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The construction of a beatification and canonization cause: historical analysis and ecclesiastical norms

*A construção de uma causa de beatificação e canonização:
análises históricas e normas eclesiais*

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Abstract: Debates on the beatification and canonization processes have always been a concern to the Catholic Church hierarchy. We have identified changes in the established norms at different times in history, with specific literature on the ways to decree the sacralization of an individual. Based on what is proposed by Cultural History, we analyzed the norms used in beatification and canonization causes based on representations that were elaborated around individuals who lived according to the standards established by the Catholic Church. To do this, we used normative documents, codes, and guidelines for the clergy, to understand the legal procedures of canonical norms. Throughout the article, we present how the causes for sainthood were based on historical, cultural, and social aspects for the faithful and the clergy.

Keywords: Saints; Canonization Process; Catholic Church; Beatification; Canonization.

Resumo: Os debates sobre os processos de beatificação e canonização sempre foram preocupações para a hierarquia da Igreja Católica. Em diferentes momentos históricos, identificamos modificações nas normas estabelecidas, com leitura específica sobre os caminhos para se decretar a sacralização de um

indivíduo. A partir das propostas da História Cultural, analisamos as normas utilizadas em causas de beatificação e canonização, a partir das representações elaboradas em torno de indivíduos que viveram de acordo com padrões estabelecidos pela Igreja Católica. Para isso, utilizamo-nos dos documentos normativos, códigos e orientações ao clero, com o objetivo de compreender os procedimentos jurídicos das normas canônicas. Durante o artigo, apresentamos como as causas em torno dos santos foram fundamentadas em aspectos histórico, culturais e sociais para os fiéis e o clero.

Palavras-chave: Santos; Processo Canônico; Igreja Católica; Beatificação; Canonização.

Holiness is the most beautiful side of the Church. But even outside the Catholic Church and in very different areas, the Spirit gives rise to «signs of its presence [...]» (Pope Francis, 2018).

Since the first centuries of the Christian era, the cult of saints was developed, with devotion to men and women who were represented as exemplary in social or religious life through narratives of martyrdom and the practice of virtues. With the process of institutionalization, the Catholic Church began to standardize the procedures for recognizing the reputation of individuals' holiness in different places.

According to the emeritus prefect of the Dicastery¹ for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Angelo Amato, the recognition of sainthood by the ecclesiastical hierarchy “implies a delicate theological discernment, followed by an accurate canonical procedure, with precise stages and deadlines [...]. All this to avoid the temptations of superficiality and inopportune haste” (Amato, 2012a, p. 3-4). We understand that a process that involves beatification and canonization must be considered from social, cultural, historical, and economic perspectives. Even though the Church has its legal determinations, sainthood must also be understood as elaborate, with many different elements in addition to the religious aspects (Moura, 2023, p 3).

Based on proposals from the Cultural History of Religions, in the article, we seek to analyze how canonical procedures for the “invention” of a saint are developed in the Catholic Church. In our proposals, we highlight that in addition to ecclesiastical procedures, an individual's canonization is constituted from cultural, social, political, economic and devotional issues. It is considered that solely the work methodology adopted by beatification and canonization commissions, based on canonical legislation, is not sufficient for the formation of a reputation

¹ A dicastery is the name of a Catholic Church department (an administrative body that assists the Pope and coordinates the Church operation). The dicasteries include the Secretariat of State, congregations, ecclesiastical courts, councils, offices, commissions, and committees. The Pope delegates a government function to each dicastery.

for holiness and success in requests for confirmation from dioceses or the Roman Curia. Therefore, the clergy representatives of the clergy need the legitimization of devotees, faithful and religious groups, as a complement to legal procedures.

For the methodological development of the research, we analyzed the canonical legislation that regulates the processes of beatification and canonization, encyclicals, manuals and religious documents, with the aim of understanding how the procedures were adapted throughout history. In the same way, we were attentive to the needs of including the sociocultural issues of each candidate for saint in their processes, as their organization is not just constituted by legal procedures.

For a beatification and canonization process to be successful, it must follow a path that begins with the individual's death and continues to when their name is inscribed in the album of saints. The whole process, so to speak, happens in two phases: the diocesan and the Roman, each with its own requirements and peculiarities. It is necessary to follow the praxis of the dicastery², observing the norms in the various documents that deal with the subject. These are precise guidelines for the bishops, postulators, ecclesiastics, historians, and all involved with the cause.

