The Cult of the Saints and Their Relics

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The saints were, both during their lives and after their deaths, key members not only of the Christian community, but of western society as a whole. As "friends of God" or "soldiers of Christ," saints possessed enormous power. In theory, all who resided in the divine court were saints, but in practice Christian churches accorded a relatively small number of people the title of saint and public veneration. The veneration of those people deemed to be saints--that is, in Latin, *cultus*, or the cult of the saints--lay at the heart of the practice of late antique and medieval Christianity in western lands. It was through relics that living Christians could seek the patronage and the help of the saintly dead now resident in heaven. While relics were also important in the medieval Christian east, the veneration of icons, or holy pictures of the saints, was equally or perhaps even more important in Byzantine lands.

Christians thought that saints were regularly capable of performing miracles with divine assistance. They could cure the sick, counter famine, quell fires, defeat enemies. As residents of the divine court, their posthumous powers were, if anything, more impressive and useful, for they could present petitions on behalf of the living to God in order to win favor for them in the divine court. For Christianity preached the universality of sinfulness, as well as of the divine judgment and punishment which was the result of sin. If a person wished to undo the consequences of their sins, they sought the aid of a saint. Perhaps a person was thought lame as a result of sin. A friend of God could ask that the limb be made whole. Or perhaps a person had been possessed by a demon. A saint had the power to drive that demon away. Or perhaps a person simply feared being sent to hell. There was no better ally to have on the final day of judgment than someone already living in heaven. The living expected miracles when they petitioned the holy dead. The posthumous power which saints possessed was a direct result of the manner in which they had lived. It is no accident that in Latin one can refer both to the holy actions of a saint's life and to the miracles performed by that saint posthumously with the same word, that is *virtus*, which can be translated variously as virtue or power. It is important to remember, however, that this power was thought to come directly from God and that the honor shown to the saints was considered a means of worshipping God. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430) remarked, "When we make our offerings at shrines, it is to God. The martyrs have their place of honor . . . but they are not adored in the place of Christ."

Gender and misogyny structured the veneration of relics in medieval Christianity in many ways. Women always constituted a minority of the people celebrated as saints by Christian communities and an even smaller minority of those saints whose relics gained widespread veneration. Living women were largely excluded from those positions of clerical and political authority which had authority over the cult of saints. Women were even at times prohibited from access to the relics of the saints. At the same time, clerics considered women to be more susceptible than men to those superstitious delusions which led to the improper use of the relics of the saints.

Martyrs were those whom Christian communities first recognized as saints and whose relics those communities first venerated. The earliest surviving piece of Christian hagiography, the *Martyrdom of St. Polycarp* (c. 167), records both the preservation of the martyr's body as a relic and the celebration of the day of his death as a feast. Thus it is clear that both the cult of relics and the liturgical cult of the saints find their origins among the earliest Christian communities. Christians celebrated the memory of martyrs with feasts held at their tombs in suburban cemeteries. Small shrines were also erected over some tombs, for example that of Peter on the Vatican hill near Rome. But it was only in the wake of the Edict of Milan (313) and other official recognitions of Christianity that the public cult of the saints attained full acceptance and began its true growth. A council of bishops meeting in Gangra (c.340) went so far as to decree excommunication for any Christian who despised relics. Over the course of the fourth century, large churches were built at the shrines of many martyrs. Here, as in other aspects of Christianity, the newly-converted emperor Constantine took the lead, building an influential shrine church over the tomb of Peter. These shrines, largely outside the city walls, became a key part of the urban topography of the late Roman empire. Some of these early *martyria* were dedicated to women, among them the shrine of Eulalia at Merida in modern Spain, that of Crispina at Tebessa in modern Tunisia, and that of Thecla at Seleucia (Silifke) in modern Turkey. Perhaps the most important of these was the shrine of Euphemia at Chalcedon near Constantinople, a massive affair which consisted of three separate churches. According to Evagrius Ponticus (+399) a mechanical device allowed sponges to be inserted into the tomb where they were covered with miraculous effusions of blood, thus becoming new relics which pilgrims carried away. The great council of Chalcedon was held in the main basilica of the shrine.

