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Modelizing epistemologies: organizing Catholic sanctity from calendar-based martyrologies to today's mobile apps

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Abstract: The Catholic concept of “sanctity” can be thought of as a “cultural unit” (Eco) composed of a wide variety of “grounds” (Peirce) or distinctive features. The figures of individual saints, i.e., tokens of sanctity, are characterized by a particular set of grounds, organized and represented in texts of different genres. This paper presents a semiotic study of texts seeking to offer an encompassing view of “sanctity” by listing *all* the saints and supplementing their names with a short description of their lives emphasizing the grounds characterizing each of them. The analysis focuses on a seminal liturgical text, the *Martyrologium Romanum* (1584–2004), and the first official encyclopedia of saints, the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (1961–2013), as well as a sample of digital texts and media such as websites and mobile apps. While the first text offers a dogmatic perspective on sanctity and saintly figures and the second offers a historical and culturological one, websites succeed in reconciling the two paradigms into a single syncretic form of interactive fruition in which the more up-to-date encyclopedic model subsumes the traditional calendar one and, in the case of apps, adds a *glocal* dimension, enhancing situated cognition. The analysis shows that the introduction of the encyclopedic genre and subsequent proliferation of digital repertoires is connected to a shift in the Catholic “episteme” (Foucault) of sanctity and a growing tendency to consider saints as not (only) religious characters and objects of cult, but (also) as historical individuals and components of a culture and, consequently, as suitable objects of critical discourse.

Keywords: *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*; Catholic saints; encyclopedia; epistemology; *Martyrologium Romanum*

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1 Introduction: the epistemological organization of sanctity¹

Across the centuries, Christians have perfected systems for organizing knowledge about the names and lives of the saints in order to preserve their memory and regulate the cults dedicated to them. Local communities soon produced both their first hagiographic narratives (*vitae*, *legendae*, *passiones*, *historiae*, *miracula*) and non-narrative texts such as their own lists of saints to be worshipped (e.g., *Deposito Martyrum* and *Deposito Episcoporum*; a list of martyrs and Popes worshipped in Rome, respectively, compiled around 354) and calendars. In these texts they usually indicated the day the saint died – his or her *dies natalis*, when the saint was “born” to heavenly life – and, thus, should be remembered and celebrated. As all of these early worshipped saints were martyrs, the calendars were called martyrologies and the earliest example of this type of text is perhaps the *Syriac* (fourth century). “Universal” martyrologies were compiled including saints from all over the Christian communities, such as the *Hieronimianum* (sixth century), and by the eighth century (with Bede’s and Usuard’s volumes) they included brief notes regarding the lives and deaths of the saints, thereby initiating the tradition of so-called “historical martyrologies” (Quentin 1908).

The martyrological, calendar order, which as such is based on the liturgical principle, continued to constitute the main criterium of systemic organization for all the saints until the twentieth century, when a new approach and proper “episteme” (Foucault 1966) gained prominence.² In the years surrounding the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Vatican publishing house Editrice Nuova issued the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* (hereafter BS), the first official collection of saints deliberately organized as a modern encyclopedia. Despite its “official” character and Latin title, this seminal work was written in Italian in accordance with the principle of vernacularization promoted by the Council.³ The BS testifies to an

¹ This paper is part of the project NeMoSanctI (nemosancti.eu, led by Principal Investigator Jenny Ponzo), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No. 757314). The research presented herein is the result of close cooperation between the authors, especially in the introduction and the conclusion. However, for formal attribution, please consider Sections 1, 2, 4 and 5 as authored by Gabriele Marino, and Sections 3 and 6 by Jenny Ponzo. All the online resources were last accessed on 30 June 2019. The authors wish to thank Gabriele Vissio for his useful insights.

² Episteme indicates the way in which a certain culture divides the universe into segments (Eco 1975: 115).

³ On this topic, see Yelle (2018).

epistemological paradigm change in both the organization of knowledge in Catholic culture and the conception of saints. Indeed, martyrologies, as liturgical texts, present the saints as *objects of cult*, while the BS, albeit not negating this dimension, focuses instead on the value of saints as individuals, placed in history and culture, and hence *objects of discourse*.

An effective way to grasp the epistemological implications of such shifts in the systematization of the saints is to compare the BS and the most important modern martyrology of the Roman Catholic tradition, namely, the *Martyrologium Romanum* (Roman Martyrology; hereafter MR), the first official edition of which dates to 1584 and the latest to 2004, a programmatic work aimed at systematizing the intricate saintly subject matter of the epoch.⁴ Moreover, the comparison must be extended in light of a further development in the organization of collections of saintly profiles that has taken root, especially in the twenty-first century: a growing number of websites and other digital resources (such as mobile apps) presenting free online databases offering unprecedented avenues of consultation. Some of the most highly-developed and frequently consulted websites include *Catholic Saints* (catholicsaints.info, launched in 1999), addressed to the English-speaking community of believers, and *Santi e Beati* (santiebeati.it, launched in 2000), addressed to the Italian one; the mobile app *Follow JC Go!* (launched in 2018) is also part of our corpus of analysis.

Therefore, Christians – and in particular, since the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church – have accurately encoded the characterizing features of sanctity and organized them according to an axiology that has changed across both time and textual genres.⁵ Different ideas of what Sanctity is (or should be) have been conveyed by different types of texts characterized by different scopes and aims; in other words, the discourse of sanctity – its conception and associated knowledge – has been formulated in different ways, implying, and thus suggesting, different hagiographical epistemologies implemented via different hagiographic texts. In other words, although the linguistic label of sanctity has been maintained, its definitions and referents have changed over time and across textual genres so as to make it possible to handle and consistently integrate new elements into the system.

By exploring the different criteria underlying the construction of all-encompassing texts listing saints, this paper presents a case study positioned

⁴ We consider BS and MR as the most representative sample of today's organization of saintly lives in lists. For a socio-historical overview of the types of lists of saints in Christian and Catholic tradition across the centuries, see Delooz (1969: 125–140).

