

PT 522 Reformed Spirituality	4 Communion of Saints
WSC / 2025	Oasis in the Wilderness

“I believe in... the communion of saints” - The Apostles’ Creed  
*credo... sanctorum communionem*

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## I - COMMUNITY OR COMMUNION OF SAINTS?

### Historical Understanding: Background of the Idea of “Community”

- A. “Communitarianism”
  - Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community & Society* [*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*] 1887
- B. Frederick Schleiermacher (1768-1834): “*The church is above all else a fellowship*”
  - Emergencing churches: “communities that practice the way of Jesus”

### Historical Understanding: The History of “Communion of Saints”

- A. “Old Roman Creed” (progenitor of Apostles’ Creed) Balkans/Gaul (~700-724 A.D.)
- B. *sanctorum communionem* (“communion of Saints”) late addition to Creed
  - It is not discussed by Ignatius<sup>c.107</sup>, Justin<sup>c.165</sup>, Irenaeus<sup>c.190</sup>, Tertullian<sup>200</sup>; Ø in Caesarea<sup>325</sup>, Nicea<sup>325</sup> Ambrose, Augustine

### The Meaning of “Communion of Saints”

- A. <sup>1</sup>“*Fellowship*” (comm./holy persons) or <sup>2</sup>“*Sacramental*” (part. in holy things)
- B. What is root of *Sanctorum* (genitive plural)? = Masculine (*sancta*) or Neuter (*sancti*)?
  - 1. *sancti* - holy people
  - 2. *sancta* - holy things
- C. The Historic **Reformed** View: a fellowship of God’s holy people
 

Heidelberg Catechism Q.#55: “What dost thou understand by the communion of saints?  
 “First, believers, all & every one, as members of X, have part in him and in all his treasures and gifts. Secondly, that each one must feel himself bound to use his gifts, readily and cheerfully, for the advantage and welfare of other members.”
- D. Biblical language
  - 1. Noun: “fellowship” (participation): Ac 2.42; Php 1.5; 2.1
  - 2. Verb: “to share” (contribute, have in common): Rom 12.13; Php 4.15

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## II - WHERE DOES THE CHURCH GAIN IT'S LIFE?

### Our Communion with God (Vertical)

- A. Heidelberg Cat. Q.55 - What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?

**First**, that believers one and all, as members of Christ the Lord, have communion with him and share in all his treasures and gifts.

**Second**, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily & joyfully for the Service & enrichment of the other members

- B. *WCF* 26 – On the Communion of Saints

*Conf* 26.1 - “All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their Head by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces.”

1. First, Union and Communion with Christ

“**United** to Christ...

“**United** to o.a. in love”

...by Sp. & by faith”

**Fellowship** [comm.] with him... have **Communion** in e.o.'s gifts & graces

...in his graces & suff/d/r/gl.

- Order reflects precedence. Communion with God is primary

2. The *Confession* established a Christ-centered understanding of communion of saints

### From Where does Church (as the Communion of Saints) Gain its Life?

- A. Modern theology & anti-supernaturalism

- B. Communion of saints is sustained by our communion with Christ - Jn 15.5

1. It is above the outworking of a deeper union & communion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Life Together): “Christian community means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. There is no Christian community that is more than this, and none that is less than this.... We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”

James Bannerman: “Christ... [is] personally present, governs and administers ordinances and blessing through the Church. The Church has no store of life apart from Christ being in it; the ordinances of the Church have no deposit of grace apart from Christ present with them; the office-bearers of the Church have no gift of power, or authority, or action, apart from Christ ruling and acting by them.”

2. e.g., Worship.

