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**SAINTS WITHOUT BORDERS: ECUMENICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE GREAT
CLOUD OF WITNESSES**

“SAINTS WITHOUT BORDERS”

Theological, Canonical and Ecumenical Perspectives from the Roman Catholic Church

I'm indeed very happy to be here in order to participate in this Summer Seminary the topic of which seems to me very important: “Saints without borders”. I do consider the holiness/sanctity as the most important “motive of credibility” of Christians and Churches today. As we profess together the Symbol of faith of the first Council of Constantinople (381), we can't renounce this note or attribute which belongs to the very nature/essence of the Church. My current contribution concerns above all the canonical processes in the Roman Catholic Church. But, in order to avoid a one-sided perception of the catholic practice, I have decided to add some theological and ecumenical considerations. So the articulation of my intervention includes three sections: Theological Foundations, Canonical Processes and Ecumenical Perspectives, naturally from the Catholic point of view.

1. Sanctity of the Church and in the Church. Theological Foundations

Only our Triune God is holy, even three times holy, according to the testimony of the Holy Scripture (cf. Is 6:3; 8:13; 43:15; 2 Mac 14:36; etc.). God who created man (and woman) in His own image and likeness calls us to be holy: “For I, the Lord, am your God; and you shall

make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy” (Lv 11:44.45; 19:2; 20:7.8.26; cf. Ex 22:30; Mt 5:48; 19:21; 1 Pet 1:16). As consequence, “for any creature to be holy can only mean that in some way it derives its holiness from God. A person or thing can be holy only insofar as it is made holy by God and for God. It is God who makes creatures holy, by separating them from all that is profane, or not associated with God, and in some way bringing them into a relationship with himself that gives them a share in holiness. The biblical notion of holiness, then, involves a «being set apart» from what is not of God, so as to belong in a special way to God”¹. Only to God pertains properly (*substantialiter*) holiness, while creatures are holy “*ex accidenti*”, by participation in the holiness of God². Even when man sinned, God has never abandoned. Indeed, he sent his only Son, so that man might be saved. Jesus Christ then saved the human person from his sins in his mystery of incarnation and redemption, not only restoring the similarity with the image of God, but also giving the sonship of God. Justified in the death and resurrection of Christ, we live as children of God reborn in baptism, according to the theology of St. Paul. From the same apostle of Gentiles, we know that in the early Church Christians called themselves willingly “saints” (cf. Rm 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1.4; 2:19; 3:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21.22; Col 1:2.4.12.22.26; Heb 3:1; 6:10; 13:24; 1 Pet 1:15; Rev 13:7.10; 14:12)³. So, the “Church of God” is the Assembly or Communion of Saints (cf. Ps 88:6.8; Dn 8:24).

As the 2nd Vatican Council stated, the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect (cf. *Lumen gentium*, § 48). The meaning of that statement made in the 7th chapter dedicated to “the eschatological nature of the pilgrim Church and its union with the Church in heaven” is the following: “The fact that the church in this world is «marked with a genuine holiness» is seen as a consequence of its «eschatological nature»; the fact that its holiness is «imperfect» is a consequence of its being a «pilgrim church»”⁴. The same Vatican Council says, “Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and

¹ F.A. SULLIVAN, *The Church We Believe In. One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press 1988), p. 67.

² Cf. BENEDICT XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, 1.1., c. 37, n. 7; with special reference to THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh* 1, 13, art. 2.

³ Cf. I. BRIA, *Saints*, in N. LOSSKY (ed.), *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, WCC Publications 2002), pp. 1006 ss.; V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi. Sussidio per lo Studium* (Città del Vaticano, LEV 2012), pp. 15-17.

⁴ F.A. SULLIVAN, *The Church We Believe In*, p. 66.

the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body” (*Lumen gentium*, § 8). The so-called analogy between Christ and the Church is further explained: “While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled knew nothing of sin, but came to expiate only the sins of the people, the Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal” (*Lumen gentium*, § 8). Nevertheless, the Church is believed to be indefectibly holy (cf. *Lumen gentium*, § 39), certainly not because of her own merits, but for the gift of the triune God. “Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as «uniquely holy», loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her. He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God’s glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: «For this is the will of God, your sanctification»” (*Lumen gentium*, § 39). Since the Church is a “complex reality”, her holiness, too, is complex. Francis A. Sullivan distinguishes three ways in which the Church is holy⁵:

- *The Church is holy by reason of the holiness of her formal or constitutive elements* (such as faith, sacraments, and the charismatic and hierarchical gifts). These formal elements are gifts which Christ has bestowed on his Church to make it an effective instrument of grace and salvation.
- *Holiness of consecration*, i.e. a holiness that marks a person by reason of being called and set apart for priestly ministry. Indeed, the Church of God is “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:9). Christians are therefore consecrated to the royal priesthood through their sacramental initiation, by being reborn of water and the Holy Spirit. They are the body of Christ and the temple of Spirit.
- *Holiness of grace and virtue*: holiness is always due to God’s initiative, and is his gift. It also calls for a response on the part of those who are called into a closer relationship with God: it is their duty to live up to their calling by leading a holy life. As St. Paul put it, Christians are “sanctified in Christ Jesus”, but also are “called to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2), “walking in love” (Eph 5:2) and striving for the perfection of charity.

⁵ See F.A. SULLIVAN, *The Church We Believe In*, pp. 69-78.

The holiness of the Church recalls and requires the holiness of her members. That means that the “holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others” (*Lumen gentium*, § 39; cf. § 48). In the Church, we are all called in Christ Jesus to acquire sanctity through the grace of God. A holy life is the best witness of the Church and the Christians to bear to Christ and to the world. It’s a strong motive of credibility and evangelization. In it, we can see the first fruits and the anticipation of the kingdom of God. Until now, we have spoken about holiness (of the living and the dead) in general, but let us come to the specific topic of our intervention: the “canonized” holiness, recognizable and recognized in people who died in “odor of sanctity”. Indeed, as put by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in the recent Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* for conducting diocesan or eparchial inquiries in the causes of saints (2007), “The cause of beatification and canonization regards a Catholic who in life, in death and after death has enjoyed a reputation of holiness by living all the Christian virtues in an heroic manner; or enjoys a reputation of martyrdom because, having followed Christ more closely, he has sacrificed his life in the act of martyrdom” (Art. 4, § 1).

