SAINTS IN CATHOLICISM AND PROTESTANTISM

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Of the three major branches of Christianity, Catholics and Eastern Orthodox see the Church as an integrated body, like an organism. So one part can communicate with other parts, both materially and spiritually. Protestants at the time of the Reformation opted instead to view the church as an association, not an organism. It was a gathering for mutual support in practicing the Christian life, but the idea that Christians can share with each other *supernaturally* was pretty much lost. That, I think, is why Protestants tend to have trouble with the doctrine of the communion of saints.

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Nearness to God and God’s grace are equally possible for Catholics and non-Catholics. It is up to each of us to determine how much we cooperate with God’s graces (allow them to work in our lives, making us holier).

Protestants tend to say that in heaven the saints (here meaning only those in heaven) are all an equal distance from God. Catholics tend to say that in heaven some are nearer to God than others (i.e., enjoy a deeper relationship with him), depending on how much each of us cooperated with God’s graces while on earth. That’s why Catholics have saints (here meaning only those in heaven who were heroically virtuous while on earth) and Protestants don’t (except for New-Testament personages: St Bartholomew Lutheran Church, St James Methodist Church).

Why do Protestants say that in heaven the saints are all equally distant from God? Because Luther had an extremely low opinion of human nature: we are all full of shit (hey, his word, not mine[[1]](#footnote-1)), infinitely nothing compared to the infinite God.

(That is also why Protestants don’t trust using the senses to worship God, whereas Catholics do: statues, incense, realistic [not geometric] stained-glass windows, crucifixes [not crosses], rosaries, medals, holy cards, etc.)

1. Luther “sometimes wondered in disgust that mankind has not by now “shit the whole world full, right up to the heavens.”” (Trovato, Benito. “Philological Limits to Knowledge, or Luther’s Tower Experience.” *University of Chicago School of Heuristic Theology*. 12 June 2001. <https://www.lettersfromthedustbowl.com/limits.html>.) Trovato and Simon are quoting Luther’s *Table Talk*. Then there is the “analysis of his close to four hundred letters, almost 40% of which had some sort of reference to either butts, shitting, shit, and anuses, in that order of descending popularity.” (Simon, Ed. “Fecal Fridays: Martin Luther on the Toilet.” *QueenMobs*.*com*. Dec. 2017. 3 Oct. 2023. <queenmobs.com/2017/12/fecal-fridays-martin-luther-toilet/>.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)