

# Saints

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pointed out that sometimes local deities were transformed directly into saints. In other cases, the legends surrounding a deity or a mythical character were attributed to a local saint.

Nevertheless, genuine saints exist, Tripiciano said, and they provide models for all the faithful.

"We always like to identify with people who are better at something than we are," he remarked.

Where saints surpass ordinary people is in their ability to see the world clearly for what it is, Tripiciano suggested.

"All a saint is is someone who does the ordinary extraordinarily well," he said. "They are most in harmony with the order, consistency, harmony and love with which God created and maintains the universe. (Saints) see things for what they truly are and what their use is."

In their clearness of vision, saints provide role models for the faithful, particularly the young, acknowledged Sister Lorraine Hale, PBVM, who teaches at Barry University in Miami Shore, Fla.

Sister Hale and her colleague, Sister Kathryn Hollywood, PBVM, were writing a dissertation on the culture of Catholic schools when they realized that the veneration once given to saints in Catholic schools had disappeared.

"It seemed to us there was a gap," Sister Hale said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*. "Where were the saints? Where were the heroes? Where were the stories we heard about the saints when we were in school?"

The two women decided to produce a book, *The Heroes and Heroines of the*

*Christian Story*, for use in Catholic schools and religious-education programs. The book was illustrated, and someone suggested that the pictures would look good on T-shirts and sweat shirts. Officials at Allegiance Advantage, the company marketing the book, decided to produce the shirts for sale as fundraisers by schools and parishes using the book.

But when the two sisters began visiting teachers' conferences in September of this year, the T-shirts and sweat shirts attracted immediate attention. Not only did the company receive orders from parishes and schools, but from individuals who had heard about the shirts through word of mouth and newspaper articles. The company was forced to install an 800 line just to handle the volume of calls.

Based on the response in just the first two months the shirts have been on the market, sales are already estimated between 250,000 and 500,000, company officials said.

The response, Sister Hale speculated, "is saying that the people want (the saints), and we are definitely meeting a need."

In addition to serving as role models, the saints fill another, deeper, psychological need, Orsi observed.

Orsi, who is researching a book on devotion to St. Jude, said, he was struck "by the way people in great need take comfort in the saints. People's needs are not being fulfilled by regular church devotions."

In the period immediately after Vatican II, he reminded, some churches even went so far as to remove their saint statues from their shrines, replacing them, in some cases, with banners. In the process, he said, something was lost.

"Think about the richness of the tradition," Orsi said. "It's a tradition of colors and sounds and smell. It's

something that can't be contained on words on a banner."

Furthermore, Orsi suggested the sudden rise of the Charismatic Renewal Movement coincided with the decline of devotion to the saints. The movement, like the devotions it succeeded, enables people to "encounter the holy in an unmediated way," he said.

Amid the discussion of saints, people frequently overlook the fact that all the faithful are part of the Communion of Saints. This teaching was reaffirmed at Vatican II, which declared that those who have died and are in Purgatory or Heaven are united with those still living to form one church.

Thus, the saints who are the objects of devotion are simply those who have received official recognition by the church.

"(Saints) are not people who have something that we don't have," Tripiciano observed. "All canonization does is to put them on a legal list."

To join that list, an individual must be judged to have lived a life of heroic virtue, and must have at least two documented miracles to their credit. The cause for a saint begins in the individual's home diocese, where an investigation is conducted. The evidence from that investigation is then sent to the Vatican where, based on the evidence presented, the pope decides if the candidate's cause is to be introduced. If the pope opts to continue the process, Vatican authorities then conduct a more detailed investigation than that conducted at the diocesan level.

One current candidate for canonization is Father Nelson Baker, a Buffalo priest who died in 1936, and who, in 1881-1882, served in St. Mary's Parish, Corning (then a part of the Buffalo diocese). Since 1987, he has been the subject of such an investigation. A tribunal has been gathering evidence that attests to his sanctity, and is ready to submit a report to the Vatican to the Congregation for the Cause of Saints.

Monsignor Robert Wurtz is the Pos-

itulator of the Cause, a role in which he acts as Father Baker's advocate in the investigation. During the past three years, the diocesan tribunal in charge of the investigation has amassed a great deal of testimony and documents, Monsignor Wurtz said. He noted, however, that no miracles have been documented thus far. If no such miracles surface, the cause will come to an end.

Since the process is so exacting and, as Monsignor Wurtz acknowledged, "anyone who makes heaven is a saint," why does the church go through the process of canonization?

Canonization is significant, the monsignor observed, because it is "a special dignity imposed on someone who has done something special. It's a recognition of his services."

Indeed, the concept of canonization as a form of recognition for achievement helps to explain the preponderance of clerics, women religious, and noble men and women on the official list, Dues acknowledged.

"The saints always come from the group that the church that the church is building up as an ideal," Dues observed. "Saints who are canonized have to have a group who is pushing the cause. So an ordinary housewife might not get canonized because her cause might not have been promoted."

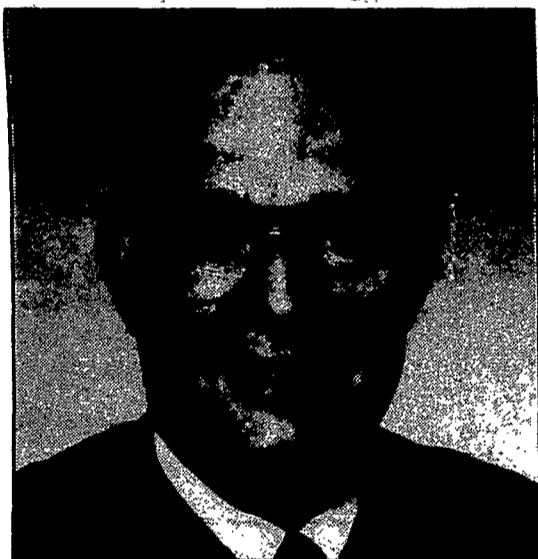
Since Vatican II, however, the church has changed its attitude about who should be canonized. The church today, Dues observed, is trying to balance the kinds of people who are canonized.

Furthermore, Dues said, the church today is more open to acknowledging that sanctity exists in many people — including single parents holding their families together and those who devote themselves to ministry. "There are saints all around us," he said.

Today, Dues said, the faithful need the church to provide proper guidance toward rediscovering traditional devotions to the saints without drifting again into of the excesses of the past.

"It's up to the people who are leaders, pastors, teachers, to put the Communion of Saints into proper perspective," Dues concluded.

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