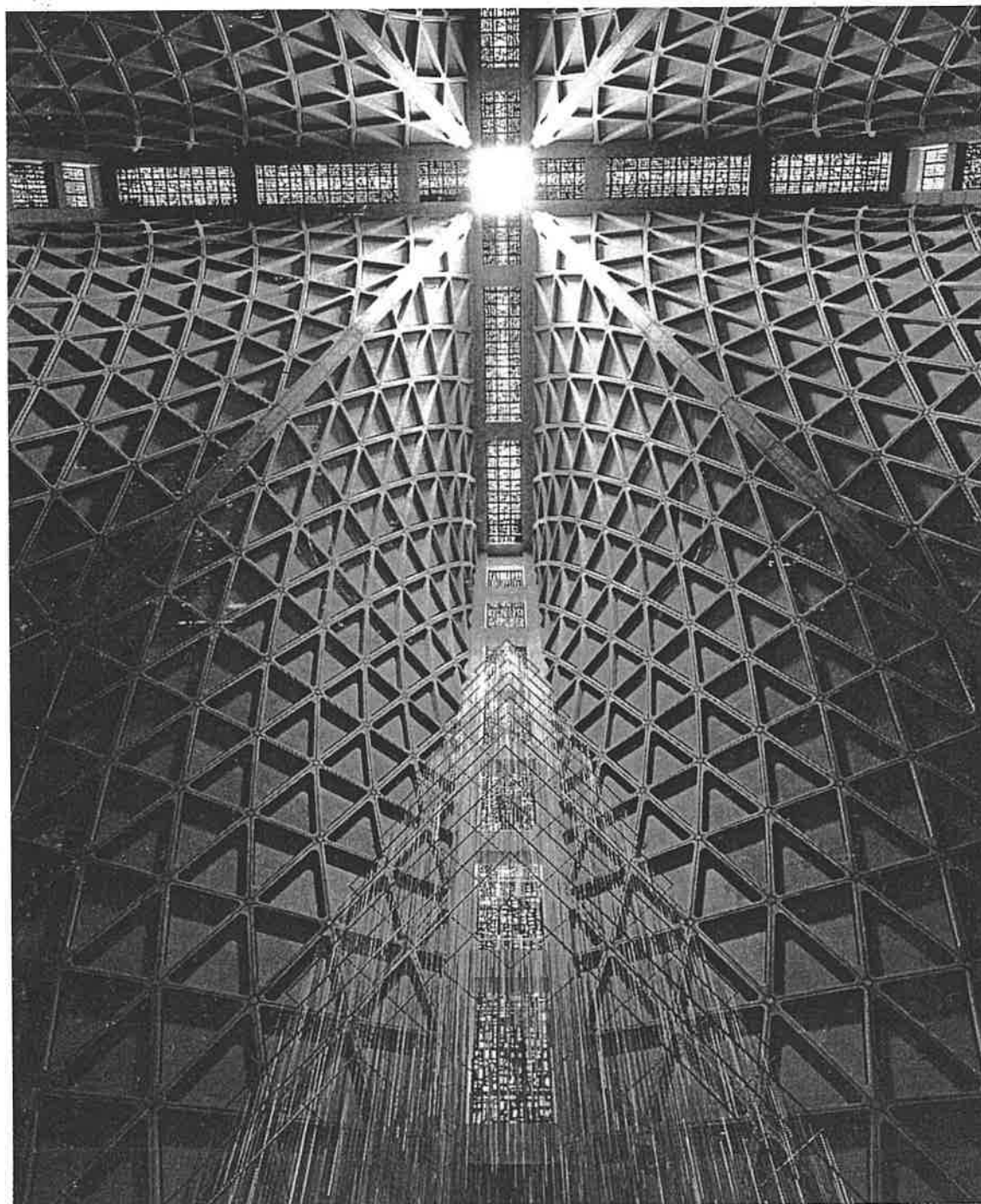


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## SAINTLY STATISTICS

### REVIEW ARTICLE

BY

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*La Sainteté en Occident aux derniers siècles du moyen âge: D'après les procès de canonisation et les documents hagiographiques.* By André Vauchez. [Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, Fasc. 241.] (Rome: École française de Rome. 1981. Pp. x, 765. FF 420.)

*Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century.* By Michael Goodich. [Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, Band 25.] (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann. 1982. Pp. viii, 290. DM 180,-.)

*Saints & Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700.* By Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1982. Pp. xii, 314. \$25.00.)

Who are the saints and what is their number? These questions might appear to be notorious topics of scholastic debate. In fact, they are a current scholarly fascination and the theses are presented not in medieval disputations but in graphs and computer-generated statistics. As a *New York Times*' headline reports, "Computers Hum as the Saints Go Marching In."<sup>1</sup> The early results are the three books reviewed here, the first monographs systematically to quantify wide-ranging data on medieval sanctity taken from the original sources. The question to be answered is whether the pioneering scholars have discovered a promising new way to study medieval life or a new intellectual dead end.

André Vauchez's *Sainteté* is superb. Using papal canonization proceedings from 1185 to 1431 (from the first surviving *processus* to the end of the reign of Pope Martin V), he analyzes the positions medieval saints held in society, the regional emphases on particular types of saints, and the signs by which saints were recognized. He finds a contrast between northern and southern sanctity which parallels the contrast between the north's vertical, hierarchical feudal society and the less rigid structure of the south epitomized in the Italian communes. He describes an evangelical model of sanctity, which suffers a relative decline in the fourteenth century, and yields, at the close of the Middle Ages, to a "wave of mysticism"; and also discovers a papal ambivalence about these shifts, which ultimately leaves official canonizations more divorced from popular and local piety. For the first time

<sup>1</sup>Israel Shenker, "Computers Hum as the Saints Go Marching In," *The New York Times*, February 5, 1976, p. 31M, describes Weinstein and Bell's project.

medieval canonization records themselves are systematically used to discuss the signs of sanctity, and we learn how, under mendicant influence, the life lived by a saint becomes his greatest miracle, at the same time that supernatural events, which must pass increasingly stringent curial scrutiny, become grander. Vauchez's theses are well expounded and well documented.

The strength of the study, and at the same time its major weakness, is its data base: the seventy-one known papal canonization inquests made between 1185 and 1431, thirty-three of which resulted in canonizations. Vauchez has located and listed many of these "inquisitions," some unpublished, and has demonstrated their value for studying ideals of sanctity. His difficulty is that popes opened judicial proceedings only for a small sample of the thousands of saints venerated in the Late Middle Ages. It is a sample probably biased on one hand against archaic and local cults and on the other hand against *avant-garde* spiritualities. Thus for Vauchez to judge the significance of his material in relation to medieval spirituality as a whole, he has to refer often to pre-existing more general studies on the subject, none made with the same thoroughness and care as his own.

Michael Goodich's *Vita Perfecta* is not a *liber perfectus*. Dedicated to the proposition that hagiography "may fruitfully be mined as a storehouse of material," he analyzes thirteenth-century hagiography by using a "pluralistic methodology" (p. vii). His initial chapters on canonization procedure have been superseded by Vauchez's study: for example, Goodich treats the partial record of St. Hugh of Lincoln's trial (1219) as the earliest surviving papal process, without noting the records Vauchez cites for St. Galgano (1185) and St. Gilbert of Sempringham (1201) (p. 29; cf. Vauchez, *Sainteté*, pp. 41-47, 656). More valuable is the list Goodich has compiled of 518 saints who lived in the years between 1215 and 1296 (from the Fourth Lateran Council to the accession of Boniface VIII). The heart of his work is based on their surviving records. With these he analyzes the hagiographical conventions employed, the social position of thirteenth-century saints, and then, in psychologically oriented chapters, their childhood and adolescence. Final chapters on the "morphology of piety" awkwardly categorize saints as monastic saints, mendicant saints, female saints, and non-monastic lay saints—divisions which make canons and bishops monastic and treat lay persons under three separate headings. Despite the *Vita Perfecta* title, Goodich tends to keep to the surface of sanctity, to the classes and traits associated with saints, and nowhere details the spiritual dynamics of the "perfect life." Readers who would have hoped to discover here the thirteenth-century forms of the patterns of spirituality described in Jean Leclercq's *La Vie parfaite* will be disappointed.<sup>2</sup> Goodich offers instead some loosely connected hagiographical studies, large sections of which have been taken directly from his doctoral dissertation and from various articles published since.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Jean Leclercq, *La Vie parfaite: Points de vue sur l'essence de l'état religieux* ("Tradition Monastique," Vol. 1 [Turnhout: Éditions Brepols, 1948]).

