

HISTORICAL STUDIES, I

- Topic: Saint-Making by the Academy?
 Convener: Daniel E. Doyle, Villanova University
 Presenters: Phyllis Zagano, Senior Research Associate-in-Residence, Hofstra University
 Regis J. Armstrong, The Catholic University of America [Absence Notified in Advance]
 Eileen C. Burke-Sullivan, Creighton University

The Historical Studies Topic Session I sponsored a panel on scholarly “canonization by acclamation.” As the scholars noted, the early Church proclaimed saints by acclamation. By developing historical, literary and biographical anthologies of men and women who illuminate specific principles of historically recognized praxis within the Christian tradition, scholars have exerted a significant influence on the popular reception of persons as “saintly,” who have not been formally canonized. One current example presented by the panel is John Henry Newman (1801-1890), beatified only in September, 2010, but included in scholars’ studies of contemporary exponents of the faith tradition for over a century. Phyllis Zagano, Regis Armstrong and Eileen Burke-Sullivan, were originally invited because they have recently published anthologies of historical spiritualities (Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan, and Ignatian) within the Catholic tradition. Unfortunately, due to sickness, Regis Armstrong was unable to attend. The panel members raised the following questions:

- How does the ancient practice of canonization by popular acclamation still function in the Church through the influence of the academy?
- How do uncanonized men and women who led markedly holy lives by culturally acceptable standards of their day continue to affect the spiritual culture of the Church through the scholarly exposition of their biographies and their writings?
- How have the postulaters within the more established religious Orders and congregations exercised an influential role in making sure their heroic members are promoted and come to the attention of the Vatican Congregation of Saints? And does this fact explain the relative dearth of lay models of holiness?
- Have scholars developed a distinct canon of saints by multiple references to persons and texts that have become so widely used as to become normative?
- Are the criteria for this canon applied differently in the secular and religious institutions of the academy?

We examined the influential role played by theologians and historians in their accounts of the complex lives of these men and women sometimes slowing down or speeding up the exigencies of the process according to the cultural sensitivities in play at the time such as the controversy that still surrounds the pontificate of

Pope Pius XII who failed to take a bolder stand against the Nazis. We also discussed the unusual pairing of beatification between the conservative, ultramontane Pope Pius IX who presided over the collapse of the papal states and the modern, progressive avuncular Pope John XXIII who had courage and optimism to open the Second Vatican Council. We explored the role played by theologians in creating biographies and anthologies of outstanding Christians which disseminate their virtues and talents to a much wider audience as well as the more critical function played by these same writers who might call attention to their limitations and character flaws.

Hans Christoffersen of Liturgical Press moderated the lively discussion that followed their presentations and commented about the enormous role played by postulators and religious communities in promoting and popularizing the holiness of their own illustrious members.

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