Understanding the current procedure is of utmost importance, considering the long history of canonization causes. Some rules have remained unchanged since the standardization processes have begun in the 17th century (Congregatione, 2018a) to the present day, while others have been adapted according to ecclesiastical needs. In this sense, it is considered that the ecclesiastical hierarchy has organized its canonical bureaucracy to meet the requirements, maintain prudence, and keep specific procedures in place for the faithful.

The Church starts from the principle that, through baptism, Christians “whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, [are] called to holiness” (Ecumenical Council Vatican II, 1964). Through the New Testament, where the baptized are called the “saints”³, as well as the *sequela Christi*, the ecclesiastics who work with the beatification and canonization processes present the grounds for declaring someone a saint. According to Thomas Aquinas, “sanctity is the disposition with which the human soul applies itself and its acts to God”

² “As Peter was passing through every region, he sent down to the holy ones living in Lydda (Acts 9:13, 32); “He gave her his hand and raised her up, and when he had called the holy ones and the widows, he presented her alive” (Acts 9:13, 42); “To all the beloved of God in Rome, called to be holy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 1:7); “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy...” (1 Corinthians 1:2). (CF. Bible, 2002).

³ Latin term used in the ecclesiastical area meaning “following of Christ”.

(Aquinas, 2016, q. 81, art. 8). In this sense, the Church understands saints to be those who have become like Christ through their way of thinking and acting.

The concept of sanctity is related to theological, historical, religious, anthropological, and legal dimensions that seek a denominator that attributes divinity to an individual. The practices surrounding the term are made up of spiritual and thaumaturgical criteria aimed at recognizing people with a privileged relationship derived from interactions between the human and divine spheres (Gajano, 2020).

The manual that guides the beatification and canonization processes of the *Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum* defines that “sanctity directs man towards God, which means that man regards God as the ultimate purpose of all his actions, and foremost, as the ultimate purpose of his mind; and this purpose is achieved through the acts of that mind: knowledge and love” (Congregatione, 2018a, p. 37). It is evident that the process meets the different requirements surrounding the life of the candidate for sainthood, as it establishes a connection between the individual, their actions, and virtues with the divine aspects.

There are countless names of saints, blessed, venerable and servants of God worldwide. Martyrs like Peter, Paul, Sebastian, Lawrence, Lucy, André de Soveral, Ignatius de Azevedo and, closer to our times, Maximilian Maria Kolbe, Lindalva Oliveira, Albertina Berkenbrock, and Benigna Cardoso (Brazilian martyrs); confessors like Francis of Assisi, Benedict of Nursia, Pio of Pietrelcina and, in Brazil: Antônio Galvão, José de Anchieta, Damião de Bozzano, Expedito Lopes, Guido Schäffer, Vital de Oliveira, Luciano Mendes, Helder Camara, Priest Ibiapina, and Cícero Romão stood out among the devotions of different faithful people in distinct places. For Catholics, there are also consecrated virgins and many other figures among the saints, such as Clara of Assisi, Rita of Cascia, Teresa of Avila, Gianna Beretta, Teresa of Calcutta, and in Brazil: Mother Paulina, Dulce of the Poor, Isabel Cristina, Vitória da Encarnação, Nhá Chica, Adélia Carvalho, Odette Vidal and Zilda Arns.

In Latin America, the opening of beatification and canonization processes has become frequent, even if in smaller numbers compared to other geographic areas such as Europe. Some of the causes constitute unique devotions, such as Mama Antula, the first Argentine saint, San Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, the first indigenous saint in Latin America, Francisca Rubatto, an Italian-Uruguayan nun and the first saint in Uruguay, and Maria Felicia de Jesus Sacramentado, the first Paraguayan nun to undergo the canonical process. Other names are better known and with greater devotion, such as Dom Óscar Romero (El Salvador), Dom Jacinto Vera (Uruguay), Madre Laura (Colombia), Madre Lupita (Mexico), Santa

Teresa de Jesus dos Andes (Chile) or Blessed José Gregorio Hernández Cisneros, the “doctor of the poor”.

Many of the mentioned names are not officially recognized as saints by the Catholic Church. However, their sainthood reputation in various places has earned them recognition from the faithful, with acts of devotion and graces or achieved miracles being reported. Therefore, it must be considered that the representation of sanctity is guided not only by the bureaucratic process of the clergy but also by the representations created by the devotees. Even so, the Church has the role of analyzing the lives and actions of these people in order to propose them as models to be followed.