With the official acceptance of Christianity, ascetics-and, still later, bishops, teachers, and others-came to be considered saints under the rubrics of "confessor" and "doctor," that is those who preached or were learned in the faith.A person could not become a saint in isolation: he or she had first to be accepted as an embodiment of holiness by a community of Christians and then recognized by ecclesiastical authority. During the middle ages there was no single canon of saints universally observed in western Christendom. Indeed the particulars of the canon differed widely from region to region, and even from period to period, although many feasts (such as that of the apostle Peter or of the first martyr Stephen) were standard. Following traditions established in Roman North Africa, bishops were charged with control of the canon of saints to be venerated and liturgically celebrated in their diocese, but from the twelfth century on the papacy exerted ever more control over the processes of canonization. This "clericalization" of the canon of the

saints tended to exclude women (at least those who were not queens, nuns, or martyrs) from recognition as saints during the early middle ages.

It was not only as saints, however, that women could become involved in the cult of saintly relics. Women had traditionally born significant responsibilities for the burial and care of the dead in Mediterranean societies. Christian women of the Roman aristocracy thus became early and deeply involved in the process of providing shrines for the relics of the martyrs. While this activity was diminished by growing episcopal control over the cult of relics, women of the imperial-and later other royal-families would long continue to exercise significant authority over the initiation of new shrines. Indeed two of the most significant discoveries of relics in the late Roman world were attributed to women, for, by at least the time of Ambrose (+397), Constantine's mother Helen (+c.330) was credited with the discovery of the remains of Christ's cross on Golgotha, while the empress Pulcheria oversaw the discovery of the relics of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in 451. Women also significantly numbered among the devout Christians who attended the feasts and flocked to the shrines of the saints. Their presence can particularly be detected in the shrill warnings of churchmen who fretted about the "unregulated sociability" of such times and places, suggesting, in Antioch for example, that women only attend the feasts held in honor of the martyrs if they could go on muleback.

The public honor, or *cultus*, accorded saints took many forms. One pervasive mode was liturgical. The memory of those admitted to the canon of saints was celebrated on a feast which commemorated the day of that saint's death, that is the day on which he or she had been born into eternal life. Such commemoration could be as simple as the inclusion of the saint's name in the recital of the martyrology, that is the list of martyrs and other saints whose feasts fell on a given day, as part of the mass or monastic office. A variety of martyrologies circulated during the middle ages, the most influential of which was the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* falsely attributed to Jerome. Saints of significant stature, either universally or locally, were provided more elaborate commemoration on their feasts, ranging from readings taken from the saint's life to elaborate processions bearing their relics. Monastic communities celebrated a round of feasts on which they not only commemorated the saints, but prayed for their intercession. Liturgical calenders specific to individual dioceses or monasteries or religious orders abound in medieval liturgical manuscripts, most particularly in sacramentaries and in those collections of hagiographic readings known as legendaries.

The other most important form which the veneration of saints assumed was the cult of relics. Relics were literally the objects "left behind" by, as the Latin word *reliquiae* suggests. That is, relics were material objects associated with the saints which served to incorporate the sacred power of those holy people, most particularly their bodies. Another word commonly used in Latin for relics provides a different sense of their significance: *pignora*, "pledges" of the saint's intercessory power. Saints had such power because at death they had been judged worthy of immediate entrance into the kingdom of God, in whose court they now resided. Their relics most obviously included their own corpses, as well as (and certainly more commonly) smaller parts of their bodies which had been specifically separated for the purpose of veneration. Relics also included items which had

belonged to or been used by the saint, such as clothing, official insignia, or books. Moreover items brought into contact with relics-pieces of cloth touched to a shrine, vials of water which had washed a corpse, or blood miraculously exuded from a long defunct corpse-themselves became relics. These categories have since been defined respectively by the Roman Catholic Church as first, second, and third class relics.

