of moral action we should add two reflections. We should first observe that human activity is always historical, that is, it is the activity of a being who

³⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981[reprint]), 304.

is both spiritual and material, whose spirituality pervades his materiality and gives it a properly human dimension. Spirituality for a human being is not immateriality, and, as we shall see, it is not individual but shared. Holiness is a complete fulfillment of the human person because it realizes the transcendent orientation of the whole human being and results in a transformation that is perfected in that act in which the Trinity gives himself unreservedly to the whole spiritual-material being in an embrace of love that is eternal life.

Secondly, genuine holiness realizes and sublates the autoteleological drives of human nature, bringing them to a transcendent fulfillment.³⁹ Thus, to quote Karol Wojtyła:

Man fulfills himself, he realizes the autoteleology of his personal self through the transcendent dimension of his action. The transcendence of truth and good has a decisive influence on forming the personal subject as is evident in the analysis of conscience and morality. The same analysis allows one to penetrate more profoundly the contingency of man, elucidating how essential is his striving for self fulfillment, how in this striving he is constantly torn between good and evil, between self-fulfillment and non-fulfillment. . . .⁴⁰

The Human Person as Essentially Relational

In his recovery of the thinking of the Cappadocians in regard to personhood, John Zizioulas has managed to forge a link between the enormous reversal effected by these saints within classical Greek thought and the modern move from the “turn to the subject” to the “turn to the person.”⁴¹ I wish, in just a few lines, to show how this understanding of the human person renders intelligible the twofold holiness of the Church, individual and corporate.

³⁹ The process I am referring to is aptly portrayed in this description of sublation given by Bernard Lonergan: “What sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all its proper features and properties, and carries them forward to a fuller realization within a richer context.” Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 241.

⁴⁰ “The Person: Subject and Community,” 287. For a discussion of how these philosophical principles are elaborated in terms of nature and saving grace, see Gerard Beigel, *Faith and Social Justice in the Teaching of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), Chapter Three, “Man Within the Sphere of Redemption.”

⁴¹ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*. This mode of thought is also part of Western theological thought: see Yves Congar, “The Father, the Absolute Source of Divinity,” in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Seabury, 1983).

The understanding that within the Trinity the Father is the very source of the Divinity for the Son and Spirit helps us to understand that Person is not added to substance, as though with the Trinity there were a neutral substance equally divided among the Persons. It is rather that the Father, as essentially Father, hypostasizes the Divinity in a relational manner eternally and freely begetting the Son and giving rise to the Spirit who is, as it were, the subsisting “we” between the Father and the Son. Having arrived at this insight, it is easier to see that the human person is also essentially relational, and that, in a created manner that does not identify substance and relation, it is still possible to understand that a human person hypostasizes his or her substance, drawing it up into the very relational nature of personality. This means that community, when it is genuine, is not added to personhood but belongs to it essentially, though only in such a way that the selfhood of each person is enhanced and not diminished.

The classical definition of person, given by Boethius (and modified somewhat in the course of history) asserted basically that a person is “an individual substance of a rational nature.”⁴² Modern philosophical and theological thought has advanced the understanding of person and thus would understand these terms in a more existential manner than that in which they were formerly understood. When “substance” is seen in the light of creation, it becomes obvious that it is what it is by its relation to God, that it subsists as what it is, and that it expresses what it is by relation to other beings. Thus, W. Norris Clarke proposes a triadic structure of being: “being *from* another, being *in* oneself, and being *toward* others.”⁴³ Given the dynamic structure of all being it is true to say that the *individuum*, the *concretum*, seen in the light of its reality as created, is constituted by relation: to God, to itself, and to other beings. This last relation, that to other beings, is what Maritain calls, “the basic generosity of existence,”⁴⁴ in which every being at its own level does impart something of itself: *bonum est diffusivum sui*.

Similarly, when we reflect on what “rational” means, we see that the unique and incommunicable reality of a person is also constituted by relation, it is *from* God, it relates *in* itself and to itself, and it is a being *toward* others. Because in regard to person we are concerned with a spiritual reality that is one who possesses itself and can reflect upon itself, we are

⁴² For a discussion of this definition and its history, see Max Müller et al., “Person,” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 404–19.

⁴³ W. Norris Clarke, “A Response to David Schindler’s Comments,” *Communio* 20 (1993): 596.

⁴⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), 90.

in the presence of the mystery of freedom. From this point of view we can see that what is unique in the instance of person is that this threefold relation is actualized in the personal activity of freedom by which the relation, accepted and lived in love, becomes *relationship*. Thus, the particular property of a “rational” substance is that it is constituted by relation in such a way that this is given properly human existence in the free acts by which the person realizes him- or herself. This philosophical elaboration is expressed biblically by saying that man is the image of God, and can find himself only in a relationship of mutual self-giving love.

For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. . . . Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, “that all may be one. . . as we are one” (John 17:21–22), opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, *cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself* (*Gaudium et Spes* nos. 22, 24, emphasis added).

The mention of the Trinity in the above text points once again to the fact that *communio* in the Church is an icon of the Trinity, a realization on the human level of the mystery and fulfillment of person through love. This communion is a communion of persons. On the created level of the Church it can increase or decrease according to the degree of love with which the created and graced persons actually give themselves to each other in love: Their actions affect their being and the being of the whole Church. These actions cannot be, of their nature, purely spiritual. They must be human actions and thus the holiness of the Church has a physical dimension: It is realized by body-persons. I will return to this in discussing *communio sanctorum*.