⁵ On the fact that genres mirror a certain worldview and include extratextual elements which keep them connected with extratextual practices, see Bahktin (1986) and Todorov (1976).

within a line of inquiry that has interested the semiotic discipline since its origins, namely, the organization of signs and knowledge. This gnoseological interest is evident, for instance, in Ferdinand de Saussure's reflections on the relational nature of signs as well as Peirce's efforts to propose detailed sub-types of signs. Here we trace the chronological development of the different genres; the first section is thus devoted to the analysis of the MR, the second to the BS, and the third to websites and apps while the conclusion develops a semiotic reflection on the epistemological elaboration of sanctity in the texts under consideration.

2 *Martyrologium Romanum*: the liturgical canon of the saints

The MR is an official liturgical book containing the eulogies (*elogia*, in Latin) – short accounts of the saints – arranged in calendar order.⁶ It was first issued in the second half of the 1580s as a consequence of the Roman centralization promoted by the Council of Trent (in opposition to the centrifugal forces of the Reformist movements) and drafted on the basis of pre-existing martyrologies (mainly, Usuard's and *Hieronimianum*); it was compiled by historian Cesare Baronio (1538–1607) with the aim of systematizing the stratified and problematic field of sanctity and thereby establishing a canon by expunging the dubious or fictional figures of saints handed down in popular tradition. The MR was first published as a work-in-progress in 1583, while the first officially papal approved edition dates to 1584 (considered the *Editio Princeps*; VV. AA. 2005 [1584]); immediately recognized as a political work as important as it was controversial, throughout modernity the text underwent an infinite series of revisions that actually consisted of minor updates (as they did not modify its traditional structure or the main corpus of entries) through the addition of some 130 new entries (Godding 2005: V) up to 1956. Coinciding with the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), a new revised edition was set in motion and eventually published in 2001 (*Editio Typica*), with a new amended version in 2004 (*Editio Typica Altera*, the only one currently available on the market; VV. AA. 2004a) and, in the same year, the first officially approved Italian translation (VV. AA. 2004b). The new MR programmatically reflects the more inclusive, decentralizing principles promoted by the Church of the time.

⁶ For a richer introduction to the *Martyrologium Romanum* from the standpoint of semiotics, see Marino (2019).

The MR lists all the saints that Catholic believers are officially allowed to worship, including both blessed and canonized saints,⁷ arranged according to their *dies natalis* in calendar order. Each day displays a series of saints, presenting first the most important ones, the canonized saints venerated by the whole Church, in a bigger font; nonetheless, local communities are allowed to read about and pray to the saints in a different order, according to their own specific interests. The entries are short, standardized paragraphs briefly summarizing key features and facts about the lives and deaths of the saints (they are not biographies, which differentiates them from hagiographies *stricto sensu*); they do not mention the saints' patronage and intentionally lack any detailed iconographic references as well as of any chronological indications. However, the saints are always geographically situated, resulting in a kind of mental map of saintly places. These textual features build meta-historical figures of saints set on a neutral, a-temporal plan. This particular meaning effect is reinforced by the pragmatics of the text; namely, the ways in which it is actually used: the MR is read as part of the Liturgy of Hours and, in particular, during Morning Prayer (or during any other Minor Hour). The peculiarity in this case is that it is not the saints listed for that day whose passages are read but rather those for the next day, in a kind of proleptical leap. Although they are certainly historical figures in any respect, the saints are thus set in a temporal dimension that obliterates the past and extends into the imminent future of an eternal, continuous present.

This traditional system was not altered by the 2001 revision, which mainly intervened – albeit massively – on the texts of the individual entries, introducing many new ones (more than 6,500 entries and approximately 9,900 saints) as well as key paratextual materials. Saints without sufficient reliable historical proof of existence were expunged and the accounts of dubious saints were rewritten with caution; a classic example of the former type is St. Wilgefortis (20 July), a legendary figure, while a classic example of the latter is St. Rosalia (traditionally worshipped on 15 July 15, now included in the MR for 4 September), whose miracle – stopping the plague in Palermo, Sicily in 1624 – was omitted from the new version of the text. The most prominent newly added saints represent secular types (approx. 300; Trapani 2006) and types belonging to developing countries, according to both the more inclusive ideologies of the contemporary Church and the needs of new, “de-

7 The Blessed are those who have been beatified, which requires one attested miracle and allows the person to be venerated by his or her local church. Canonization requires two attested miracles and allows veneration of the saint by the Universal Church. The MR does not include Servants of God (namely, those whose sanctification trial has just started in the original diocese) or Venerables (the Servants of God whose sanctification trials have been concluded with a positive verdict the local diocese, thus receiving this title from the Pope, and who are ready to be judged by the central Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome).

centered” Christian communities across the globe. The newly-added *Praenotanda* (‘Premises’) of the new MR present a theological and liturgical interpretation of the text, map the network of contemporary intertextual relations within which it is entangled (mainly, the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and Apostolic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and the Roman Missal), and provide practical instructions as to when and how to use the book. Other *apparata*, especially detailed indexes of the saints, have been prepared but are still unpublished.⁸ The latest edition of the MR is the 2004 Italian one; therefore, the text does not include the many saints that the Roman Church ratified in the following years.

3 *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*: the encyclopedia of saints

The BS was published between 1961 and 1970 in 13 volumes, including an index volume. Three Appendices were issued in 1987, 2000, and 2013. Further additions, represented for instance by two volumes devoted to the saints of the Oriental Church (1998, 1999) and one to the Saints of the Reformation (2010), indicate a growing spirit of ecumenism and inclusiveness. Our attention, however, is focused exclusively on the volumes devoted to Roman Catholicism. Each of the 13 volumes opens with the same introduction (*Presentazione*), warnings (*Avvertenze*) and norms for consultation (*Norme per la consultazione*), while in the Appendices these texts change.