<sup>3</sup>Goodich does not list his earlier publications in his bibliography and only briefly notes in a preface the names of journals in which "earlier versions of several portions of this work have

Unfortunately, some historical errors have crept into Goodich's text. One is surprised to read from a medievalist working in Israel about "the capture of Louis IX by the Saracens at Jerusalem" and about the return of his relics "to France from the Holy Land" (pp. 133, 187). Or to learn that Hostensius claimed that monks and canons could own private property (p. 129). Or to discover that in the thirteenth century, "each rule provided some period of eremitical life for its members, which served as a kind of cathartic preparation for the rigors of saintliness akin to the education of a shaman" (p. 131).

Perhaps the major difficulty with Goodich's book is that it overemphasizes the battle against heresy as a key factor in the saint's mode of life and eventual sanctification. He claims that "the basis of this sudden papal interest in sainthood was undoubtedly the alarming growth of heresy"; that "the chief stated function of the cult of the saints was as a witness against heresy"; that popes used canonization as "an effective papal weapon to reward friends"; that the early thirteenth-century papal interest in mendicant canonizations is linked to "the anti-heretical function of canonization"; and that "in order to achieve recognition of their cults, the female saints had to prove their loyalty to Rome by participation against the church's political and ideological foes" (pp. 23, 37, 38, 43, 179). Now certainly the cults of some saints were influenced by the battle against heresy, witness Innocent IV's prompt canonization of an assassinated inquisitor, St. Peter Martyr, in 1253, one year after his death; and certainly thirteenth-century popes would be no more likely to canonize heretics and unreconstructed Ghibbelines than sixteenth-century popes would be to canonize Protestants. Nevertheless, it is fundamentally misleading to view papal interest in canonization mainly as a reaction to heresy, since this interest first appears in a major way at the start of the Gregorian Reform when widespread heresy was not a great problem.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, since the popes canonized only sixteen of Goodich's 518 thirteenth-century saints in the fifty years after their deaths, Rome's control over the ideals of sanctity, despite the proclamations of the Fourth Lateran Council, does not appear sufficient in itself to explain an anti-heretical or pro-Roman political bias in the cult of the saints. Goodich must prove his assertion that most saints' *lives* were written with possible papal canonization

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appeared." Yet the book does not greatly advance "The Dimensions of Thirteenth Century Sainthood" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1972); "Childhood and Adolescence among the Thirteenth-Century Saints," *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, 1 (1973), 286-309; "The Politics of Canonization in the Thirteenth Century: Lay and Mendicant Saints," *Church History*, 44 (1975), 294-307; "A Profile of Thirteenth-Century Sainthood," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (1976), 429-437; "The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography," *Church History*, 50 (1981), 20-32; and "A Note on Sainthood in the Hagiographical Prologue," *History and Theory*, 20 (1981), 168-174.

<sup>4</sup>On the beginning of extensive papal interest in the cult of the saints, see Eric Waldram Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); and Cyriakus Heinrich Brackel, "Die vom Reformpapsttum geförderten Heilgenkulte," *Studi gregoriani*, 9 (1972), 239-311.

in mind (p. 30). To stress above all Rome's use of thirteenth-century ideals of sanctity to fight heresy is to present negatively a phenomenon whose positive affirmations were at least equally important. A more sophisticated look at the late medieval papacy's successes and failures in dealing with the cult of the saints is offered by Vauchez.