Based on the teachings of the Church, the lives of the saints are proposed as a reference for practicing Christian virtues in one’s life. The saints put themselves through a conversion process, in other words, a change of life, behavior, and mentality. As such, elaborating their representations seeks to transform and influence the environment they find themselves in and the realities in which they are inserted. Due to this, one can consider the importance, in the Church’s view, of the beatification and canonization causes.

The term ‘to canonize’ comes from the Greek *κάνων*, which means to place on the list, that is, to inscribe in the album of saints, using an ecclesiastical term. The names of those who have distinguished themselves in their virtuous practice are inscribed in this document. However, the Catholic Church acknowledges that there are many Christians with reputations of sanctity that the institution does not officially recognize. In such causes, Pope Francis classifies them as “sanctity ‘at the doorstep’: referring to those who live close to us and are a reflection of God’s presence, or – in other words – the ‘middle class of sanctity’” (Francis, 2018).

Throughout the article, we analyze the bureaucratic procedures in a beatification and canonization cause elaborated by the Catholic Church, its representations, and requirements for the faithful. Similarly, we discuss the elaboration of the reputation of sanctity discourses around figures who are “recognized” by the people, even without the official recognition of an institution.

THE VENERATION OF SAINTS AND THE HISTORY OF CANONIZATION

Ecclesiastical initiatives and procedures related to veneration and causes for the canonization of saints began to emerge in the Church’s earliest years. These procedures developed over the centuries and have been “[...] articulated based on historical, theological, legal and medical sciences, to establish the truth and exclude all doubt in the declaration of sanctity” (Congregazione, 2018b,

p. 165). Even though it is a procedure with religious discussions, the beatification and canonization processes use scientific elements based on the different areas of knowledge used.

The first form of saint worship was reserved for martyrs. We find in the Bible the one who is considered to be the first saint, Stephen (cf. Acts 7:55ff), with discussions that refer to the expression of veneration to him since it is said that “devout men buried Stephen and made a loud lament over him” (Acts 8:2). The term “martyr” comes from a Greek expression which originally means “witness”. Since the early Church, these figures were considered examples of the Gospel, with narratives around the defense of the Christian faith and teachings. However, until the 4th century, during Diocletian’s last persecution (284 – 305), there were only martyr saints or those considered as such. From this period onward, the occurrences of “confessor” saints began, with accounts of a virtuous life, with the sanctity reputation being present during their lives and after their deaths (cf. Bible, 2002).

Since the first process, the ecclesiastical authority has exercised a vigilant role to ensure that the Church’s declaration is historically consistent. In the first centuries, for example, there were safeguards in place so that the people’s enthusiasm would not attribute martyr status to someone who had suffered a violent death for reasons not related to faith. It should be emphasized that, in all causes, the aim was to prove the reputation of sanctity, be it through miracles or martyrdom, by presenting to the diocesan authority the research results, aiming to draw up an opinion, along with the authorization or prohibition of worship (Pujol, 2005, p. 11).

Initially, the bishops analyzed each saint candidate and authorized the worship. Gradually, however, they began inviting the Pope to preside over the canonization events. The first papal canonization, with its respective papal bull, occurred in 993 when John XV (950-996) canonized Saint Ulric of Dillingen (Porsi, 2006, pp. 20-21). The practice of inviting the Pontiff gradually became more common until it became definitive. Cardinal Prospero Lambertini, who became Pope Benedict XIV (1675-1758), emphasized in his work, *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum Canonizatione*, that the movement contributed to centralising the authority in the Church of Rome, regarding canonization (Congregazione, 2018, p. 193).

The term “to canonize” first appeared in 13th century documents, with Pope Alexander III (1105-1181). In 1234, Gregory IX (1170-1241) promulgated the Decretals, a medieval canon law code that became a pontifical canonization “manual” for the Church. The first canonization by Gregory IX was that of

Francis of Assisi, who was proclaimed a saint on July 19th, 1228. It should be emphasized that the previous documentation “on the life and miracles of Francis is the first process [...] whose acts are preserved almost in their entirety” (Congregatione, 2018a, p. 203).

Innocent IV (1195-1254), who succeeded Gregory, was a jurist who declared the pontifical reserve regarding canonizations, saying, “Solus Papa potest canonizare”,⁴ since only He can exercise universal jurisdiction over the Church. Thus, from that moment on, canonizations became the exclusive right of popes.

Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590) reorganized the Curia and created the so-called Roman congregations. One of them was *Congregatio pro sacris ritibus et caeremoniis* which, among other competences, regulated canonizations. Along with the standardization of the processes. Urban VIII (1623-1644) published decrees on canonization with austere and secure procedures, many of which are still in effect. The most important of these documents is the apostolic constitution *Caelestis Hierusalem cives*, with precise norms for the causes (Soares, 2015, p. 108; Garcia; Bernal; Broggio; Dell’Arco, 2020, p. 43). Under this Pontiff, the canonical procedures related to a cause for canonization were set and practically prescribed.

Other important formulations were prescribed by Alexander VII (1655-1667), Innocent XI (1676-1689), and Clement XII (1730-1740). However, among the popes, Benedict XIV (1740-1758) is classified as the “Magister” for the causes of saints, being responsible for the systematization of legislation and canonical procedures in the beatification and canonization processes. He was the one who made the concept of “heroic virtues” clear. For the Pontiff:

For it to be heroic, Christian virtue must lead the one who possesses it to act, from a supernatural end, in a manner that is quick, prompt, and superior to the ordinary, and therefore, without human reasoning, with the self-sacrifice of those who work and with the submission of affections (Benedict XIV, 1842, ch. 22, 1.).

Benedict XIV’s successors confirmed his doctrine, which is based on a conception of virtue that is not “divine”. Even so, new decrees were elaborated by Leo XIII (1878-1903), Pius XI (1922-1939), Pius XII (1939-1958), John XXIII (1958-1963) and Paul VI (1963-1978), referring to the canonization processes. The latter was elaborated on May 8, 1969, with the apostolic constitution *Sacra Rituum Congregatio*, which suppressed the Sacred Congregation of Rites and created two others, for Divine Worship and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, later denominated as Congregation of the Causes of Saints (Paul VI, 1969).

⁴ A term in Latin which means “Only the Pope can canonize”.

In turn, John Paul II (1978-2005) carried out a major reform with the apostolic constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, of January 25, 1983. In his proposal, the Pontiff noted that the Congregation for the Causes of Saints does not judge a cause but studies it. Such measures changed the procedures that were underway within the Catholic Church.

Benedict XVI (2005-2013) made great contributions to the congregation through his pronouncements and indications. During his papacy, the instruction *Sanctorum Mater* was published with guidelines for the development of the diocesan or eparchial⁵ inquiries, as well as modifications in the procedures for beatification rites. The document established the guidelines on the reputation of sanctity or of martyrdom and the reputation of signs in the beatification and canonization cause, which concerns:

[...] a faithful catholic who in life, in death, and after death enjoyed a reputation of sanctity, heroically living all the Christian virtues; or enjoys a reputation of martyrdom because, having followed the Lord Jesus Christ more closely, sacrificed his life in the act of martyrdom. [...] A Servant of God is a faithful Catholic whose cause for beatification and canonization has already begun. [...] The reputation of sanctity is the overall opinion among the faithful about the purity and integrity of the Servant of God's life and the virtues he practices to a heroic degree. [...] The reputation of martyrdom is the overall opinion among the faithful about the death the Servant of God suffered in the name of faith or a virtue related to the faith. [...] Before deciding to initiate the cause, the diocesan or eparchial Bishop should verify whether, with a significant part of the people of God, the Servant of God has an authentic and widespread reputation of sanctity or martyrdom, with an authentic and widespread reputation of signs (Martins, 2007, art. 4).

The document showed the Church's concern with the procedures used for the beatification and canonization cause, with guidelines for the organization of documents and the course of the process. The guidelines were fundamental, as they established a bureaucratic organization for the processes, as well as recognized the importance of scientific contributions for "confirming" the sainthood.

In his procedures to reform the Roman Curia through the *Praedicate Evangelium*, Pope Francis presented precise guidelines for the body, now called the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. He had already published the Norms on the Administration of the Goods of the Causes, the Regulations for Medical Consultation, the instruction on Relics in the Church, and the Regulations for Postulators. The Pope also created a third route to canonization: in addition to causes based on martyrdom and life and virtues, he presented the possibility based on "Offering of Life", which consists of a "free and voluntary offering of life and in

⁵ Type of ecclesiastical circumscription adopted in the Eastern Catholic, Orthodox, and Eastern Orthodox Churches, which corresponds to the concept of diocese. Its ordinary nomenclature is eparch

the heroic acceptance *propter caritatem*⁶ of certain death in the short-term” (Congregazione, 2017, art. 2, 6).