The first sentence of the introduction, authored by Cardinal Pietro Ciriaci (1961), reads: “An Encyclopedia of the Saints could not flourish in a worthier and happier see than Rome, center of the Catholic Church, ‘mother of the Saints’.” This opening passage indicates two of the pivotal features of the BS: 1) it is an encyclopedia of saints, and 2) it was created in Rome. Ciriaci argues that Rome is the only possible birthplace for the BS because it is the “image of the heavenly Jerusalem” where the cult of saints receives its “supreme sanction” and where the postulations and Congregation for the Causes of Saints are located. Rome, moreover, also hosts the richest libraries specialized in ecclesiastic history and therefore congregates the most prominent scholars in Christian history, archaeology, hagiography, and liturgy. This spatial centralization mirrors one of the key criteria of the BS, namely, respect for both the Church’s official regulation of sainthood

⁸ Prof. Mons. Maurizio Barba, distinguished scholar of the MR (private communication; 17 January 2019, Vatican City).

and for Catholic orthodoxy. This is underlined several times in the BS's paratext and the *Avvertenze* in particular through an explicit list of the values pursued by the authors, including precision of information, bibliographic richness, clarity of expression, and "most of all, the most absolute respect for the Catholic orthodoxy and fidelity to the perennial teaching of the Church."

The genre of the encyclopedia as a "hypothetical compendium of *all* of the knowledge available to a given culture" (Eco 2014: 49) organized in alphabetical order is one of the main epistemological revolutions of the modern age. It is almost a tautology to say that the French *Encyclopédie* (1751) is one of the masterpieces of Enlightenment thought, which challenged religious tradition by basing knowledge on reason rather than faith, exploring topics that had been prohibited up to that moment and pushing reasoning to draw its own conclusions even though they clashed with official and religious knowledge. From the perspective of this episteme, adopting an alphabetic order appeared to be a neutral principle of classification that denied any hierarchy among the topics of human knowledge. What is perhaps less known is that the first attempt to create an alphabetically ordered encyclopedia written in a modern language was pioneered not by an exponent of the anti-clericalist French revolutionary elite, but most likely by Vincenzo M. Coronelli, a venetian cartographer and general of the Friar Minors (La Colla 1932). Coronelli began to publish the *Biblioteca universale sacro-profana*, the fruit of thirty years of labor, in 1701. However, due to the extent of the work, he was only able to publish 7 volumes out of 45. As this example shows, even though the encyclopedia is generally represented as the product of a current of thought that challenged Catholic tradition, Church exponents themselves, or at least a fringe element of them, had no prejudices against this new organization of human knowledge, nor did they see its non-hierarchic structure as a menace to Catholic tradition. Indeed, among the many encyclopedias that soon appeared following Coronelli's, there were a number of Catholic encyclopedias in different national languages. For instance, the publishing house Herder in Germany issued the first edition of *Konversations-Lexikon* (5 volumes) between 1853 and 1857, while the Vatican published the *Enciclopedia Cattolica* in Italian between 1948 and 1954 (12 volumes). The latter is mentioned as a reference source for the compilation of the BS. The latter, however, represents a particular case in that it belongs to the subgenre of biographical encyclopedia. The peculiarity of this subgenre lies in the fact that the objects of its definitions are actually "subjects" (as defined by Greimas and Courtés 1979) and consequently the entries are narrative in character.

The BS should therefore be read as the product of a process of opening up to the modern organization of knowledge, a process that entails not only overcoming the liturgical calendar order as the sole criterion for organizing saintly lives, but two other key factors as well. The first is an evolution in hagiographic knowledge.

Indeed, in the 19th century this field of knowledge began to endorse the historical-critical method for the study of the sources, thanks especially to the work of the Bollandists.⁹ This scientific status of hagiography is clearly formulated in the introduction to the BS (1961), where hagiography is described as a “true auxiliary historical science.” The adoption of the historical-critical method also had an impact on the procedures of canonization, the most visible sign of which is probably the creation of the Historical Section inside the Congregation charged with managing trials for saints. In the judicial praxis of the trials, this methodological shift entailed a different way of evaluating the life of future blessed and saints, focusing not on single heroic acts but on their whole lives, that is, their stories. This shift led to a less static conception of saints, representing them not as fixed in their perfection, as before, but rather possessed of life stories which are open to changes, moments of evolution and involution as well as imperfections (Ponzio and Rai 2019). This tendency is mirrored in the BS, as it contains short biographies aimed at portraying “each personality in its wholeness” (Introduction).

The second factor is a change in the conception of the accessibility of knowledge. The BS presupposes a vast readership of “cultivated people” and the “faithful in general” (Introduction): its declared goal is to constitute an updated and complete repository that will make the scientific results of hagiographic work widely accessible. The BS’s style is coherent with the harmonization of science and faith and with the wide scope of this ideal readership. Its declared characteristics are a “plain but always and everywhere dignified exposition,” “a serene rigor in the critical judgment, imposed by the most modern and valid exigencies of the historical discipline together with the supernatural breath of faith, which never fears, but always benefits from the prudent scientific impartiality illuminated by charity” (Introduction).

3.1 Criteria and categories

According to Eco’s reconstruction of the genesis of the modern encyclopedic genre during the Enlightenment, an encyclopedia must have many cross-references and a “critical and scientific” character:

it refuses to censor any belief, even those considered erroneous, but it exposes them for what they are (see, for instance, the entry on the unicorn, which appears to describe the animal according to tradition, but at the same time underscores its legendary nature). Following the model of the ancient encyclopedia, it aspires to give an account of the entirety of human knowledge, even the “mechanical” knowledge associated with arts and crafts. (Eco 2014: 47)

⁹ See Criscuolo et al. (2014: 199). For a discussion of the Society of Bollandists (a Jesuit research institute on hagiography), see Delehay (1920).