Holiness consists essentially in union with God, which is made by grace. Since the latter is invisible, we must rely on its signs to identify holiness⁶. These signs are of two types: necessary signs and contingent signs. The two categories of signs proceed from holiness, but in a different way: the signs which are necessary to holiness consist in heroic virtues and, in some respect, martyrdom; those that are not strictly bound to holiness, but contribute to its recognition, for example the preternatural gifts, fame of sanctity or reputation of martyrdom and miracles before and after death. According to Thomas Aquinas, “a human virtue is a practical habit, a good habit, a disposition to do the good”⁷. There are also bad habits, which are normally called vices. We are dealing here only with good habits, i.e. virtues. Following an Aristotelian distinction, we can speak about “entitative virtues” (which for example pertain to health, or in Christian point of view, *gratia gratum faciens*) and “operative virtues” (for example intellectual and moral dispositions to act). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) proposes an instructive definition of virtue, reechoing the thomistic conception: “A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. the virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual

⁶ For this paragraph, see V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 25 ss.

⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 3, c: “Virtus humana, quae est habitus operativus, est bonus habitus, et boni operativus”.

powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions” (§ 1803). The virtue is therefore a constant habit, disposition (*habitus*), a style or way of life. It’s a characteristic which impresses the life of the faithful. The constancy and the stability are worth noting, in order to ascertain the presence and the exercise of the virtue. Prospero Lambertini (1675-1758), i.e. Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), used three adverbs to qualify a constant habit: *expedite*, *prompte* and *delectabiliter*. Indeed as a habit, the virtue is a second nature and its acts occur/arise expeditiously, spontaneously and pleasantly. These criteria are very important because they allow to see whether the acts that appear are really virtuous or not. We have also to emphasize the interconnection between the virtues. In a canonical process, it refers to a threefold series of virtues, namely theological, cardinal and annexed:

- The *theological virtues* which have the One and Triune God as origin, motive and object are *faith*, *hope* and *charity* (towards God and towards the neighbour);
- The *cardinal, human or moral virtues* are rooted in the theological virtues, which adapt man’s faculties for participation in the divine nature; these are *prudence*, *justice* (towards God and towards the neighbour), *fortitude* and *temperance*;
- The *annexed virtues* consist mainly in evangelical counsels (of *poverty*, *chastity* and *obedience*) and in *humility*.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, while prudence is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues), because it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure, charity is said to be superior to all the virtues (cf. 1 Cor 13:13). As the form of the virtues, charity articulates and orders them among themselves⁸. The heroic practice of all the virtues benefits from the sanctifying grace and infused virtues which are not formal operations, but divine gifts at the same time distinct and linked to grace. As a medieval axiom recalls us, grace does not destroy nature but perfects it (“*Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit eam*”): so we can speak about a certain relationship between the gift of God (infused virtues) and the task of human person (acquired virtues), even if naturally we have to recognize the primacy of the divine grace that “informs” (i.e. shapes, transforms) the human behaviour. Though the sanctification transcends his natural capacities, man does not undergo this transformation

⁸ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1806: “*Prudence* is «right reason in action», writes St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience”. *Ibid.*, §§ 1826-1827: “*Charity* is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues: «So faith, hope, charity abide, these three. But the greatest of these is charity» (1 Cor 13:13). The practice of all the virtues is animated and inspired by charity, which «binds everything together in perfect harmony» (Col 3:14); it is the *form of the virtues*; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and the goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love”.

passively. Rather, prevented and supported by divine assistance, he responds with a total and unconditional love to the call of personal communion with God. By his practice of virtues, man is therefore called upon to “collaborate” in the work of Christ, and this “collaboration” is implemented mainly on the “merits” (*ex condigno, ex congruo*). People can only earn *ex condigno* for oneself, because the sanctifying grace, i.e. the root of merit, has been given by Christ for our salvation. For others, one can gain merit only *ex congruo*. Through the works of virtue that express our love for God, we grow in grace and obtain divine favor for us and for others. The concrete ascertainment concerns not some but all the virtues that are interrelated and heroically experienced in the life of a saint, who becomes an intercessor by God⁹.

Given that all Christians possess infused and acquired virtues in differentiated manner (cf. Rom 12:3; 1 Cor 12:11), the real difference with the saints arises from the fact that the latter show an heroic practice of all the virtues. Pope Benedict XIV can help us to explain in what consists a heroic virtue: “In order to be heroic, a Christian virtue has to be done expeditiously, promptly and pleasantly in a superior level comparably to a common way, from a supernatural goal, and so without a human reasoning, with self-denial and submission of the affects”¹⁰. We have already met the adverbs *expedite, prompte* and *delectabiliter* used by Pope Benedict XIV in his definition of an authentic virtue. “*Ex fine supernaturali*” means probably here that the agent is moved by a supernatural goal or that it is matter of infused virtues. Thomas Aquinas explains that the virtuous act is done without a human reasoning because the heroic virtue is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, an heroic virtue requires self-denial and submission of the affects to reason. Actually, we can say that all these distinctions apply to the practice of each virtue. At the end, the only true difference of heroic virtue lies in the fact that it is accomplished “*supra communem modum*”. It must be clear that constancy in heroic habit makes the difference with the common run of mortals. A heroic act of virtue can endanger life or liberty, reputation, personal good. It requires an extraordinary commitment, habitually illuminated by grace. Heroic act, however, which sometimes depends on circumstances, can also be an affective reaction that demonstrates the depth of a virtue. Heroic virtue does not necessarily require arduous and difficult task, but above all a faithful, continuous and constant fulfillment of one’s duties. In the

⁹ Cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 22-25; 35-36; 84-85. About the concept of “merit” (*meritum*) that we can’t study further here, see at least the Council of Trent: “Si quis dixerit, hominis iustificati bona opera ita esse dona Dei, ut non sint etiam bona ipsius iustificati merita, aut ipsum iustificatum bonis operibus, quae ab eo per Dei gratiam et Iesu Christi meritum (cuius vivum membrum est) fiunt, non vere mereri augmentum gratiae, vitam aeternam et ipsius vitae aeternae (si tamen in gratia decesserit) consecutionem, atque etiam gloriae augmentum: anathema sit” (*De iustificatione*, Can. 32, in DS 1582).

¹⁰ BENEDICT XIV, *De Servorum Dei beatificatione*, III, c. 22, n. 1: “Virtus christiana, ut sit heroica, efficere debet, ut eam habens operetur expedite, prompte, et delectabiliter supra communem modum ex fine supernaturali, et sic sine humano ratiocinio, cum abnegatione operantis, et affectuum subiectione”.

midst of the “terrible routine”, saints are those who manage to be “extraordinary in the ordinary” (Paul VI). In his *Biography of St. Anthony*, St. Athanasius said that the Father of monasticism was a “daily martyr” (in PG 26, 911: “*Quotidie martyr erat*”)¹¹.