“An assembly of public worship is not merely a gathering of God's children with each other, but is, before all else, a meeting of the triune God with his covenant people.” – OPC DPW I.B.1

## Our Communion with One Another (Horizontal)

1John 1.3 – *“that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”*

### A. Gifts of the Spirit - 2Tim 1.6,7

1. All gifts are endowed by the Spirit & empowered by the Spirit - 1Cor 12.4-11; 1Pet 4.10

2. The “one another” commands

*Love...* one another: Jn 13.34,35; 15:12,17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 1Th. 3:12; 4:9; 2Th. 1:3; 1Pet. 1:22; 4:8-10; 1Jn 3:11,16,23; 4:7,11; 2John 1.5

*Serve or submit to...* one another (Gal 5.13; Eph. 5:21; 1Pet. 4:8-10; 5:5)

*Be kind to & do good to...* to one another (Eph 4.32; 1Th 5.15)

*Forbearing or bearing with...* one another (Col 3.13; Eph 4.2)

*Forgiving...* one another (Col 3.13; Eph 4.32)

*Live in peace with...* one another (Mk 9.50; Rom 12.16; 15.5; Gal 5.15, 26; 1Cor 6.7; 12.25; 2Cor 10.12; 13.11)

*Accept* [do not *show favoritism*, do not *judge*]... one another (Rom 12.16; 14.13)

*Comfort...* one another (2Cor 13.11)

*Pray for...* one another (Jam 5.16; Eph 6.18)

*Show hospitality to* [greet]... one another (Rom 15.7; 16.16; 1Cor 11.33; 12.25; 1Pet 4.9)

*Encourage or exhort* [teach, instruct, admonish]... one another (1Th 4.18; 5.11; Heb 3.13; 10.24; Rom 15.14; Col 3.16; Eph 5.19)

*Speak truth to* [build up, not gossip]... one another (Col 3.9; Jam 4.11; 5.9)

*Confess sins to...* one another (Jam 5.16)

*Fellowship with...* one another (1Jn 1.7)

### B. We need each our Fellow Brothers and Sisters: We Grow as a Body, as a Communion

1Cor 12.26 *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

Eph 4.15 *we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup>from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

1. Worshiping together (Heb 10.25; 1Cor 10.17)

2. Devoted to one another (Ac 2.42,44)

3. Church Discipline (1Cor 5; Mt 16.19)

### C. The Body Grows through Mutual Gifts & Graces of the Spirit

1. The gifts of the Spirit are necessary for mutual growth (1Cor 12.7; 1Pet 4.10)

2. The service of the Saints builds up the body (Rom 1.11,12; 14.19; 1Cor 12.21)

3. The gifts maintain the Unity of the Church (Php 2.1-4; Jn 17.23)

### D. The Ultimate sign of the Communion of Saint: Love

Jn 13.35 - *“By this all people will know: you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”*

- Christian love unveils True source of our life and the world *beholds* what is transcendent

## Christ and His Church are Inseparable

John Murray: “We cannot think of Christ properly apart from the church. If we think of the Church apart from Christ or transfer to the church prerogatives that belong only to Christ... we are guilty of idolatry. But if we think of Christ apart from the church, then we are guilty of dismemberment that severs what God has joined together. We are divorcing Christ from his only bride.” - *Writings*, 1.238

John Calvin: “They therefore are insane who, neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics, who pretend to secret revelations of the Spirit; and the proud who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the church.” –

### A. Christ & Church — “Head” & “Body”

1. Branch & Vine (Jn 15.5); Bride of Groom (Eph 5.32, Rev 21.2f; 22.17); Temple *or* Spiritual house (Eph 2.21f; 1Cor 3.16f; 2Cor 6.16; 1Pet 2.5)
2. As the *Body* of Christ, we are united to Christ our *Head*, and derive all life from Him (Eph 1.23; 3.19; 4.13-16; Jn 15.5; 1Cor 12.27; Eph 3.6; 4.12f; Col 1.18; 2.19)
3. As the *Body* of Christ, we are united to one another, as *Members* of the body. (Rom 12.4,5; 1Cor 1.10f; 6.16; 10.17; 12.12; Eph 2.15; Col 3.15)

### B. The Church is the Household of Faith

1. Our love for Christ is evidenced in & by our love for brothers and sisters (1Jn 3.16,17)
2. To love or persecute the Church is to do the same to Christ - Mt 25.40; Jn 21.15-17;  
*Acts 9.4 - “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”*
3. The Church is the place of Salvation  
*Conf. 25.2: “...out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”*  
- Christ entrusted the Church with the Great Commission (Mt 28.18-20); the message of salvation (Rom 10.14-17) & to be “*the pillar and buttress of the truth*” (1Tim 3.15).