The BS respects all of these criteria. This fact is evident, firstly, in the goal of completeness that induces the author to include “not only minor, but [also] minimal characters” (*Avvertenze* 1961), a trait which distinguishes the BS from any other similar collection. This all-encompassing nature also entails the inclusion of folkloristic and invented characters, as well as selected pictures and notes on iconography, as the Introduction explicitly claims:

We believe ... the reliability of the work is not compromised by the introduction ... of some “legends” formed across the centuries around the memory of many Saints, both because many of them still survive today in typical manifestations of the folklore or in popular poetry and because, in their quality of peculiar production of a culture and custom, they inspired a number of iconographic representations. Hence, the need was felt to complete the strictly hagiographic “entry” with short notes concerning the iconography and popular traditions, very useful to portray ... the vitality, often unsuspected ... of countless figures. Finally, the richness of the illustrations ... should not be intended as a deceiving frill ..., but as a complementary document aiming at reproducing the earthly features of a Saint or the image of his relics, or the most vivid testimonies of the diffusion of his cult ... (BS: Introduction)

As a consequence, the BS includes all the figures of the Old and New Testament who are the object of a cult, including the angels, all the saints and blessed officially recognized by the Catholic Church, all the candidates for sainthood whose canonization trials are currently ongoing, and all the real or fictional figures who enjoy or enjoyed a cult, even if such worship ceased upon intervention by the Ecclesiastic authorities or because of forgetfulness on the part of the faithful (*Avvertenze* 1961). According to the latter criterium, the BS includes entries devoted to saints who were excluded from the MR because of their non-historical character. There are, for instance, lengthy entries devoted to Saint Rosalia of Palermo and Saint Wilgefortis, entries which of course specify their folkloristic character and non-compliance with the official parameters of sainthood but nevertheless attest to and document their cultural existence.

The “Norms for consultation” specify that most of the biographical entries are listed according to the surname of the characters, followed by first name. This classification according to “secular” names is coherent with the critical episteme of the encyclopedic genre: saints are listed as historical individuals rather than religious characters. In contrast Saints, Popes, Rulers, and the Religious are listed according to their first name. Moreover, the BS includes some collective entries, such as Angels and Apostles. One of these categories mirrors the liturgical calendar (the BS includes collective entries devoted to the martyrs venerated each month, e.g., “Martyrs of September”) while another follows a geographical principle (e.g., “Martyrs of England”). A system of cross-referencing renders the figures easily available (e.g., referencing the surname of characters listed by first name). A further categorization is offered by the index volume, which provides a general

onomastic index (rich in cross-references), an emerological index, an index of patronages, and the index of the authors. The emerological index lists the figures venerated each day in both the universal and local calendars; it also includes figures mentioned only in local calendars (indicated with abbreviations). The index of patronages contains entries belonging to different categories: toponomastics (e.g., names of cities, nations, continents), professional and artistic categories (e.g., butchers, professors), things, animals, and diseases, with the entry indicating the respective patrons and their feasts.

3.2 The appendices

The Appendices display only minor changes in terms of the organization of the entries, the main one being that religious figures are also listed according to their surname and secular first name. This system indicates a further significant shift towards the consideration of saints as historical rather than “religious” characters. What is particularly significant in the Appendices is that their Presentations offer interpretative keys and well-defined pathways for reading: while the 1961 introduction presented the BS as a work belonging to the modern genre of encyclopedia and based on the “scientific” principle of the historical-critical method, the Presentations of the Appendices orient contemporary readers by pointing to the most important models of sanctity that can serve as examples and models for today.¹⁰

The Presentation of the first appendix (1987, authored by cardinal Pietro Palazzini, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes for Saints), for instance, evokes the notion of universal sanctity promoted by the Second Vatican Council and, also referring to the teachings of John Paul II, stresses the topicality of martyrdom and lay models of sanctity. The second appendix (2000, authored by Giovanni D’Alessandro, literary director of the publishing house, and the religious scholar Giovanni Spinelli) intends to complete the outline of sanctity in the “second millennium of the Christian era” and provide “an overview of the human events in the twentieth century,” represented for example by the stories of the Chinese, Armenian, Mexican, Spanish, and Peruvian martyrs as well as the martyrs of totalitarian regimes. It also stresses the importance of sanctity “in normal times,” represented by the founders of religious institutions (e.g., Mother Therese of Calcutta), prominent religious figures (e.g., Paul VI and several cardinals) and lay people who distinguished themselves in the fields of politics (Alcide De Gasperi), culture (Giuseppe Larrati), science (Enrico Medi), and art (Antonio Gaudì). D’Alessandro and Spinelli (2000) also highlight the growing centrality of figures

¹⁰ This is clearly stated in the presentation of the first Appendix (1987).

representing lay Catholic movements such as the Focolare, married couples of saints and young saints. They also draw the reader's attention to some particularly important entries such as Thérèse of Lisieux and Edith Stein. The centrality of Rome evoked in the introduction to the first volume ends up being challenged by the procedural reform that took place under the pontificate of John Paul II: the authors claim that, due to the fact that the first phase of the trial is now managed by the dioceses, it has become more difficult to collect information concerning new candidates to sainthood, and this required them to extend the list of contributors to the BS to the five continents. The presentation of the third appendix (D'Alessandro 2013) reiterates the same arguments, and supplements the list of particularly topical saints with the addition of martyrs of Asia (Laos), South America, and South Africa, as well as martyrs of the mafia (Luigi Puglisi, Rosario Livantino) and satanism (Sister Maria Laura Mainetti), as well as women who defended their purity, ill people who devoted their illness to God, and popes.

The paratext of the Appendices, moreover, delineates a more precise readership and several specific ways the text ought to be employed. D'Alessandro and Spinelli (2000), for instance, claim that the BS update constituted by the second appendix is a useful tool for those working in canonization trials, scholars studying hagiography, the laity, and the clergy. Moreover, they hypothesize a new kind of fruition that was not specified in the introduction (1961–2013), specifically arguing that, even though the BS is an encyclopedia, it also serves as domestic and daily reading. As a consequence, while in the beginning the BS was mainly aimed at improving the knowledge of its readership in accordance with a Catholic worldview, the paratext of the Appendices also stress the goal of edifying the readership. The presentations orient readers by indicating reading pathways reflecting a well-defined axiology, thus reintroducing a sort of hierarchical principle among the entries. In other words, the Presentations convey a “paradigm” defining the relationship between the different saints/tokens, while the encyclopedic text offers a syntagmatic chain of these tokens based mostly on the “neutral” alphabetic principle by surname.