As we have seen above, some contingent signs are not strictly bound to holiness but contribute to its recognition. These are for example: preternatural gifts, fame of sanctity or reputation of martyrdom, and miracles. Holiness grows within a context of faith and of solid spiritual life, but is not necessarily connected with mysticism. Mysticism contemplates preternatural gifts, divine visions and locutions, prophecies and specific charisms. Other particular phenomena can be ubiquity, bilocation or stigmata. Even if these extraordinary signs do not belong directly to holiness, they can confirm its existence. In the next section, we will mention the importance of the fame of sanctity, the reputation of martyrdom and the necessity of miracles in the canonical process.

2. The Making of Saints. Canonical Process in the Roman Catholic Church

Dealing with the eschatological nature of the pilgrim Church and its union with the Church in heaven, the Vatican Council has justified and promoted the cult of the saints. It put: “The pilgrim Church from the very first ages of the Christian religion has cultivated with great piety the memory of the dead, and «because it is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins», also offers suffrages for them. The Church has always believed that the apostles and Christ’s martyrs who had given the supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely joined with us in Christ, and she has always venerated them with special devotion, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels. The Church has piously implored the aid of their intercession. To these were soon added also those who had more closely imitated Christ’s virginity and poverty, and finally others whom the outstanding practice of the Christian virtues and the divine charisms recommended to the pious devotion and imitation of the faithful” (*Lumen gentium*, § 50)¹².

¹¹ Cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 28-33; 137-146.

¹² This conciliar text of *Lumen gentium*, § 50 has been quoted by John Paul II in the introduction of the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*: “The Church (...) from the earliest beginnings of Christianity has always believed that the Apostles and Martyrs are more closely joined to us in Christ and has venerated them, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy Angels, with special devotion, devoutly imploring the aid of their intercession. To these were soon added others also who had imitated more closely the virginity and poverty of Christ and, finally, others whose outstanding practice of the Christian virtues and whose divine charisms commended them to the pious devotion of, and imitation by, the faithful”.

This conciliar text presents a brief overview of the historical evolution of the cult of the saints, from the worship of the apostles and martyrs in the primitive Church to all those who have distinguished themselves with the heroic practice of Christian virtues, without forgetting those who are sanctified imitating radically Christ according to the evangelical counsels. Very likely, the liturgical veneration in respect of certain deceased was born spontaneously (i.e. *Vox populi, Acta martyrum, Acta confessorum*, etc.), but soon the Church authorities (viz. Bishops and Popes) have felt the need for an adjustment, for the good of the souls of the faithful. It was a matter, in fact, of making as sure as possible that the venerated person was really in heaven (hence the use of miracles after death). It was also necessary to make sure that the life of the person in question was worthy to be proposed to the imitation of the faithful. Famous and decisive, for it was added in the Decretals of Gregory IX, seems to be the intervention of Alexander III (July 6, 1170) in which the Pope, writing to the king, the bishops, the clergy and the people of Sweden, complained that someone was revered as a holy martyr even though he was killed in a drunken state¹³. As confirmed by Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) in the introduction of the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister* (1983), one of the last documents on the reform of the procedure for the inquiries in the Causes of saints, the intervention of ecclesiastical authority in the canonization has been always motivated by pastoral care: “Faithful to the serious duty entrusted to her of teaching, sanctifying and governing the People of God, she [the Apostolic See] proposes to the faithful for their imitation, veneration and invocation, men and women who are outstanding in the splendor of charity and other evangelical virtues and, after due investigations, she declares them, in the solemn act of canonization, to be Saints”. In the historical development of the (pontifical) canonization, historians indicate generally three periods¹⁴:

- From the 5th Century to 1234, when the collection of Decretals of Gregory IX (1227-1241) was published.
- From 1234 to 1588, when Pope Sixtus V established the Congregation of the Sacred Rites (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Immensa Aeterni Dei*, January 22, 1588), with competence in procedure for canonization Causes. It should be noted that Pope Paul VI († 1978), with the Apostolic Constitution *Sacra Rituum Congregatio* of May 8, 1969, divided the Congregation of Rites, creating two congregations: one for Divine Worship and another

¹³ Cf. *Decretal. Gregor. IX*, l. 3, tit. 45: *De reliquiis et veneratione sanctorum*, cap. *Audivimus* (Fr. 2, 650), quoted in V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 88 and 161-163. Considered later as a decree, the letter of Pope Alexander III begun to be presented as an axiom: “Sine Papae licentia non licet aliquem venerari pro sancto” (quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 162; cf. S. KUTTNER, *La réserve papale du droit de canonization*, in *Revue historique du droit français et étranger*, n.s. 17 [1938] 172-228).

¹⁴ Cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, p. 157 (pp. 156-180).

for the Causes of Saints. John Paul II, with the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of June 28, 1988, changed the name to Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

- The further pontifical legislation on beatification and canonization, especially by the Pope Urban VIII († 1644)¹⁵, and the important determination of the canonical procedure by the Pope Benedict XIV († 1758) until the last Reform, implemented under the pontificate of Benedict XVI (2007). At least, you have to remember in this period the establishment of the “Historical Section” within the Sacred Congregation of Rites in order to foster the study of “historical Causes” by Pope Pius IX (cf. Apostolic Letter *Già da qualche tempo*, on February 6, 1930), the *Code of Canon Law* of the Latin Church (1917¹⁶ and 1983¹⁷) and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (1990)¹⁸.

We think that it is not necessary to review this complex history, that met various stages (spontaneous cult, *elevatio – translatio*, canonization)¹⁹, but rather we want to explain the content of the current canonical processes in the Roman Catholic Church. As commonly admitted, the current legislation is based above all on the special work of Prospero Lambertini/Pope Benedict († 1758), the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* (January 25, 1983)²⁰ and the *Normae Servandae*, i.e. *Norms to Be Observed in Inquiries Made by Bishops in the Causes of Saints* (February 7, 1983)²¹ published during the pontificate of John Paul II and the Instruction *Sanctorum mater* of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints (May 17, 2007)²². Card. Prospero Lambertini (1675-1758), Archbishop of Bologna and later Pope Benedict XIV (1740-1758), dedicated a monumental work in 5 volumes to the procedures

¹⁵ The canonical legislation of Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644) gave austerity and sobriety, rigor and vigor to the process of canonization. All his decrees were collected in the book published in 1642, under the title *Urbani VIII Pont. O.M. Decreta servanda in canonizatione et beatificatione sanctorum. Accedunt instructiones et declarationes quas E.mi et R.mi S.R.E. Cardinales praesulesque Romanae Curiae ad id muneris congregati ex eiusdem Summi Pontificis mandato condiderunt* (cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 172-173).