The final point to be realized here in the discussion of *communio personarum* is that the Catholic view understands the nature of these relationships to be stronger than death since they are centered on the relationship to the risen Christ whose Body we are. It is for this reason that the “communion of saints” includes the Church triumphant, the Church suffering, and the Church militant, and that the celebration of the heavenly banquet gathers all of the Church together. I will give here some expressions of this faith from Vatican II.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See Christoph Schönborn, “The ‘Communion of Saints’ as Three States of the Church: Pilgrimage, Purification and Glory,” *Communio* 15 (1988): 169–81. For an even stronger expressions, see Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, Chapter 4,

Until the Lord shall come in His majesty, and all the angels with Him and death being destroyed, all things are subject to Him. Some of His disciples are exiles on earth, some having died are purified, and others are in glory beholding “clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is”; but all in various ways and degrees are in communion in the same charity of God and neighbor and all sing the same hymn of glory to our God. For all who are in Christ, having His Spirit, form one Church and cleave together in Him. Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least weakened or interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the Church, is strengthened by communication of spiritual goods.

For by reason of the fact that those in heaven are more closely united with Christ, they establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness, lend nobility to the worship which the Church offers to God here on earth and in many ways contribute to its greater edification. For after they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord, through Him and with Him and in Him they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, showing forth the merits which they won on earth through the one Mediator between God and man, serving God in all things and filling up in their flesh those things which are lacking of the sufferings of Christ for His Body which is the Church. Thus by their brotherly interest our weakness is greatly strengthened (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 49).

Communio Sanctorum

The origins of this expression and its precise original understanding are shrouded in the mists of history.⁴⁶ This much is clear: From a very early date the phrase referred to two different but interconnected realities, namely, participation in holy things, specifically baptism and Eucharist, and communion among those sanctified by the Holy Spirit. I will give here two quotes from Catholic authors to give an idea of how the phrase functions in Catholic thought and practice. The first is from the Commentary on the Apostles Creed by St. Thomas Aquinas:

Just as in a physical body the operation of one member conduces to the good of the whole body, so it is in a spiritual body such as the Church. And since all the faithful are one body, the good of one member is

“Eucharist and Catholicity.” One might also consult the study by Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).

⁴⁶ For a study of these origins one may consult Stephen Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio* (Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1964); J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972), “The Communion of Saints,” 388–97.

communicated to another: *every one*, as the Apostle says (Rom. xii, 5), *members, one of another*. Wherefore among points of faith handed down by the Apostles, is that there is a community of goods in the Church, and this is expressed in the words *Communion of saints*. Now of all the members of the Church Christ is the principal, for He is the head: *He . . . hath made him head over all the Church which is his body* (Eph. i, 22). Accordingly Christ's good is communicated to all Christians, even as the power in the head is shared by all the members.

This communication is effected by the sacraments of the Church, wherein the power of Christ's passion operates, the effect of which is the bestowal of grace unto the remission of sins. . . .⁴⁷

The second text is by Hans Urs von Balthasar who reflects a typically Catholic sense of interconnection between the saints on earth and between those in heaven and those on earth. After speaking of the vertical dimension of unity and holiness effected by the Holy Spirit, von Balthasar goes on to speak of the "horizontal element," which equally owes its existence to the same Spirit.

The extent to which the "saints"—those who attempt to take seriously their sanctification by the holy triune God and to respond to it—are able in their community to be, to live, to work, and to suffer for one another can only begin to be realized when one has grasped the principle which welds them together into the unity of the community of the Church: the unity of the triune God manifested in the self-giving of Christ and poured out in the Holy Spirit. For this unity is nothing other than pure being-for-another. . . .

It is here that the biblical concept of fruitfulness is introduced. This supersedes (but without destroying their limited meaning) the concepts of works and rewards, which at first, as images taken from the world of human labour, presuppose a system of individuals distinct from one another in order to be able to stress the effective "being-for" of the "saint" (that is to say of the truly believing, hoping, loving man). . . .

There is perhaps no more comforting truth about the Church than that in it there is a community, a communism of saints. For, on the one hand, this means that there is a continually overflowing richness on which all the poor may draw; it is called the treasure of the Church. It is precisely the same as the incalculable fruitfulness of those who offer themselves and all they have to God to dispose of for the sake of the brotherhood.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, "Exposition of the Apostles' Creed," in *The Three Greatest Prayers: Commentaries on the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Apostles' Creed* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1956), 80.

⁴⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Elucidations*, trans. John Riches (London: S.P.C.K., 1975), 58–59, 62.

III. Conclusion

In the Catholic tradition the expressions *sancta ecclesia* and *communio sanctorum* have come to designate two aspects of the one mystery of the holiness of the Church. The first puts the accent on the aspect of person, and of how the “subsisting altruism” of the Trinity is shared in and manifested in the human dimension. The second places the accent on what is shared, namely the life of Christ as he shares himself in the Eucharist. One of the contributions of the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* is, as we have seen, to set forth the rhythm between holiness received and holiness manifested. Let this text from the encyclical sum up this teaching in the context precisely of the Eucharist:

The lives of the saints, as a reflection of the goodness of God—the One who “alone is good”—constitute not only a genuine profession of faith and an incentive for sharing it with others, but also a glorification of God and his infinite holiness. The life of holiness thus brings to full expression and effectiveness the threefold and unitary *munus propheticum, sacerdotale et regale* which every Christian receives as a gift by being born again “of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5) in baptism. His moral life has the value of a “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1; cf. Phil 3:3), flowing from and nourished by that inexhaustible source of holiness and glorification of God which is found in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist: by sharing in the sacrifice of the Cross, the Christian partakes of Christ’s self-giving love and is equipped and committed to live this same charity in all his thoughts and deeds. In the moral life the Christian’s royal service is also made evident and effective: with the help of grace, the more one obeys the new law of the Holy Spirit, the more one grows in the freedom to which he or she is called by the service of truth, charity and justice. (*Veritatis Splendor* no. 106).