4 Websites: hypertextual sanctity

Just before concluding his introductory comments on a series of studies regarding the new post-Conciliar edition of the MR (2001), liturgist Manlio Sodi asked

whether and how the web might represent the ideal “space for a virtual Martyrology:”¹¹

From day to day, web surfers grow disproportionately. Among the countless websites, those dedicated to the saints are not the least popular, indeed! The news of the obstruction of Saint Anthony’s website by the cyberbelievers asking for forgiveness via e-mail is well known! The educator does have to deal with issues of these kinds. While, on the one hand, there is a commitment to creating suitable websites that respect the content offered, on the other, there are educational perspectives that aim to distinguish between a virtual experience and a real one as it is implemented in a unique way in the Eucharist only! Therefore, since we can affirm that the web today offers what martyrologies have been offering for centuries, the question arises: what are the lessons that the educator can draw from the web and what information can the educator offer in turn with the aim of making the web educational according to a mindset that would reflect the original motive that gave rise to the martyrologies in the first place? (Sodi 2006: 12–13, translation mine)?

Sodi reflects on the theological, liturgical, eucological and doxological consequences of the online rendition of martyrologies. He suggests that *in praesentia* experiences actually only serve to further real, efficacious devotional purposes, whereas digital ones are useful mainly for educational purposes; as we will see, the Catholic Church has endorsed a quite different position in recent times (e.g., the case of *Click to Pray*; see below, par. 5). Fifteen years after Sodi’s comments, it is possible to group the models of knowledge implied and proposed by digital texts based on or inspired by the martyrologies and encyclopedias of the saints into a number of types.

4.1 Transcripts

Online renditions of the MR seem to employ the most basic features of hypertextuality. On the official Vatican website (vatican.va),¹² there are different martyrologies (including an abridged version of the 2004 Italian version of the MR), each contained in a single page, with very limited interactive options (e.g., in the MR users can click on a single month to access the saints associated with that month). Some saints are featured with a picture, but neither the source of nor criteria for such a visual supplement is made explicit. On the website *Liturgia Latina* (liturgialatina.org, which has been administered by a Catholic, David

¹¹ It should be noted that Sodi was writing at the very beginning of the social media era; MySpace was created in 2003, YouTube in 2005 and Facebook became accessible to users outside the US that same year.

¹² vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/cult-martyrum/martiri/index.html.

Forster from Oxfordshire, England, since 2000),¹³ it is possible to access the Latin text of the 1913 edition (“transcribed ... for the use of Roman Catholic traditionalists and liturgical scholars”) via a hypertextual “Index Generalis.” The English translation (drawn from a 1916 edition) available on the website of the *Boston Catholic Journal* (boston-catholic-journal.com)¹⁴ adheres to the same “minimalist” logic, with the addition of an option to hypertextually access a single day of the given month and read “Today’s Martyrology” directly from the homepage. The same is true of to the 2004 Italian text of the MR transcribed on the website of the *San Giovanni Apostolo* parish in Marotta, in the province of Pesaro and Urbino (sangiovanniapostolo.it).¹⁵ The webpage “Vies Des Saints” on the website *Le Site Des Vrais Chrétiens Orthodoxes (Vco) Francophones* (orthodoxievco.net)¹⁶ presents a number of entries about the saints arranged according to month and in alphabetical order, with the text – in French – mainly drawn from *Les Petits Bollandistes* (1865), a 17-volume collection of lives of the saints compiled by Paul Guerin; the entries in this case are not hypertextual *stricto sensu*, since they are accessible in a PDF format only. In the same way, the online renditions of the Bollandists’ *Acta Sanctorum* simply offer the PDF version of the anastatic prints of the volumes, chronologically listed and available for free download.¹⁷

4.2 Almanac-like

Other online texts emphasize the calendar structure of the MR by essentially presenting users with the saints for that same day, as in a holy daily almanac. It is worth noting that, although such a criterium does valorize the calendar nature of the book, it casts the pragmatics of the martyrological text into the background; the martyrological text instead has the peculiarity of being employed every day of the year, in the early morning (during the Morning Prayer), by proleptically reading the saints for *the next day*. Websites such as *Chiesa Cattolica Italiana* (chiesacattolica.it, the official website of CEI, the Episcopal Conference of Italy)¹⁸ and *Vatican News* (vaticannews.va)¹⁹ present a section dedicated to the “Santo del giorno” (Saint of the day), the entry for which is accessible for the whole day. However, while the

¹³ liturgicalatina.org/martyrologium/35.htm.

¹⁴ boston-catholic-journal.com/roman-martyrology-complete-in-english-for-daily-reflection.htm.

¹⁵ sangiovanniapostolo.it/il-martirologio-romano.

¹⁶ orthodoxievco.net/ecrits/vies/synaxair/indexx.htm.

¹⁷ documentacatholicaomnia.eu/25_90_1643-1925-Acta_Sanctorum.html.

¹⁸ chiesacattolica.it/santo-del-giorno.

¹⁹ vaticannews.va/it/santo-del-giorno.html and vaticannews.va/en/saints.html.

former displays the eulogy of the main saint (namely, the one listed first) in the MR, the latter does not clarify the source for the text of the saints included (most of the saints are only named, with no accompanying description). The fully dedicated website *Santo del giorno* (santodelgiorno.it) presents the saints for the day and a rich contextualization consisting in the saints for the day before and the next day, for the whole month, other related saints, etc. Each saint is equipped with a text (basically their story, but prayers devoted to them are also included) and pictures, although none of the sources for these images are specified. A general bibliography for the website is listed, but the MR and BS are not included.²⁰ After logging in, users can post a message onto each saint's page. It should be noted that the Facebook page (fb.com/santodelgiorno.it) associated with this site has +430k likes (as of 30 June 2019).²¹

4.3 Syncretic models

The websites that seem to make the most of their specific nature as online hypertexts are the ones that fully exploit the articulation and combinability that a well-designed database can grant a set of content, in this case individual saints. In these kinds of websites, each saint is made accessible from time to time and according to different perspectives and needs, in relation to other ones. Indeed, since each saint is characterized by a different set of features (e.g., he or she was born in a given era, is worshipped on a given date, by a given community, etc.), the user is able to access each figure by employing different queries and viewing different sections. This is exactly the criterion according to which hypertextual and online encyclopedias (e.g., “Wikipedia” and other Wiki-resources)²² arrange their lexemes (elements which have to be cross-referenced and crosslinked). A precursor for this organizational principle is represented by the system of indexes and categories provided by publications in print form (as seen with both the MR and the BS; see above, pars. 2 and 3). The way in which each saint can be accessed may help

20 The lack of metadata or, simpler, references for the text employed is a recurring feature of most materials available online (in other words: Internet is the home of the *bricoleurs*) and websites of this kind are no exception; e.g., see also franciscanmedia.org/sod-calendar (on Twitter: twitter.com/saintoftheday, +32k followers), mycatholic.life/saints/saints-of-the-liturgical-year, or divvol.org/santoral/index.php.