¹⁶ In the *Instruction Sanctorum Mater* (2007), the Inquiry is equivalent to that process conducted in causes of beatification and canonization in conformity with canon law previously in force, i.e. the *Code of Canon Law* 1917, Cann. 1999-2141 in Book IV: *De Processibus. Pars Secunda: De Causis Beatificationis Servorum Dei et Canonizatione Beatorum*.

¹⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law* (January 25, 1983), Can. 1403, §§ 1-2.

¹⁸ Cf. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (October 18, 1990), Can. 1057.

¹⁹ The first “papal canonization” historically sure of which we have the respective papal bull is of St. Ulrich (lat. Udalricus), from Dillingen, but born in Zurich in 890, bishop of Augsburg from 923 to his death, in 973. The canonization was performed by Pope John XV (985-996), on the 31st January 993, during the Roman Synod held at the Lateran (cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO [eds.], *Le Cause dei Santi*, p. 158). Moreover, Alexander III was the first Pope to use in a papal document the verb “*canonizare*” (for example referring to the Archbishop martyr Thomas Becket: “*Praefatum archiepiscopum solemniter canonizavimus*”), in order to indicate the registration of a Servant of God among the Saints. This use has remained until today (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 163).

²⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Constitutio Apostolica Divinus perfectionis Magister*, in *AAS* 75 (1983) 349-355.

²¹ Cf. CONGREGATIO PRO CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopis faciendis in Causis Sanctorum*, in *AAS* 75 (1983) 396-404.

²² Cf. CONGREGATIO DE CAUSIS SANCTORUM, *Sanctorum Mater*. Istruzione per lo svolgimento delle Inchieste diocesane o eparchiali nelle Cause dei Santi, in *AAS* 99 (2007) 465-510.

of beatification and canonization entitled *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*. The first edition was published in 1734-1738 and for many aspects this work is still valid. Currently, the eighth edition in Latin and Italian is being published by the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*²³. As Pope, Benedict XIV issued also numerous decrees on the Causes of canonization. Any further reform has always been inspired by his instructions, as rightly recognized by John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*: “The instruction of causes of canonization, which Our Predecessor Sixtus V entrusted to the Congregation of Sacred Rites, which he himself had established, was, with the passage of time, always improved by new norms. Worthy of special mention are those of Urban VIII, which Prospero Lambertini (later Benedict XIV), drawing upon the experiences of time past, handed down to later generations in a work entitled *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et de Beatorum canonizatione*. This work served as the rule of the Sacred Congregation of Rites for almost two centuries. Finally, these norms were substantially incorporated into the *Code of Canon Law* promulgated in 1917”. Let us now divide into three sections our presentation in order to explain better the current legislation of canonization.

2.1. Diocesan and Roman phases

The process of canonization includes two major phases: the diocesan and the Roman one. This procedure reflects the close collaboration between local or particular Churches and the universal Church. The starting point is the expanding of the reputation of holiness for a person who has lived in saintly manner or has been killed for his faith. The Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* affirms: “Before deciding to initiate the cause, the diocesan or eparchial Bishop must verify if, among a significant portion of the people of God, the Servant of God enjoys an authentic and widespread reputation of holiness or of martyrdom as well as an authentic and widespread reputation of intercessory power. This reputation must be spontaneous and not artificially produced. It must be stable, continuous, widespread among trustworthy people and existing among a significant portion of the People of God”²⁴.

²³ BENEDETTO XIV (PROSPERO LAMBERTINI), *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione. La beatificazione dei Servi di Dio e la canonizzazione dei Beati*, I/1-2; II/1 (Città del Vaticano, LEV 2010-2012). On the importance of the work of Lambertini, see V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 176-177.

²⁴ CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS, Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 7, §§ 2-3; cf. Art. 25, § 3. About the reputation of holiness and of martyrdom it is said: “The *reputation of holiness* is the opinion that has spread among the faithful about the purity and integrity of life of the Servant of God and about the virtues practiced by him to an heroic degree. The *reputation of martyrdom* is the opinion that has spread among the faithful about the death endured by the Servant of God for the Faith or for a virtue connected to the Faith” (*Ibid.*, Art. 5, §§ 1-2).

As John Paul II put it: “It is the right of diocesan Bishops or Bishops of the Eastern Rite (Eparchies) and others who have the same powers in law, within the limits of their own jurisdiction, either *ex officio* or upon the request of individual members of the faithful or of legitimate groups and their representatives, to inquire about the life, virtues or martyrdom and reputation of sanctity or martyrdom, alleged miracles, as well as, if it be the case, ancient cult of the Servant of God, whose canonization is sought”²⁵. The postulator who is appointed by the petitioner by means of a mandate written according to the norm of law, with the approval of the Bishop, conducts thorough investigations into the life of the Servant of God in question, in order to establish his reputation of sanctity and the importance of the Cause for the Church, and then to report his findings to the Bishop (cf. *Normae servandae*, §§ 2a and 3b). All the witnesses (*de visu* or *de auditu*) that are trustworthy have to be questioned, included those whose opinions are contrary to the instruction of the Cause. Those who are not to be allowed to testify are: (1) a priest, with regard to all those things which were made known to him through the sacrament of Penance; (2) regular confessors of the Servant of God or spiritual directors, with regard also to all those things which they learned from the Servant of God in the forum of conscience outside the sacrament of Penance and (3) the postulator of the cause, during his term as postulator (cf. *Normae servandae*, § 20). Some important conditions are requested for the validity and the authenticity of the witnesses:

- In their testimony, which is to be sworn to under oath, the witnesses must indicate the source of their knowledge of the things they assert; otherwise, their testimony is to be considered of no value (cf. *Normae servandae*, § 23).
- In whatever way the witnesses provide their information, the Bishop or his delegate is carefully to see to it that he always authenticates it with his signature and his seal. Furthermore, The documents and written testimony, whether gathered by the experts or handed over by others, are to be authenticated by the signature and seal of any notary or public official, who attests to its authenticity (cf. *Normae servandae*, § 25a-b).