The path presented in the discussion shows the bureaucracy with which the Church establishes the studies into the life and work of a deceased believer with a reputation of sanctity. The representatives of the institution study, analyze, and verify the necessary elements to obtain information that can support the declaration of beatification and canonization. For this reason, the process can last for years or even centuries, depending on the development of each cause.

THE DIOCESAN INQUIRIES IN THE LOCAL CHURCHES AND THE ROMAN PHASE OF THE CAUSE

According to ecclesiastical norms, in the context of dioceses, if there is a deceased believer with a reputation of sanctity, his cause can only be opened five years after his death. The inquiries investigate whether the individual has reached the “perfect union with Christ”, that is, sanctity, according to his state and condition (Ecumenical Council Vatican II, 1964, n. 50). The elements refer to a Catholic faithful who, in life, in death, and after death, had the reputation of sanctity, living the “Christian virtues” in a heroic manner, if he suffered through martyrdom or sacrificed his life for his neighbor in an extreme act of charity. (Congregazione, 2018a, p. 550).

The reputation of sanctity is an essential element in opening a cause. The analysis of the actions of the faithful in their daily practices is the same one the Church uses to proclaim the sanctity of a Christian (Bescós, 2005, p.17). It should be noted that, for the Catholic Church, representations of sanctity should be spontaneous and not sought after.

The diocesan bishop where the faithful died is responsible for opening the process related to the beatification and canonization cause. If it needs to be opened elsewhere, it is necessary for the competent religious authority and the person who wishes to open it to be in agreement and to obtain the consent of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. An example of this practice happened with the cause of Don Vital Maria Gonçalves de Oliveira, who died in Paris in 1878. For the cause to be opened in the Archdiocese of Olinda and Recife, Archbishop Don José Cardoso Sobrinho asked Cardinal Aron Jean-Marie Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, for the jurisdiction to be transferred, which was approved by the dicastery.

⁶ Latin term which means “Because of charity”.

To open a cause, the diocesan bishop must obtain the *Nihil Obstat*, issued by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. The candidate can be denominated “Servant of God” when this document is issued. A diocesan or eparchial bishop from a diocese, congregation, religious order, apostolic life society, or an association of the faithful can author it.

The diocesan phase is instructed by a postulator chosen by the author of the cause; if he is not the diocesan bishop, the postulator must have his consent. The office can be held by a priest, religious authority, or layperson, who must have knowledge of theology, canon law, and history. In the case of an appointment of vice-postulators, it must be done by the postulator himself with the bishop’s consent. It should be noted that it is “the postulator who holds the office of a legal representative of the author of the Cause before the dicastery and competent ecclesiastical authorities” (Congregazione, 2022, n. 3b).

A cause can be historical or recent. A cause is considered historical when it cannot rely on the oral testimony of witnesses. A cause is considered recent when one can collect information about the possible virtues, martyrdom, or offering of life through the testimony of people who knew and lived with the “Servant of God”. Some examples of historical causes in Brazil are Mother Vitória da Encarnação (+1715), Don Vital de Oliveira (+1878), Father José Ibiapina (+1883), and Father Cícero Romão (+1844). In the Latin American context, we can highlight the causes of priest Mamerto Esquiú (+1883), in Argentina, and brother José Gregorio Hernández Cisneros (+1919), in Venezuela. The recent causes are those of Friar Damião de Bozzano (+1997), Father Léo Tarcísio (+2007), Guido Schäffer (+2009) and Nemésio Bernardi (+2016). In all of them, a perennial and, at least in part, meaningful reputation of sanctity is necessary.

Before opening a cause, the bishop must investigate if there are any impediments to its development. In order to do this, he should consult other bishops on the pertinence of the process and request information from the Episcopal Conference, which should then elaborate an opinion on how appropriate it is to initiate the cause (Congregazione, 2018a, p. 560).

After the beatification process is opened, the writings published by a “Servant of God” should be analyzed by theological Censors, whose members are appointed in secrecy and must individually elaborate an opinion on the documents. The analysis is based on the investigation of the existence of elements contrary to the representations of faith and good morals related to the candidate for sainthood (Congregazione, 2018a, p. 535).