21 Another social media page of some relevance within this subgenre, addressing an international audience, is fb.com/pg/SaintOfTheDay (+300k likes).

22 E.g., see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Catholic_saints or it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categoria:Santi_per_nome and dedicated websites such as it.cathopedia.org/wiki/Lista_dei_Santi or santopedia.com.

to reveal the grounds on which sanctity as a historically determined discourse is based or, in other words, what the various pertinences of sanctity might be.

Between 1999 and c. 2008, an early version of the website now known as *CatholicSaints.Info – Notes about your extended family in heaven* (catholicsaints.info) was published as part of the *Catholic Forum* (catholic-forum.com),²³ under the title *Saint Joseph Software* (now offline and accessible via *WebArchive* only). This pioneering online platform included “2,575 topics/5,513 saints, blesseds and venerables” as of September 2008, and offered an incredibly rich array of resources: a “Today on the Calendar of Saints” section, a “Calendar of Saints,” a “Time Line” (a chronology by century), “Image Galleries” and a “Dictionary” (a transcript of the 12,958 entry-*New Catholic Dictionary* originally published in 1910). The entries for the saints were accessible alphabetically (“list by NAME”) and, whereas the headings suggested a series of main categories for navigating the website (“Name Day Patrons, Martyr Groups, Countries, Animal-related, Disease-related, Education-related, Healing-related, Husbandry-related, Occupations, Place-related, United States-related”), the complete list actually featured +3,900 “Topics,”²⁴ encompassing almost everything might have granted the given saint relatability of some kind for any possible believer. The categories include peculiar Content-Forms to clusterize saintly subject matter (such as “dancers” and saints “against mice”), along with more traditional ones (such as saints from “Alsace, France”). This is an excellent example of hagiographic folk taxonomies and folksonomies in particular.²⁵ The effort put into such a project was an encyclopedic work of early Internet

23 web.archive.org/web/20000816043811/http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/indexsnt.htm.

24 web.archive.org/web/20080913124209/http://saints.sqpn.com/patron00.htm.

25 Folk taxonomies are vernacular naming systems, in contrast to scientific ones; the notion was developed in the fields of cognitive anthropology and ethnoscience, the study and reconstruction of culture-specific knowledge systems (namely, the way in which communities organize their own categorizations). See Conklin (1962) for one of the first uses of this notion. Folksonomy is folk taxonomy at the time of digital platforms:

the user-created bottom-up categorical structure development with an emergent thesaurus... [It] is the result of personal free tagging of information and objects (anything with a URL) for one's own retrieval. The tagging is done in a social environment (usually shared and open to others). Folksonomy is created from the act of tagging by the person consuming the information. The value in this external tagging is derived from people using their own vocabulary and adding explicit meaning, which may come from inferred understanding of the information/object. People are not so much categorizing, as providing a means to connect items (placing hooks) to provide their meaning in their own understanding. (Vander Wal 2004).

“Catholic nerdness”²⁶ (which, in contrast to many sites, is to be praised for having acknowledge many of its sources, a list not including either the MR or the BS); as a matter of fact the creator, Terry Jones, was an IT professional (he claims he was the “one-man IT department” at the company where he worked) as well as an amateur hagiographer. The platform moved to a dedicated URL (saints.sqpn.com) around 2008 and, again, around 2015 (catholicsaints.info); today’s version of the platform, including “5,247 topics/15,303 saints, blessed, venerables and feasts” involves more rationalized grids. There are still the “Today’s Calendar” (with the saints for the day), “Alphabetical” and “Calendar” sections, but the “Topics” have been broken down into the macro-subcategories “Emblems of the Faith” (focusing on the saints’ symbols), “Patronage Topics” (which mainly include geographical coordinates, such as “Udine, Italy,” categories of people, such as “used clothes dealers,” abstract issues such as “unfaithfulness, against”) and “Saints who were ...” (focusing on the saints’ social statuses, roles, and jobs). By 2015, a comprehensive version of the website in the form of mobile app had been launched as well, called *Laudate* (‘Pray,’ in Latin); also available for iOS/iTunes, the Android version of the app has been downloaded one million times.

The website *Catholic Online* (catholic.org) presents a “Saints – A to Z” webpage²⁷ launched in 1997 and displaying some preferred accessibility options: by alphabetical order, month, and patronage. Its complete list of saint categories includes: “Popular Saints, Saints by Alphabet, Female Saints, Saint Feast Days by Month, Patron Saints by Alphabet, American Saints, African/Black Saints, Irish Saints, Japanese Saints, Martyr Saints, Saint of the Day, Saint Videos, Saints Fun Facts, Saints FAQs, Latest Saint News & Updates, All Saints’ Day, All Souls’ Day, Day of the Dead, Stigmata, California Missions, Church Doctors, [and] Angels.” The website is full of resources (including an e-commerce section) and it offers some exclusive hagiological features, including the possibility to subscribe to the dedicated mailing list “Saint of the Day by E-Mail” in order to “Learn about the lives of the saints and other saint resources, including a calendar, over 5,000 saint biographies, our most popular saints, and a list of patron saints. 7 days/week.” For many saints (the “Popular” ones, although the criteria for this classification are unclear; perhaps it reflects the number of unique visitors to the webpage itself), users can not only read the entries (there are no references provided for either the associated texts or the pictures displayed) but also watch an embedded YouTube video with a voice reading the same text over a slideshow (background music included).

The dedicated website *Santi, beati e testimoni – Enciclopedia dei santi* (santie-beati.it), launched in 2000 and coordinated by Domenico Agasso (chief editor of

²⁶ web.archive.org/web/20080724052948/http://saints.sqpn.com/personal.htm.