According to the current laws, the Bishop competent to instruct causes of canonization – with the previous *Nihil Obstat* of the Holy See – is the one in whose territory the Servant of God died no sooner than five years, unless particular circumstances, recognized as such by the Sacred Congregation, suggest otherwise. Similarly, in the case of an alleged miracle, the competent

About the meaning of the intercessory power, the same Instruction explains: “The *reputation of intercessory power* is the opinion that has spread among the faithful about the graces and favors received from God through the intercession of the Servant of God” (*Ibid.*, Art. 6).

²⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*, § 1. The *Normae servandae* (§ 1a) stated: “The petitioner advances the cause of canonization. Any member of the People of God or any group of the faithful recognized by ecclesiastical authority can exercise this function”.

Bishop is the one in whose territory the event took place (cf. *Normae servandae*, § 5a-b; Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, Artt. 20-21). The Bishop is helped by a Historical Commission and a special Tribunal established *ad hoc.*, included a Promoter of Justice and a Notary. In the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister* (cf. § 2)²⁶, John Paul II fixes clearly the role of the Bishop and of his collaborators in the instruction of a Cause of canonization:

1. From the postulator of the cause, legitimately appointed by the petitioner, the Bishop is to seek out accurate information about the life of the Servant of God and likewise be thoroughly informed by the postulator of the reasons which seem to support promoting the cause of canonization.
2. If the Servant of God has published any writings, the Bishop is to see to it that they are examined by theological censors.
3. If the writings have been found to contain nothing contrary to faith and good morals, then the Bishop should order persons qualified for this task to collect other unpublished writings (letters, diaries, etc.) as well as all documents, which in any way pertain to the cause. After they have faithfully completed their task, they are to write a report on their investigations.
4. If the Bishop has prudently judged that the Cause can proceed, on the basis of all that has been done so far, he is to see to it that those witnesses proposed by the postulator and others to be called *ex officio* are duly examined.
5. If, indeed, it is urgent that witnesses be examined lest any proofs be lost, they are to be questioned even though the gathering of the documents has not yet been completed.
6. The inquiry into alleged miracles is to be conducted separately from the inquiry into virtues or martyrdom.
7. When the inquiries are complete, a transcript of all the acts is to be sent in duplicate to the Sacred Congregation, together with a copy of the books of the Servant of God which were examined by the theological censors and their judgment as well. Furthermore, the Bishop is to attach a declaration on the observance of the decrees of Urban VIII regarding the absence of cult.

The Roman phase concerns the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which is presided over by a Cardinal Prefect, assisted by an Archbishop Secretary and by an Undersecretary. In

²⁶ These norms have been explained in the *Normae servandae*, i.e. *Norms to be observed in inquiries made by Bishops in the Causes of Saints* (1983) and further revised in the Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* (2007) both published by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

addition, nowadays there is a staff of 23 Officials (priests, religious and lay people). The Congregation has 34 members – Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops – 1 Promoter of the Faith (Prelate Theologian), 5 Relators of the Causes and 83 Consultors (theologians, historians and medical experts). The duty of the Congregation is to deal with those matters which pertain to the beatification of the (Venerable) Servants of God and the canonization of the Blessed by providing advice and guidelines to Bishops in the instruction of the causes, by studying the causes thoroughly and, finally, by casting its vote. According to the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister* (cf. § 3), it is also the duty of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to decide those things which pertain to the authenticity and preservation of relics.

After the diocesan or eparchial inquiries, the task of the Congregation consists in verifying whether all the rules of law have been followed in the inquiries conducted by the Bishop. The result of this examination is to be submitted to the ordinary meeting of the Congregation's members. If the meeting judges that the cause was conducted according to the norms of law, it decides to which Relator the cause is to be assigned; the Relator, then, together with a collaborator from outside the Congregation, generally the postulator who served already in diocesan or eparchial inquiries, will prepare the *Positio* on virtues or on martyrdom according to the rules of critical hagiography. Once ready, the *Positio* (together with the votes of the historical Consultors as well as any new explanations by the Relator, should they be necessary)²⁷ is handed over to the theological Consultors, who are to cast their vote on the merit of the cause; their responsibility, together with the Promotor of the Faith, is to study the cause in such a way that, before the *Positio* is submitted for discussion in their special meeting, controversial theological questions, if there be any, may be examined thoroughly. Once attained moral certitude, the definitive votes of the theological Consultors, together with the written conclusions of the Promotor of the Faith, are submitted to the judgment of the members of the Congregation, i.e. the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, whose decision has to be definitely ratified by the Supreme Pontiff²⁸. From the pontificate of Benedict XVI (2005-2013), the Holy Father presides at a Canonization, which attributes the devotion of the whole Church to the Blessed, a Beatification, nonetheless a Pontifical act, is celebrated by a representative of the Holy Father who is normally the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. While the canonization is celebrated in Rome, the rite of Beatification takes place in the Diocese that has promoted the

²⁷ About the ancient Causes, the *Normae servandae* (§ 7) say: "A cause can be recent or ancient; it is called recent if the martyrdom or virtues of the Servant of God can be proved through the oral depositions of eye witnesses; it is ancient, however, when the proofs for martyrdom or virtues can be brought to light only from written sources".

²⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*, § 13, 1-2 and 4-5.

Cause of the new Blessed, or in any other place deemed suitable. As follows, the solemn formula of canonization which is not a simple act of devotion or of popular piety, but a magisterial *sententia definitiva tenenda*:²⁹

“For the honour of the Blessed Trinity, the exaltation of the Catholic faith and the increase of the Christian life, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own, after due deliberation and frequent prayer for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother Bishops, we declare and define Blessed N... to be Saint and we enroll him/her among the Saints, decreeing that he/she is to be venerated as such by the whole Church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen”³⁰.

2.2. Typology and structure of “*Positiones*”

After the solemn closing session of the diocesan phase, all the documentation of the instruction for a Cause of canonization is closed, sealed and kept in the Diocese or sent to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The acts of the Inquiry that are sent to the Congregation are: the *Transcript*, the *Public Copy*, a copy of the published writings of the Servant of God already examined by the Theological Censors and their written opinions³¹. Actually, since the original acts of the diocesan or eparchial Inquiry (known as the *Archetype*) are to be kept in a safe place of the archive of the diocese or eparchy (cf. *Normae servandae*, § 30b; Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 145, § 2), two copies of the *Archetype* (i.e. the *Transcript* and the *Public Copy*) are sent to Rome. Any translation of the acts and documents into a language accepted at the Congregation for Causes of Saints is to be declared authentic³². As it has been said in the previous section, the local documentation is attentively examined in the ordinary meeting of the members of the Congregation, on the basis of a report of the Undersecretary. If the validity of the diocesan inquiry is attested, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints publishes the *Decretum super validitate (inquisitionis dioecesanae)*. From then on, the assigned Relator

²⁹ Cf. A. AMATO, *I santi nella Chiesa* (Città del Vaticano, LEV 2010), pp. 28-29.