A Commission of Experts must collect documentary evidence in historical and archival matters who, in the end, must present a report to the bishop with

their opinion on the authenticity of the documents, including any negative aspects. The copies of the documents, as well as the report from the Historical and Archival Commission, along with the opinions of the theologians, are attached to the procedural records for the analysis of the reputation of sanctity.

In order to hear the witnesses and to follow up on the diocesan phase, the bishop constitutes a Tribunal made up of an Episcopal Delegate, a Promoter of Justice, and a Notary. For a cause involving a miracle, the religious authority must also appoint a medical or technical expert to analyze the accounts and demonstrate that there are no scientific explanations for the accounts of the events, which are often related to healing.

One of the last actions in the Diocesan Phase is the “Declaration of no worship”, because “according to the provisions of Urban VIII, it is forbidden for a Servant of God to be the object of public ecclesiastical worship without prior authorization from the Holy See” (Congregazione, 2018a, p. 583). These provisions do not prevent the private worship and spontaneous dissemination of the reputation of sanctity by the faithful. The impediments are directed towards prohibiting the institutionalization of devotion to people who have not yet been declared saints.

Members of the Ecclesiastical Court examine the documents and opinions once the actions are concluded, with two copies being drawn up and sent to the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. The originals are sealed and filed at the diocesan Curia to be kept by local officials. After the closing session for the local work, a bearer takes the two copies to the Vatican, and then the Roman phase begins.

Once they arrive at the Dicastery, the files are opened and examined, and if they are in accordance with the norms, the Decree of Legal Validity is issued. Then, a rapporteur is appointed to oversee the drafting of the *Positio*. Once the document has been drafted and approved for a historical cause, the material is submitted to the Historical Commission to elaborate an opinion, which is then sent to theologians, bishops, and cardinals. In a recent cause, the material does not need to be submitted to such a commission.

If the opinions are positive, the candidate is presented to the Pope by the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery. If approved, the Pontiff allows the publication of the Decree of Venerability. This recognizes that the individual has lived “Christian virtues” to a heroic degree. For the process to continue, it is necessary to have an account of a miracle that happened after the death of the “Servant of God” so he can be beatified. A second miracle must happen after the beatification for him to be inscribed in the album of saints. In the cause of a martyr, after going

through the commissions, it is allowed for him to be beatified without the need for a miracle. However, for his canonization, one of the requirements is the account of a miracle.

There are also equipollent beatifications and canonizations, which are allowed by the Pope in the cause of a “Servant of God” who has an ancient veneration in which he is the object of *ab immemorabili tempore*⁷. These are the “ancient blessed” who are part of a limited category developed in a particular historical context. The period includes the “blessed” who lived from the pontificate of Alexander III (+1181) until the Constitution was published by Urban VIII in 1634. Likewise, one can proceed with the canonization of an “ancient saint” with an uninterrupted reputation of sanctity (Congregazione, 2018a, pp. 445-452). In this context, we can mention the cause of José de Anchieta, who was declared a saint by Pope Francis in 2014, with a canonization by decree, where the “proof” of a miracle was dismissed.

Both in the diocesan and Roman phases, the work of a postulator is essential for the progression of the cause. In the organization of the process, he prepares the documents, guided by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, so that the beatification or canonization ceremony can take place according to the Church’s norms. They are also responsible for other tasks, even after canonization, such as the need to present the accounting to the administrator of the goods of the cause in the dicastery (López, 2022, pp. 10-11).

Beatification entitles the “Servant of God” to be worshiped in the local Church where he is buried or in other places, with the necessary permissions of the Holy See, as it is a restricted worship. However, canonization is permission to worship in all territories, proclaimed by the Catholic Church, its representatives, and the faithful that the person has become a saint and is an example to be followed.

THE CANONIZED SAINTS AND THE “SAINTS OF THE PEOPLE”

Throughout its history, the Church has canonized many faithful people who died with a reputation of sanctity and are presented as models of life, with the creation of a liturgical worship guided by the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. A narrative about the individual’s sanctity is elaborated to this end, with an emphasis on the merits and benefits of God (Peloso, 1991, p. 29).

⁷ Latin term which means “Since immemorial times”.