²⁷ catholic.org/saints.

Famiglia Cristiana, lit. ‘Christian Family,’ the leading Christian weekly magazine in Italy for the period 1968–1971), is the richest and most complete resource to date for the Italian context. The home page presents a variety of content elements and resources, including the “saint of the day” (and dedicated mailing list thereof), while the main top and bottom menus include “Onomastico” (saints, alphabetically), “Emerologico” (in calendar order), “Patronati” (according to their patronage), “Diz.Nomi” (a dictionary of Christian names), “Ricerca” (search by saint’s name), “Ultimi” (latest additions), “Più visitati” (the most frequently visited). The texts of the entries have been compiled or authored by a team of 20 amateur hagiographers²⁸ who relied upon entries from the BS and a series of other reference books (including the MR).²⁹ Even at their most minimal the entries include at least the text from the MR (a 2007 Italian re-print),³⁰ but many of them feature a more detailed story as well.³¹ The website offers a kind of freemium formula: the content of the site is freely accessible, but it is possible to financially support the project by purchasing the complete set of 27,500 pictures used in the website in a CD or DVD version.³²

5 Apps: augmented sanctity

By the second half of October 2018, online newspapers and magazines were monopolized for a few days by a peculiar news item which in most cases sounded like: “The Catholic Church launches its own *Pokémon Go* for the Saints.” *Pokémon Go* is an augmented reality mobile game released in July 2016 as a part of the Pokémon (also known as Pocket Monsters) franchise that started in 1995 as a videogame for Nintendo’s Game Boy console and soon grew to include cartoons, comics, toys, and merchandise of every kind. As a mobile game, *Go* uses GPS technology (Global Positioning System; a satellite-based radionavigation system that provides geo-location and time information) to locate, capture, battle, and train virtual renditions of the creatures that appear as if they are sharing the player’s real-world location. *Go* went viral and was a huge success, with 147 million monthly users as of May 2018, \$3 billion in revenue as of December 2018, and 1 billion downloads as of February 2019. As a matter of fact, *Follow JC Go!* (fundacionpane.org/followjcg),³³ produced by

²⁸ santiebeati.it/autori.html.

²⁹ santiebeati.it/Bibliografia.

³⁰ This is the case with “new saints” such as the ones from the Chinese community (see e.g. “Santi Raimondo Li Quanzhen e Pietro Li Quanhui Martiri”, santiebeati.it/dettaglio/60040).

³¹ This is the case, for instance, with saints whose holiness has been diminished in order to restore a historical reliability of some kind; e.g., Saint Rosalia (santiebeati.it/dettaglio/69050).

³² santiebeati.it/sostieni.html.

³³ It has never been officially stated but it is likely that “JC” would stand for “Jesus Christ.”

Fundación Ramón Pané (a religious organization founded in 1994 and now based in Miami, US) on the occasion of the 2019 World Youth Day in Panama and approved by Pope Francis, closely follows the format — and graphics — of its source of inspiration; it is a freemium app (namely, it can be downloaded free but there are also some paid features called “Denarios” which can be used for charity purposes). The logic is that of the gamification (the application of game principles in non-game contexts) of religion; as reported by “Time”:

Follow JC Go helps users discover biblical figures and icons — literally, saints, represented in stylized cartoon form — as they wander around cities. They’ll interact with the virtual holy characters and add them to an ‘evangelization team,’ as long as they answer certain questions right that refer to biblical history ... Players can win points and compete against friends, gather ‘e-teams’ of believers and even find nearby churches and “make the journey more fun” by playing. (Bruner 2018)

Follow JC Go! presents a model of knowledge which is prominently embodied (Varela et al. 1991), enactive (Bruner 1966), and ecological (in the sense suggested by Gibson 1979): the user/believer learns about the saints by dynamically interacting with the environment. In this sense, it may be understood as an actualization of the mental map provided by the precise geographical coordinates included in the MR. This body of holy knowledge can be seen as glocal: it is shared and global, as it appeals to the whole of the Catholic Church worldwide, and, at the same time, it is nothing but the union of the very local cults to be discovered and collected. With more than 100k downloads of its Android version (iOS/iTunes does not display such information), this “Catholic Pokémon Go” may have been a kind of pre-test for a wider-scope project likewise conceived with the aim of meeting youth halfway, both physically and virtually: the website and mobile app *Click to Pray*.³⁴

³⁴ In January 2018, the multilingual website *Click to Pray* (clicktopray.org) had already been launched, with the aim of allowing believers to (1) “Pray with the Pope” (according to his “intentions for the challenges of humanity and mission of the church”), (2) “Pray Every Day” (in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night), and (3) “Pray with the Network” (by posting onto the wall of this forum-like section). It is interesting to underline the different degrees of agency allowed. In each and every section, the believer enacts his or her own act of prayer by clicking on the button “Click to Pray” and, obviously, each prayer can be shared on the user’s Twitter and Facebook accounts. In the first section, the believer is frequently subjected to a logic of interactivity and choice (e.g. for May 2019 the user has to choose between “If you live in Africa [read this]” vs. “If you live outside of Africa [read this]”) which is reminiscent of classic gamebooks popularized in the late 1970s (e.g., the *Endless Quest* series, 1982–1987). In the third section, users can actually pray twice or, at least, in two different ways: by (1) posting their own prayer onto the wall and by (2) supporting someone else’s prayer (in this case as well, by clicking on the “Click to Pray” button, which works as a kind of “like” button enabling visitors to see how many believers have prayed the very same prayer). In January 2019, a dedicated mobile app for both iOS and Android was launched as well, just a few days before the start of the 2019 World Youth Day.