Weinstein and Bell's *Saints & Society* is a well-written, sometimes insightful, flawed book. Using sources concerning 864 saints who lived from 1000 to 1700, it first analyzes the quest of the saints themselves for sanctity; and it then reverses the glass and looks at popular perceptions of saints—the places, states, classes, and genders favored. The statistical tables presenting the study's data are the most sophisticated hagiographic quantification to date, and are easy for a non-statistician to understand, once he has made the initially required cross-references from the text to the separately placed statistical tables to the explanatory appendix and back again to the tables. The numbers are not allowed to overwhelm the subject, and the text becomes a string of exemplary illustrations of the trends statistically documented, a topical *Golden Legend*. The illustrations are well chosen and better integrated into the text than are Vauchez's.

Among the better sections of the book are the initial chapters, where Weinstein and Bell marshal hagiographic evidence against the view of Philip Ariès and his followers that the Middle Ages had no concept of childhood as a special state. Widely disregarded commonplaces such as the prayers of mothers for children, the *puer senex* (the boy with the maturity of an old man), and the stories about the murders of children by Jews are coupled with some detailed childhood narratives to document convincingly that "medieval society knew the age of childhood" (p. 19). The material assembled demands attention, although some of the *topoi* actually go back to Late Antiquity<sup>5</sup> and require more study before they can be convincingly integrated into Weinstein and Bell's thesis that there was a special appreciation of childhood from the twelfth to the fifteenth century.

Another strong point is the depiction of Italian sanctity from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, the area of Weinstein's previous publications. Today late medieval Italian saints frequently seem an unattractive group dominated by diseased, ecstatic women who bear physical marks of Christ's sufferings. *Saints & Society* is able to present the dynamic, innovative character of these saints and to integrate them into their Italian communal context, explaining how it came to pass that "the summer of the Italian city-republics was also the flowering time of Italian saints" (p. 175).

Weinstein and Bell drew their sample of saints from appendixes III-VI of Pierre Delooz's *Sociologie et canonisations* (1969), from which they used the pertinent saints of III, V, and VI, and half of the saints from IV, which covered local

<sup>5</sup>On the *puer senex*, for example, see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, transl. Willard R. Trask (Bollingen Series, Vol. 36 [New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1952]), pp. 98-101.

reader who had learned from the "Appendix on Sources" that John is known from "contemporary documentation or other information." In the *Acta Sanctorum* the first of the passages quoted bears a specific warning that this dialogue was not found in earlier sources and must be Rossi's amplification.<sup>11</sup> Yet Weinstein and Bell spend five pages summarizing John's *life*—their longest explication of a single text—and use it to prove a new late medieval attitude toward marriage and the family, claiming that "by the time of Colombini's biographer a positive ethos of family life is apparent" (pp. 114-119, 245). They later argue that "Gone from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century hagiographic accounts is the sympathy toward marriage and family that made earlier accounts of struggle so poignant and so ambivalent" (pp. 226-227).

These errors involving all the indented direct quotations call into question the quality of the rest of the research. If they represent its accuracy, of what value are all the magnificent computer-generated statistical tables? They may well be generally representative, since the sample is large and the errors, if random, ought not to distort the basic patterns. It is in fact only the gross variations which have concerned the authors, who advise readers to "interpret our numbers as orders of magnitude rather than precise quantities" (p. 279). Nevertheless, it is a shame that carelessness has cast suspicion on a stylistically pleasant, potentially illuminating work.

Differences between these three pioneering studies highlight problems which need to be addressed before attempts to analyze saintly statistics can be easily compared.