The last few Popes have carried out many canonizations, and the theme of sanctity has been present in many pontifical proclamations, such as those of the current Pontiff, who has published an apostolic exhortation dedicated to the subject. *Gaudete et exultate* addresses the call to sanctity, with discussions about the necessary adaptations for the present time. For the religious authority:

We do not need to think only about those who have already been beatified or canonized. The Holy Spirit bestows holiness in abundance among God's holy and faithful people [...] In salvation history, the Lord saved a people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual. Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in the human community: God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people. I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God's people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance, I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often, it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God's presence. We might call them "the middle class of holiness". (Francis, 2018, n. 6).

With this document, the pontiff establishes new possibilities for the representation of sanctity in the Catholic Church based on the daily actions of its faithful people. Since this is a topic of great relevance for Catholics, the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints published a work with the participation of many commentators, with various aspects related to sanctity based on the Pope's reflections and guidelines. In the presentation, the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery, Marcello Semeraro, highlights that "for Pope Francis, the saints are happy people and that sanctity does not make them less human, since it is the meeting of their weakness with the strength of grace" (*Dicastero Delle Cause dei Santi*, 2023, comment 14).

In the Catholic world, there is a concern about recognizing the testimonies of sanctity of the faithful. This has been a latent movement in Brazil, especially since the 1990s, with some causes being opened. However, the first canonization in the country was done in 2002, in relation to Saint Paulina, an Italian who arrived in 1875 with her family, among other immigrants, and became a nun, with work dedicated to charity. This was followed by the canonization of Friar Galvão in 2007, Nhá Chica in 2013, a laywoman born in Minas Gerais, and Sister Dulce of the Poor in 2019.

Dozens of Brazilian causes are being processed at the Vatican. There are many Servants of God, venerable and blessed, whose processes follow the necessary path within the Dicastery. There are many other causes being analyzed by the dioceses, with the likelihood of being officially opened, demonstrating the importance of this matter to the Church and its commitment to instructing the norms throughout the centuries in the history of canonization.

However, it is interesting to understand a parallel movement, which comes from the people, in relation to figures who are considered saints and were not subject to a diocesan inquiry or the scrutiny of the Dicastery responsible for the canonizations. They are “the saints of the people”, present in many places, who have not undergone a formal process but have been “canonized” by the local faithful. For Vera Irene Jurkevics, these direct and immediate manifestations of the sacred, which dismiss or significantly reduce institutional mediation, “show that the divine continues to occupy spaces that man and the secularized world have not been able to fill, contrary to scientific premises that say that faith would be overcome by reason” (Jurkevics, 2004, p. 198).

In Brazil, we have many people of sanctity who have not been officially “canonized” by the Church but who are venerated by many of the faithful on pilgrimages, turning the place where they have been buried into a shrine. Raylenn Barros da Silva notes that “these figures walk side by side with the official saints; even though they have different profiles, they possess the same capacity for miraculous intermediation and devotion” (Silva, 2013, p. 181).

In the Basilica of Our Lady of Penha, in the neighborhood of São José, in the city of Recife, Pernambuco, there is a “people’s saint” called Rita Ramalho (1913-1948), whose remains are in the temple’s ossuary. She passed away when she was fifteen years old, and the accounts say that she offered her life in exchange for curing her mother, who had terminal cancer. After Rita Ramalho’s death, family, friends, and people who heard about the miracle reported that they began to invoke her intercession to receive graces. Every day, people visit her tomb in search of the miracle girl, sacralizing a figure who, for the Church, does not have official devotion rights (Galvão; Ratis, 2003, p. 3).

Other places in Brazil also stand out with the presence of these popular figures. In the semi-arid region of Paraíba, there is the Sanctuary of the Girl’s Cross. This is the cause of a child called Francisca, who, supposedly, was murdered by her parents. The devotion around her representations is already established, but there are still tensions with the local Church, because they classify the actions of the faithful as superstition.

The boundaries between devotion to the girl Francisca and the part of the clergy are not very well defined. However, it is interesting to note that the Church is responsible for the devotional aspect, with the administration of the sacraments to the devout, who “even having elected the saint without the Church’s approval, and carrying out their devotional practices, consider themselves Catholics, participating in the rituals of the official Church” (Silva, 2012, p. 38).

The causes mentioned illustrate a large number of figures on the fringes of the official worship as established by the Catholic Church. In many causes, in a pastoral attitude, the bishops welcome and guide the manifestations of devotion from the people. “The saints of the people” are often not submitted to a formal canonization cause since they do not have enough documentation or sources to prove their martyrdom, the heroic practice, or their virtues.