³⁰ “Ad honorem Sanctae et Individuae Trinitatis, ad exaltationem fidei catholicae et vitae christianae incrementum, auctoritate Domini nostri Iesu Christi, beatorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli ac Nostra, matura deliberatione praehabita et divina ope saepius implorata, ac de plurimorum Fratrum Nostrorum consilio, Beatum/Beatam... Sanctum/Sanctam esse decernimus et definimus, ac Sanctorum Catalogo adscribimus, statuentes eum/eam in universa Ecclesia inter Sanctos pia devotione recoli debere. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen”.

³¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*, § 2, 6; *Normae servandae*, § 31a; Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 138, § 2; Art. 145, § 4.

³² Cf. *Normae servandae*, § 31b. According to the Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* (§ 127), the languages admitted by the Congregation for the study of Causes are: Latin, English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish.

and his collaborators prepare what is called in technical and curial language the “*Positio*”³³. The term *Positio* has been used since the creation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (1588), as well as today by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to indicate the organic and systematic synthesis of the procedural documentation, which is also conserved. It relates to the treatment of both the Causes of beatification and canonization, as well as the most important issues concerning the specific competences of the said Congregation, such as the question of the worship of relics or the conferment of the title of “Doctor of the Church”. All these topics and issues must be normally submitted to the discussion and the judgment of Consultors, Prelates and Cardinals. At the beginning of a Cause, the candidate is called Servant of God. After the recognition of the heroic of his virtues, he becomes Venerable. The next stages, which require each one a miracle, are Blessed and finally Saint³⁴.

The typology of the *Positiones* depends on the variety of the canonical processes. The main types of the *Positio* are the following:

- *Positio super vita, virtutibus et fama sanctitatis* (*Positio* on the life, the virtues and the fame of holiness).
- *Positio super martyrio et causa martyrii* (*Positio* on the martyrdom and the motive of martyrdom).
- *Positio super miro* (*Positio* on the miracle).

Near these main types of the *Positio*, we can also quote the *Positio super canonizatione aequipollenti* (*Positio* on the equipollent canonization) and the *Positio super concessione tituli Doctoris Ecclesiae universalis*, i.e. on conferment of the title of “Doctor of the Church”. The equipollent canonization is the recognition by the Pope of a holy person – who has been venerated in a particular locality *ab immemorabili tempore*, i.e. since immemorial time – as a saint to be venerated by the universal Church without the formal process of canonization (for example Hildegard von Bingen, on 10 May 2012). The conferring of the title “Doctor of the Church” concerns some Christian authors who have distinguished themselves by sanctity of life, eminence of doctrine and ecclesiastical attachment. Nowadays, the Catholic Church has proclaimed as “Doctors of the Church” 31 men and 4 women (Catherine of Siena, Theresa of Avila, Theresa of Lisieux and Hildegard of Bingen).

³³ After the creation of the Sacred Congregation of Rites (1588), the *Positio* was also called *Relatio de sanctitate vitae et miraculis, Memoriale et Summarium*, or *Compendium vitae, virtutum et miraculorum* (cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO [eds.], *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 212-213).

³⁴ Cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, p. 211.

1) As established by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the ordinary structure of a *Positio* on life, virtues and fame of sanctity is the following³⁵:

- Introduction of the Relator;
- *Informatio* (on the life, virtues and fame of sanctity);
- *Summarium testium* (Decree on validity and summary of witnesses);
- *Summarium documentorum* (documents)
- *Positio super scriptis* (appreciation of the writings of the Servant of God)
- *(Eventual) Expertises*
- *Relatio et vota* (Report and vote) of the Congress of the historical Consultors (in case of ancient Causes)

2) The *Positio super martyrio* is structured as following:

- Introduction of the Relator;
- *Informatio* (history of the Cause; notices on the life, virtues and fame of sanctity or of martyrdom);
- *Summarium testium* (Decree on validity and summary of witnesses);
- *Summarium documentorum* (documents)
- *Positio super scriptis* (appreciation of the writings of the Servant of God)
- *Relatio et vota* (Report and vote) of the Congress of the historical Consultors (in case of ancient Causes)

3) The *Positio super miro* (on miracle) is structured as following:

- Introduction of the Relator;
- Biographic notice about the Servant of God or the Blessed
- *Informatio* (about the miracle);
- *Chronology of the facts*;
- *Summarium testium et documentorum* (Summary of witnesses and documents, preceded by the Decree of validity)
- *Legal expertises*
- *Relatio et vota* (Report and vote) of the Congress of medical Experts

2.3. Necessity of miracles for beatification and canonization

³⁵ Cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 211-242.

After the recognition of the heroic practice of virtues of a Servant of God who becomes a Venerable, a miracle is requested in order to be declared Blessed. However, if no miracle is required for a martyr to be Blessed, all the Blessed need one to be canonized. Indeed, the Instruction *Sanctorum Mater* says: “Once the decree on the confirmation of cult and on the heroic virtues or martyrdom of the Blessed has been promulgated, the *ancient Blessed* may proceed to canonization by means of the approval of one miracle that took place after the confirmation of cult” (Art. 35). It is the task of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to examine cases of alleged miracles. After the diocesan or eparchial phase, the Relator assigned to this task prepares a *Positio* on alleged miracles. They are discussed in a meeting of experts (in the case of healings, in a meeting of physicians), whose votes and conclusions are set forth in an accurate report. Then the miracles are to be discussed in the special meeting of the theologians and, finally, in that of the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops. The results of the discussions of the members of the Congregation are reported to the Supreme Pontiff, who alone has the right to declare that public cult may be given by the Church to Servants of God³⁶.

Even if the inquiry on miracles is to be instructed separately from the inquiry on virtues or martyrdom as seen early, it has also both the diocesan and the Roman phase. As established in the *Normae servandae* (cf. §§ 32-34), the inquiry on miracles is conducted according to the following norms:

- Once the Bishop has accepted the petition of the postulator together with a brief but accurate report on the alleged miracle as well as those documents which pertain to the case, he is to ask for the judgment of one or two experts (§ 33a).
- If he has then decided to instruct a judicial inquiry, he is to examine all the witnesses either personally or through his delegate (§ 33b)³⁷.
- In the case of a cure from some disease, the Bishop or his delegate is to seek help from a physician, who is to propose questions to the witnesses in order to clarify matters according to necessity and circumstances (§ 34a).
- If the person healed is still alive, he is to be examined by experts so that the duration of the healing can be ascertained (§ 34b).

