

Ronald Finucane. *Contested Canonizations: The Last Medieval Saints, 1482–1523*.

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Among many faithful Roman Catholics, results constitute the litmus test for venerating a deceased person as a saint: did the individual lead a life of such outstanding holiness as to earn a place in heaven from which to hear prayers by the living and then to intercede on their behalf in current human affairs? For centuries, hagiographers duly recorded the extraordinary lives of these saints, along with the post mortem intercessions attributed to them. Secular scholars have not been entirely comfortable with this functional determination of who is a saint, and even the Church of Rome acknowledges differences within the community of saints, not only the sharp division between *santi* and *beati* but also the different categories of saints, ranging from those canonized in thoroughly documented, often extravagantly expensive ceremonies, to a multitude recognized as having had cults in existence since time immemorial.

Beginning in the 1980s historians ventured into the domain of hagiography, snatching saints' lives from credulous biographers and mining these rich sources to develop a new sociocultural history of popular religion, resulting especially in a significant expansion of our understanding and appreciation of women's spirituality. Secular scholarly purposes were best served by the widest possible definition of who was a saint. The works of Caroline Bynum (1982, 1987), Donald

Weinstein (1982) and Rudolph Bell (1982, 1985), Michael Goodich (1982, 1989, 1995), Elizabeth Petroff (1994), Richard Kieckhefer (1984), Barbara Newman (1987), Giulia Barone et al. (1994), Gabriella Zarri (1996), Alison Frazier (2005), and John Coakley (2006), for example, focused heavily on saints who were never formally canonized and even for those who were, the process of papal recognition mattered much less in this scholarly corpus than the fascinating details about holy people's daily lives and thoughts.

The book under review, published posthumously with finishing touches ably provided by Simon Ditchfield, is entirely a study of men, powerful men in high curial positions who had the authority to canonize new saints and thereby recognize officially their membership in the community of saints. This line of inquiry also has had its practitioners in recent scholarship, most notably Andre Vauchez (1981, 1997), Giovanni Papa (2001), and the popular Kenneth Woodward (1990). The intersection of these two fields of inquiry — on the one hand the holy people and on the other the largely unholy men who canonized them — is at the core of Finucane's study, providing both its moments of strength and of weakness.

According to popular estimates, there are about 10,000 Roman Catholic saints, a number that may be off by a few thousand but is as good as any. Among these, the authoritative Pierre DeLooz, *Sociologie et canonisations* (1969), 440–46 lists only 128 saints in the “first class,” consisting of those who received direct papal canonizations (all occurring before the explosion of saint-making under Pope John Paul II). Finucane chose to study the last five saints who made it to this first-class category in the period 1482–1523, before a hiatus of more than six decades when popes seem to have lost their zest for making new saints, given the onslaught of Protestant criticism about the theology of intercession. Excluded from Finucane's ultimate five is Casimir, virgin prince of Poland, for whom Pope Leo X issued a bull of canonization in 1521. Although DeLooz lists him as canonized by Adrian VI in 1522, the original documents went missing and only when Pope Clement VIII accepted copies retained at the Vatican Library did a formal ceremony take place in 1602. What happened to Casimir's case says much about the unpredictable if not downright arbitrary nature of the entire process.

Cases floundered for decades and even centuries as documents were lost, cardinals afraid of the plague abandoned their work each spring, unexpected doubts about the authenticity of claimed miracles emerged in witness testimony, the cash necessary to facilitate the process proved inadequate, and popes feared the assertion that canonizing a saint meant death within a year. This concern had some factual basis; over the preceding century only Popes Nicholas V, Pius II, and Innocent VIII survived more than a year beyond their last canonization, whereas Popes Eugenius IV, Calixtus III, Sixtus IV, Leo X, and Adrian VI did not.

Finucane wrestles mightily with the question of why X but not Y received papal canonization and concludes, persuasively but without much satisfaction, that it took “a favorable ecclesiastical-political climate, luck, perseverance, and sacrifice on the part of their supporters . . . Holiness, in and of itself, was never enough” (256). The five success stories ably recounted and analyzed in the core chapters of this book tell

us much about the human effort, some of it rather unseemly, involved in saint-making, but collectively the evidence does not, and probably cannot, offer a clear logical separation of the first-class saints from the unnumbered wannabes.

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