However, it should be noted that, even though it is not official, there is still a recognition of the reputation of sanctity among the people. This is the element which sustains the presence, continuity, and transmission of devotion. For some of the faithful, these figures are among the examples given by Pope Francis, whom he calls the “middle class of sanctity”. They are devout who, in Catholic communities, lived “in holiness”, and they are remembered by those who knew them and lived with them.

Each cause is a construction that must align with all the legislation from the Holy See. It requires time, competence, and responsibility from those who agree to work on a canonization process. The process is also a construction of the reputation of sanctity, going through all the necessary stages, the constituent acts of a journey that ends with the ceremony in which the Pope announces the individual a saint, with speeches elaborated based on the representations around the documents that were collected by the members of the team involved in the process.

In the construction of a beatification and canonization cause, the Church dialogues with different sciences and spheres of society. One example is the need to prove that a miracle happened thanks to the intercession of the candidate, a necessary element for them to be declared blessed or saint. If it is a healing cause, it is submitted to be analyzed by health professionals, both at the place of the occurrence as well as in Rome. The Dicastery’s Medical Commission analyzes the cause to elaborate an opinion, including the medical information. This is of utmost importance, so much so that on August 24th, 2016, the Pope approved the Regulations for Medical Consultation with precise guidelines for analyzing a potential miracle (Congregazione, 2018a, pp. 601-605).

The remains are usually exhumed and canonically recognized in preparation for the beatification. At this point, the preparation of the so-called relics begins, according to the instructions from the Holy See, with the preparation of the remains and the necessary interventions for hygiene and conservation, which must be done with scientific rigor and adequate techniques (Congregazione, 2018b, pp. 109-127). For Nazzareno Gabrielli, the recognition of the “body of a Servant of God (authorized by the Holy See) and by the diocesan bishop, carried out before the ecclesiastical Court, after the exhumation, constitutes an interven-

tion of relevant importance and requires the full attention of the postulator in the cause” (Gabielli, 2019, p. 12).

In the announcement phase, the beatification celebration happens where the individual lived, in the diocese territory where the cause was initiated, with a representative of the Pope. For the canonization, the event happens in Rome unless the Pope is already visiting the site. This ceremony is presided over solely by the Pontiff, who, with a definitive verdict, makes the announcement on the sanctity of the “blessed”, allowing them to be venerated by the members of the Church (Amato, 2012b, p. 25). The canonization is then attested by the Decretal Letter, signed by the Pope, and documentary proof of the event.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to ecclesiastical understanding, the saints are examples to be followed and imitated by the faithful. The lives and works of these individuals are studied in detail so that the Catholic Church can obtain confirmation of the reputation of sanctity elaborated by different devotees. During the beatification and canonization process, time and energy are invested in carrying out all the necessary steps to achieve their goal, which is the confirmation of the reputation of sanctity. It is a process that relies on the collaboration of ecclesiastics, professionals, and the faithful, some with specific duties and others through their devotion and donations, which, from an economic point of view, are used to pay for the costs of the cause.

Each cause is a construction that starts at the base, which is the reputation of sanctity, and continues until the peak, which is the canonization ceremony. It begins with the diocesan phase, when the candidate is declared to be a Servant of God, and goes on to the Roman phase, when they become venerable, blessed, and holy. Each stage has its own requirements to be met, which establish extensive professional work in the conduction of the cause.

In Brazil, a country with continental dimensions, the processes are complex due, among other reasons, to the political activities of some individuals with a reputation for holiness, friction with other devotional practices, the lack of conservation of documents in private, religious or public archives, and the organization of private devotions in specific groups. In the context of Latin America, indigenous issues, the cults created by the people or the relationship with other religious practices, such as the culture brought by the enslaved, offer specificities to investigations in dioceses and the Roman Curia, which need to be considered during the processing in the different dicasteries.

The history of canonizations shows that the Church has always taken great care in declaring someone a saint. For this reason, its representatives study the causes, collect documents, elaborate opinions, and make judgments based on the norms that must be met to achieve the objective. The ‘canonized’ saint is not something ready-made but the result of a construction that does not have a pre-determined deadline and which depends on the commitment of those involved. Some causes have lasted for centuries; others happened very quickly. The time factor is important, but we must consider that this process must be done based on the ecclesiastical organization and norms. In this way, the result of the construction of a saint is the success of the cause, that is, the inscription of the individual’s name in the album of saints.

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