A transcript of the diocesan or eparchial inquiry together with attached documents is sent to Rome in order to be handled by a medical experts, theological consultants, and finally by the members of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. In accordance with the Bishop’s

³⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*, §§ 14-15.

³⁷ Let us remember here that in the case of miraculous healings, the physicians who treated the patient are to be called as witnesses (cf. *Normae servandae*, § 22a).

Declaration on the Absence of Cult (*Declaratio de non cultu*), any solemn celebrations or panegyric speeches about Servants of God whose sanctity of life is still being legitimately examined are prohibited in Churches³⁸.

Often miracles consist in extraordinary healing, that is for example instantaneous, complete or integral, permanent and not scientifically explainable³⁹. A similar appreciation is to be issued by physicians and by a medical commission. The so-called miraculous healing occurs in concomitance of prayers addressed to God through the intercession of a Servant of God or a Blessed. In the case of allegedly miraculous healing, medical and clinical documents as well as test results (for example clinical and medical records, laboratory exams and analyses) are necessary (cf. Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 38, § 2). If it is matter of an alleged miracle of another nature, such as multiplication of bread or of a given meal, familiarity with a wild beast, sweat and tears of blood, sudden fire extinguish, predictions and prophecies, then there is a need of another kind of Technical Expert (cf. Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 47, § 2). The moral miracles (for example healing the addiction to alcoholism, drugs; favoring a sudden conversion to the catholic faith, etc.) are not at all considered. Benedict XIV suggested to treat this category of miracles with caution due to the absence of a sure probative system of verification.

Theologically, we can say that the miracle is a kind of divine revelation within the human salvific history. The Church does not ascribe the miracle to saints, but to God himself. As instruments of God, the Saints are only intercessors. There is no direct relationship between holiness and miracle, even if the miracle is considered as a divine sign which confirm the holiness. People see a certain parallelism between the role of miracles in canonical process and the complex significance of miracles in Holy Scripture: miracles belong to the realm of signs which reveal the intervention of God in the history of salvation and represent a motive of credibility (cf. Jn 10:38). In ancient times, miracles were a primary element in the recognition of holiness. In the Middle Ages, they became a secondary one. Pope Innocent III († 1216) stated clearly that in order to recognize the sanctity of a person, the process of the Church must take into account not only the miracles wrought by the candidate, but also the very holiness of his life.

³⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister*, § 2, 6; *Normae servandae*, § 36; Instruction *Sanctorum Mater*, §§ 117-119.

³⁹ According to Thomas Aquinas, it is matter here of a miracle of the third grade (i.e. *miraculum quoad modum*), in which the miracle goes beyond the faculty of human nature only according to the modality of its execution. The first grade concerns the case in which the miracle goes beyond the faculty of the nature as such, i.e. *miraculum quoad substantiam* (for example the sweeping of the sea in Ex 14:21-22 or the stopping of the sun in Jos 10:13). In the second grade, the miracle goes beyond the natural faculty in the subject where it happens (for example: the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus in Lc 8:56 or the healing of a born blind in Jn 9, etc.). For more explanations, see V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, p. 78; J.L. GUTIÉRREZ, *I miracoli nell'apparato probatorio delle cause di canonizzazione*, in *Ius Ecclesiae* 10 (1998) 491-529; H. MISZTAL, *Le Cause di canonizzazione*, pp. 69-78, especially p. 73.

God, however, chooses to do miracles through the intermediary of holy people, so that miracles offer a certain manifestation of their holiness. According to Benedict XIV († 1758)⁴⁰, the miracles are therefore works of God that manifest his glory that shines in the lives of the saints, either to confirm the faith and morals, or to attest to their holiness. So miracles are not per se an attestation of sanctity, but the radiance of the life in Christ. Except for a few cases, only miracles that occur after death are recognized for the process of canonization. The ultimate goal of the miracles is a divine confirmation at the conclusion of the study in favor of the sanctity of a Servant of God⁴¹.

3. “Saints without Borders”. Ecumenical Perspectives

“Of the Worship of Saints they teach that the memory of saints may be set before us, that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling. (...) But the Scripture teaches not the invocation of saints or to ask help of saints, since it sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Propitiation, High Priest, and Intercessor” (*Confessio Augustana*, § 21). This controversial statement of the 16th Century put Catholics and Protestants in front of a different comprehension of the Worship of Saints. Nevertheless, there is still a certain common denominator: we agree that any form of cult of the saints may lead us to worship the One and Triune God (cf. Rev 22:9), “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13)⁴². According to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition, the veneration given to the saints goes to the only Holy One, Jesus Christ: saints are invoked as intercessors and

⁴⁰ Cf. BENEDICT XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et canonizatione*, IV, pars 1, c. 4, n. 1: “Inter fines miraculorum secundarios, qui tamen ad primarium ordinantur, recensentur tum confirmatio pro ostendenda veritate doctrinae Fidei et morum, tum attestatio verae sanctitatis alicuius”, here quoted from V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, p. 79.

⁴¹ Cf. V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, pp. 79-81; R. LATOURELLE, *Miracle et sainteté dans les causes de béatification et de canonisation*, in *Science et Esprit* 50 (1998) 265-277; H. MISZTAL, *Le Cause di canonizzazione*, pp. 70-72.

⁴² Even if the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) between Catholics and Lutherans does not use the word “sanctification”, it includes language expressive of sanctification. Indeed, justification is closely linked with sanctification (cf. W. KASPER, *Harvesting the Fruits. Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* [London-New York, Continuum 2009], pp. 42-44, here especially p. 42). Important seems to be the statement of the BILATERALE ARBEITSGRUPPE DER DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ UND DER KIRCHENLEITUNG DER VEREINIGTEN EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHEN KIRCHE DEUTSCHLANDS, *Communio Sanctorum. Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen* (Paderborn-Frankfurt am Main, Bonifatius-Otto Lembeck 2000; ³2005), pp. 110-119, here p. 111 (§ 230): „Die römisch-katholische und die evangelisch-lutherische Kirche stimmen darin überein, «daß man die Heiligen ehren soll». Sie verstehen unter solcher Ehre den Dank an Gott, der Menschen zur Heiligkeit berufen hat, den Glauben an die Macht seiner Gnade, die mächtiger ist als die Sünde, und das Bekenntnis zu seiner Güte, in der er Mitmenschen als lebendige Vorbilder christlichen Lebens in der Geschichte beruft“.

protectors, not as mediators⁴³. At the beginning of the 20th Century, the conviction of the precursors of the ecumenical movement was that the closer we get to Jesus Christ, the unique mediator, the closer we come to one another.