6 Conclusion: different genres for different hagiographic epistemes

In Saussurean terms, the texts selecting and organizing saints can be said to work as syntagmatic chains of signs. Each sign is represented by a saint, reduced to a linguistic unit analogous to a dictionary entry, composed of a lemma and a definition;³⁵ the latter has the particular feature of being a narrative text highlighting the main grounds according to which the life of the saint constitutes an example of sanctity. The syntagmatic chain of signs is constructed according to a paradigm. This paradigm is in turn determined by a set of criteria and epistemological principles, some of which are explicitly enunciated in the paratext (e.g., the introduction to the BS, the MR's *Praenotanda*). Such principles determine the specific Content-Form and Expression-Form (Hjelmslev 1954) of martyrology and the encyclopedia of the saints as genres. As regards the Content, martyrologies involve a dogmatic episteme while encyclopedias display a critical one in which saints are the objects of critical exposition rather than cults. As regards the Expression, the two differ in terms of their “radicals of presentation,” to use Frye’s terminology (1957); namely, by virtue of their different syntagmatic organization of the units, that is, calendar and alphabetical order respectively. In both genres, saints represent tokens of sanctity. Based on his or her features (historical era, geographical area, public role, personal qualities, etc.), each saint may be conceived as a contingent, situated, and subjective embodied actualization of the abstract type of sanctity, namely, a token, appealing to and suitable for some believers (for some more than others, and not necessarily for all of them).

From the perspective of interpretative semiotics and the semiotics of culture, the notion of sanctity can be considered as both a Cultural Unit and a “form of life” – that is, an embodied valorization according to which an entire project of life is designed (Fontanille 1993, 2015). In the terms developed by Umberto Eco (1975), sanctity is a Cultural Unit of the socio-cultural Encyclopedia; namely, a specific piece within “the general set of knowledge of the world, of a factual nature [i.e., not only of linguistic nature] and potentially open, if not unlimited” (Violi 1997: 87, translation mine). The encyclopedia is open – as indeed it has to be so, if it is to include variation and new elements – in that it is not structured like a hierarchical tree (like the Porphyrian), but rather like a rhizome (Eco 1984: 112). This latter notion was introduced into the philosophical debate by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) to designate a lattice, a network lacking proper center whose nodes are all connected to each other. Following Eco (1997), the different specific features of

35 On saints as signs, see Leone (2010).

sanctity displayed by the individuals considered saints by the Catholic community are the Grounds (to use Charles S. Peirce's terms), affordances (Gibson 1979) or pertinences (Prieto 1975) that may be selected and activated by someone in some respect or capacity (according to Peirce's classic definition of sign) in order to gain access to the Cultural Unit of Sanctity; in other words, they are the possible cognitive paths leading to an understanding of this Unit. These Grounds of Sanctity (which may be compared to the Themes of Greimasian Generative Trajectory of Meaning)³⁶ are agglutinated into recurring Types (e.g., the religious, lay, worker saint), each characterized by a certain number of Grounds. Each individual saint (token) is represented through the activation of a particular combination of these Grounds, together with peculiar, idiolectal characteristics. Each representation contributes to formulating a series of public, collective representations and modelizations of the Cultural Unit of sanctity. The modelization of Types, therefore, is collective in nature (we might also call these collective representations Interpretants, in Peircean terms, Nuclear Contents, according to Eco, or Figures in Greimassian terms).³⁷ These virtual Types of Sanctity may overlap with the concrete actualization provided by the individual saints as Tokens.

The peculiar trait of texts such as the MR, the BS and the digital renditions analyzed herein is that they offer an encompassing portrait of sanctity by selecting and organizing *all* the tokens, according to an underlying episteme. In light of this point, it might be productive to study the Grounds emerging from the totality of the definitions explored as a macro-text in an effort to grasp the main features of the Cultural Unit of Sanctity and to identify different general types composing this Unit. What is significant in this research perspective is precisely the fact that the Cultural Unit at stake is also a form of life, that is, a set of values and narrative programs set up to be imitated by millions of Catholics worldwide.

If we consider the relationship between the texts we have analyzed, we can affirm that the MR, in its 2001 update, has subsumed the innovations and, more broadly, the spirit of a new way of framing the field of Sanctity as embodied by an oeuvre such as the BS; at the same time, its value is solidly still theological, eucological and doxological rather than historical or cultorological. The MR must be understood as an encompassing collection of the many possible declinations of – and, thus, ways of gaining access to – sanctity; a kind of a handbook, a manual (Sodi 2006: 22), a practical guide, rather than a repository of knowledge wherein the historical saintly characters become more abstract and almost sublimate by virtue of being models, actualizations of a form of life. As a matter of fact, the MR

³⁶ Greimas and Courtés (1982: 132–134; *ad vocem* “Generative (Trajectory)”).

³⁷ Eco also refers to a Molar Content, a type of enlarged, specialized representation which, in the case of the subject matter of Sanctity, would be that of religious scholars or hagiographers.

and BS are actually complementary texts: while “fictional saints” such as Wilgefortis were expunged from the dogmatic epistemology pursued by the former, they were not totally erased from Catholic culture because they found a new place in the historical and critical discourse of the encyclopedia of saints. Some saints walk out the front door of religious worship only to be brought back into the discourse of Sanctity through the back door of history and culture. These saints lose their status as objects of cult devotion to become objects of knowledge. Saints, therefore, *go* from cult to culture, back-and-forth, and they also *make* believers *go*: thanks to the geolocalized, augmented reality-apps, they become a call to action (*Go!*), a means through which to acquire experience of the world. In the same way, saints also go from pragmatics to semantics, back-and-forth; they are *prayed*, they are *read*, they are *used*. A further argument for the complementarity of the MR and BS stems from the syncretic websites that manage to blend the calendar form with the encyclopedic one, making Sanctity accessible in the most diverse of ways and valorizing the most diverse Grounds of Sanctity. Indeed, this is precisely the greatest innovation represented by the hypertextual structure and remediation (Bolter and Grusin 1999) of this field: “breaking up” the saints – cutting out the subject matter of Sanctity – into many more pieces, features, and pertinences than the traditional reference books (the MR and BS) and presenting them to users. The success of the encyclopedia of saints genre and explosion of folksonomies of saints is closely related to an epistemological shift consisting in an increased perception of saints as historical, cultural, and sometimes legendary subjects who can be not only venerated but also critically studied. This tendency is coherent with the wider phenomenon of “horizontalization” of sanctity recently promoted by the Church at the sociological and geographical levels as well, for instance through the growing number of canonizations of saints from the laity and developing countries.

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