We are still very far from an exhaustive listing of the saints. As Vauchez observes (p. 291), since even the best hagiographic dictionaries and encyclopedias rest largely on the Roman martyrology and on lists assembled by religious orders, in-depth research in any region of Europe will enable a scholar to add quantities of *beati* from local legends and necrologies. Vauchez avoided the problem by basing his work on canonization processes; Goodich derived his sample of thirteenth-century saints from the *Acta Sanctorum*, the *Analecta Bollandiana*, and "numerous other periodicals and primary works"; Weinstein and Bell used lists from Delooz, which in turn were based largely on *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (as edited in 1956) and on the *Vies des saints* (1935-1959).<sup>12</sup> Further research might do better to use the most recent and comprehensive listing, the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*.<sup>13</sup>

The names of the saints, preserved in Latin and vernacular records, are difficult to standardize. Vauchez uses French forms; Goodich uses English forms; and

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 370A.

<sup>12</sup>Goodich notes his sources in *Vita Perfecta*, p. 15, but gives more information in "A Profile of Thirteenth-Century Sainthood," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (1976), 430 n.; Weinstein and Bell, *Saints & Society*, pp. 277-279, explain their dependence on Delooz, who lists his own sources in *Sociologie et canonisations*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>13</sup>*Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (13 vols.; Rome: Istituto Giovanni XXIII, 1962-1970).

Weinstein and Bell a variety of spellings, which would be acceptable if local vernaculars and geographical appellations were used consistently, but which assure confusion, when, for example, "Etienne de Chatillon" is indexed far from "Stephen of Grandmont," or when Gerard of Potenza is indexed as "Gerald" (pp. 257, 259, 269).

References to different versions of hagiographical documents can often be confusing. Unfortunately, none of the authors reviewed here identifies texts by using numbers from the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*. These would have aided not only the readers but also the authors themselves, since their consistent use would have made it more difficult for Weinstein and Bell, for example, to mix up Theobald's *lives* or to misidentify the famous St. Alexius as a ninth-century Roman saint (p. 40). Perhaps identification numbers will become more common when the forthcoming new edition of the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* finally appears.

Geographical references are a perpetual problem. Vauchez and Weinstein and Bell use contemporary political boundaries, while Goodich uses less anachronistic regional units but does not explain his choices. The former procedure, despite its arbitrariness, may be the easiest to standardize.

If lay sanctity is to be intelligently quantified, there needs to be some consensus on who is lay. Vauchez treats as lay all those who are unordained and unaffiliated with religious orders. Goodich also treats all nuns and all tertiaries as lay, which explains his relatively high percentage of thirteenth-century lay saints. Weinstein and Bell leave the term undefined, but in some graphs treat "tertiary" as a separate occupational category. Perhaps it would be best to adopt the division that was used by Delooz (pp. 324-325) and to treat as "religious" all ordained clergy and all religious who lead a conventual life, treating non-conventual tertiaries as lay.

Meaningful social categories vary over time—and among scholars. Vauchez divides the saints' original social levels into three classes; Goodich's tables for parental class and occupation contain up to twenty-seven variables; Weinstein and Bell use a dozen divisions. It will take further work in medieval social and economic history as well as in hagiographic studies before the most useful categories are clear.

Statistical evaluation of particular virtues and images involves a problem noted by none of the authors reviewed here—a tendency for positive statistics to result as a direct consequence of limited opportunity. Thus, if female saints are relatively more praised for their chastity or peasant saints for their wondrous deeds, it cannot necessarily be assumed that female saints were seen as more heroically chaste or peasants more filled with divine power. It must be recognized that the hagiographers who commemorated saints from subgroups with social disabilities did not have the same range of possibilities as they did for the socially elite: they could praise neither women for being good priests nor peasants for their mastery of studies. If the audience for hagiographical texts is presumed to be a constant factor requiring comparable written memorials of heroic virtues and deeds, then for saints from groups with more limited opportunities the available possibilities will be stressed relatively more frequently. There may be no unarbitrary way to correct

for this phenomenon, but when general comparisons are employed, positive results for socially limited subgroups should be treated with care.