In assessing the “universal call to holiness in the Church”⁴⁴, the Roman Catholic Church confirmed that holiness is not her exclusive prerogative. The Solemnity of All Saints on the 1st November remembers particularly the saints whose names are known only to God. The almighty God saves even beyond the frontiers of the Church and ecclesial communities whose mission is nothing more than continue the mission of Christ and therefore the salvation of humanity. Indeed, God who wishes all men and women to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth leads them to salvation in ways known to Himself⁴⁵. As the Second Vatican Council admitted, “the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic (...) subsists in the Catholic Church, (...) although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity”⁴⁶. The Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, which offers the hermeneutic key to understand ecumenically the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* explains the quoted statement: “Some and even very many of the significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements too. All of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ. (...) It follows that the separated Churches and Communities as such, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church”⁴⁷. Furthermore, in his Encyclical *Ut unum sint* on commitment to ecumenism, Pope John Paul II adds that the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian Communities, in a degree which varies from one to the other, constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church. So, on the one hand, the Church of Christ is effectively present in other Christian communities, and on the other hand, the Catholic Church is linked with these

⁴³ I. BRIA, *Saints*, in N. LOSSKY (ed.), *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement*, p. 1008.

⁴⁴ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, Chapter V.

⁴⁵ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Ad gentes*, § 7.

⁴⁶ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, § 8; cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encycl. *Ut unum sint*, § 10.

⁴⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, § 3.

Communities by a true union in the Holy Spirit⁴⁸. No wonder then, that the Popes have sincerely recognized the virtuous and holy life of other Christians, who for example have endured the same martyrdom with Catholics, as the latter were beatified or canonized. It was the case on the 18th October 1964, when Paul VI proceeded with the canonization of Uganda martyrs. In his homely, after having spoken about Charles Lwanga, Mathias Mulumba Kalemba and their 20 companions, Paul VI mentioned also some Anglicans who were killed on the same occasion: “*Et mentione digni sunt alii etiam, qui, anglicana instituta religiosa profitentes, pro Christi nomine morte affecti sunt*”. More recently, we can recall the beatification of the martyrs of Lübeck in Germany: Johannes Prassek, Hermann Lange, Andreas Paul Eduard Müller, priests († 1943). The beatification took place in Lübeck June 25, 2011. At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, the Lutheran Bishop of Hamburg presented the figure of the Pastor Stellbrink, as brave and heroic witness of the Gospel. The ceremony was attended by Catholics and Lutherans, united in admiration of these heroes of the faith⁴⁹.

Instead of being motive of division, holiness is therefore an incentive to promote unity among Christians. According to Ion Bria, in fact, “The theme of saints is also essential in order to keep the search for visible unity deeply rooted in the life of prayer, of mutual intercession among the churches. The practice of continued intercession for one another, and for all the churches, keeps before every Christian something of the catholicity of the church of Christ. It enables the churches to see one another not with the eyes of confessional appraisal and historical assessment but as joint petitioners before the throne of God. It opens one not only to give but also to receive within the fellowship of prayer and service. In the ecumenical community the churches bring their particularities of life, worship and witness. From the «saints» tradition we learn about the extraordinary power of the Christian life («holiness as witness») for the proclamation of the gospel. (...) It is highly important for today’s ecumenical spirituality and liturgical renewal to recognize the saints as encouraging examples on the pilgrim journey and as symbols of the church universal. (...) Commemoration of all saints and martyrs of the church universal is observed on the first Sunday after Pentecost in the Orthodox churches and on 1 November in the Western tradition”⁵⁰. The shared calendar of the saints’ liturgical celebration

⁴⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Enycl. Ut unum sint*, § 11.

⁴⁹ Cf. A. AMATO, *I santi testimoni della fede* (Città del Vaticano, LEV 2012), pp. 388-390.

⁵⁰ I. BRIA, *Saints*, in N. LOSSKY (ed.), *Dictionary of Ecumenical Movement*, pp. 1007-1008. See also H.-M. BARTH, *Sehnsucht nach den Heiligen?* (Stuttgart, Quell 1992); R. LARINI, *Il libro dei testimoni: martirologio ecumenico* (Cinisello Balsamo, San Paolo 2002); J.F. PUGLISI – S. TOBLER (eds.), *Testimoni della fede nelle Chiese della Riforma* (Roma, Città Nuova 2010); K. SCHLEMMER (ed.), *Heilige als Brückenbauer. Heiligenverehrung im ökumenischen Dialog* (St. Ottilien, EOS 1997); T. VETRALI, *La santità: da categoria di separazione a luogo di unità*, in *Quaderni di Studi Ecumenici* 18 (2009) 11-43.

can help to develop a spiritual proximity and then to gain a suitable disposition for the ecumenical dialogue. Generally, saints are unanimously considered as leading figures in the confession of the primacy of God and in the transformation of the society. They bear witness to the world to come, where every difference will be abolished and we'll really be one in Christ. They are an epiphany of the manifold sanctity of God which is limitedly revealed in the churches. If dialogue is also "exchange of gifts"⁵¹ among Christians, there is no better gift to share than holiness. So let us confess together the *Communio Sanctorum* and be "fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Eph 2:19).

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I'd rather conclude with the words of Card. Angelo Amato, sdb, the present Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints: "Holiness belongs to the DNA of the Church, one, *holy*, catholic and apostolic. Throughout the ages, the Saints have been the spiritual compass, which guided humanity towards God, and they are the true innovators of history. With their human and spiritual pattern they improve the world, because they fertilize it beneficially with the truth and the infinite love of God. The Holy Father Benedict XVI said: «The presence of God is always manifested clearly in particular manner in the saints» (Erfurt, September 24, 2011). The refined canonical procedures in view of the exaltation of the faithful, especially distinguished in the Christian virtues, have precisely the incomparable task of helping to highlight the traceability of the trinitarian love in the hearts and minds of men and women flooded by grace"⁵².

⁵¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encycl. *Ut unum sint*, §§ 28 and 57; 82-85.

⁵² A. AMATO, *Prefazione*, in V. CRISCUOLO – D. OLS – R.J. SARNO (eds.), *Le Cause dei Santi*, p. 9.