Perhaps the major problem illustrated by the three books is uncertainty about where to begin a large-scale comparative study of sanctity. A saint is a saint "for someone": public affirmation of sanctity presupposes a cult beginning at least with the saint's death and extending onward through space and time. At what point should scholarly quantification attempt to freeze this cult for comparative study? Vauchez chose the moment when the saint's supporters were able to exert sufficient pressure to launch a papal inquiry, a point available only for a small number of medieval saints. Goodich chose to compare saints and sought to control the accuracy of traditions about them by accepting into his sample only saints whose cults are attested by two or more independent traditions emanating within fifty years of their deaths. Weinstein and Bell chose to compare saints, and perceptions of the saints, but accepted the earliest surviving information without making any exclusions based on source quality. None of the three books chose the date when a saint's *life* was written as a basis for comparison, yet that would be the one point where the developing image of a saint's sanctity shared by a hagiographer and his intended audience could be stopped with some security. It may be the only practical starting point for the Early Middle Ages, where most surviving hagiographic material is centuries later than its subjects.

It is rare that three studies, proceeding from different statistical bases, simultaneously investigate a new field. Their areas of agreement are impressive, especially in the thirteenth century where the research directly overlaps. All emphasize the dynamism of the cults of new saints at this time, a renewal of the Western "pantheon" unparalleled by any similar development in non-Latin churches. Thirteenth-century Western acclamations of sainthood are shown to be increasingly concentrated in Italy, a development partially explained by the influence of the new mendicant orders and by the desire of Italian cities for their own saintly patrons. All note that, although saints continued to be drawn predominantly from the social elite, new categories of saints begin to appear such as priests, peasants, and feminine mystics. All document a hesitant movement toward lay sanctity, although Vauchez (p. 412) points out that after Innocent III's canonization of the merchant Homobonus (d. 1197), which he sees as an inspired attempt to offer a true model of lay sanctity to the world, no other non-clerical, non-noble male was to be papally canonized until the end of the Middle Ages. Points of consensus such as these suggest that "saint counters" can produce data that can help to clarify our knowledge of medieval sanctity and society. Their work deserves attention.

What remains to be done? The studies reviewed here may help to guide future research since they offer a potential framework to orient more chronologically and regionally limited work on saintly sociology, geography, and ideals. Some of the trends they suggest in family life, lay sanctity, papal policy, etc. can be clarified or perhaps refuted, and certainly the roots of phenomena noted in all three could be better traced in hagiographic tradition. Yet major questions remain completely untouched. How does the sanctity of the Late Middle Ages relate to early medieval



tradition? Should saints' *lives* continue to dominate research or should more attention be given to *miracles* and *translations*? How do the cults of the "new saints" studied in the works reviewed here relate to the ongoing cults of traditional saints, such as the cult of the Virgin which reached its greatest popularity in the High Middle Ages? How do *lives* of non-historical saints support or refute the patterns noted? Thus, new ground may have been broken, but much remains untilled.

One final observation might be made. Although the books studied here proceed from a knowledge of medieval sanctity to a knowledge of medieval society, a reverse orientation might be possible. Today the Catholic Church finds itself in a "post-Gutenberg" world in which psychologists stress the primacy of modeling over specific teaching; and in which even some Biblical fundamentalists may depend for their knowledge of the Scriptures on charismatic media figures. Yet just when one would expect a tremendous need for holy models, traditional devotions to the saints often appear to be declining. Why? Studies on the history of sanctity may raise some useful questions: What was gained and what was lost when the spontaneous acclamation of sanctity found in the early Church was replaced by the world's longest and most complicated judicial process? How have ideals of sanctity changed over time and with what results? How does the cult of the saints function in society? What were the effects on the traditional cult of the saints when the late medieval and early modern Church upgraded proclaimed sanctity to a level of increasingly heroic virtue and spectacular miracle? Isolation of trends in proclaimed sanctity may offer useful information not only for history but also for historical theology.

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