To understand the religious practices which coalesced specifically around relics in medieval Christianity it is essential to view relics in an eschatological perspective. A saint was above all else someone whose soul currently resided in that court. On the day of the Last Judgment every human being's body was to be reassembled from the pieces which had once constituted it. Thus the corporal relics of the saint were not only objects which had been part of the saint, but they continued to be an essential part of the saint's person and would be part of the saint's glorified body following the Last Judgment. Seen from this perspective a tomb or reliquary did not simply contain dead bones. To pray before a relic was to address a living member of the divine court who could bear one's petitions directly to God. Relics were not merely a symbol of the saint, but rather the continued physical presence of the saint in this world. As a fifth-century inscription at the tomb of Martin of Tours (d. 397) read, "Here lies bishop Martin of holy memory, whose soul is in the hand of God, but who is completely present here, manifesting through the power of miracles his every grace." Relics thus provided, in the evocative phrase of the modern scholar Peter Brown, "joinings of Heaven and earth."

The veneration of saints' relics took many forms. Large shrines were erected over the tombs of saints or in those places to which the saintly bodies had been moved (that is "translated"). Shrines--such as those of James at Compostella, Faith at Conques, Becket at Canterbury--attracted pilgrims from near and far. More fragmentary corporal relics were placed into altars as part of the process of consecration or set into elaborately jeweled cases called reliquaries. These latter decorated churches and ecclesiastical institutions; they could be also obtained by wealthy laypeople for private devotion. Canon law also required that fragmentary relics be placed inside altars as part of the ritual of consecration. Relics not only served pious Christians during their lifetimes, but in death as well. Burial near the shrines of the saints (*ad sanctos*) was highly prized, for on the day of judgment one would be near the body of a saint called to eternal glory.

The earliest record of the collection of a martyr's bones for special internment is in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* of 156 CE. Numerous similar accounts survive from the period of persecutions, over half of them from the records of female martyrs. In the wake of the elevation of Christianity to official status in the Empire, the persecution of Christians ceased and the public veneration of the martyr's bones was established. The public veneration of relics grew in importance and geographic scope during the last decades of the fourth and first decades of the fifth century, particularly under the impetus provided by Ambrose of Milan (+397). There was some significant opposition on the part of learned clerics, such as Jerome's opponent Vigilantius; Augustine himself was not fully convinced of the propriety of relic cults until the final years of his life, at which time he took up the cause of the cults of St. Stephen and others with gusto. From at least that time, the clerical hierarchy exercised significant effort both at promoting and at

controlling the veneration of relics among the laity. They were concerned both with the authenticity of relics themselves and with the orthodoxy of the practice of veneration. Much ecclesiastical legislation controlled the transfer or sale of relics, as well as the beginning of the cults of new relics or saints. In the *Admonitio Generalis* of 789, Charlemagne ordered that "the false names of martyrs and the uncertain memorials of saints should not be venerated." Thus was inaugurated a custom by which bishops controlled the practice of relic veneration within their dioceses. In the later middle ages, the papacy slowly usurped some of this authority, in particular through the practice of canonizing new saints through the issuance of a papal bull. Like the mass, the veneration of relics usually took place within a church or other sacred space and under the eye of supervising clerics or monks. Thus it provided an important link between the worlds of the clergy and the laity. There was, however, clerical unease with certain aspects of the cult of relics. In the mid-ninth century, for example, Bishop Amulo of Lyon criticized a new relic cult which had begun in Dijon, primarily involving women: "Some miracles have begun to occur in the church. These are not, however, cures and healings, by which some indication of divine compassion and approval would be shown, but rather blows and pressures, from which in this house of prayer pitiable little women suddenly fall down, thrash about, and are seen to shake violently." (For a trnaslation of the text of this episode avialable on-line, click here.) The veneration of these fell outside the bounds of clerical control and thus was deemed unacceptable.

As communities of celibate men came to control the great shrines, access to relics was sometimes denied to women. A monk of Fleury, for example, explained how "women were prohibited by ancient authority from going within the exterior gates of the monastery" and thus prevented from venerating the shrine of St. Benedict of Nursia contained within its church. The same strict enforcement of the cloister meant that few important shrines existed in female convents, although that of St. Potentianus at Jouarre (where the relics were translated in 847 by Abbess Hermentruda) was an exception. When Hrotsvit of Gandersheim related how important the acquisition of the relics of a martyr had been to the foundation of her convent (c. 845), it was clear they were not venerated by pilgrims.

In the Byzantine east these centuries witnessed profound changes in the devotion to relics. The Islamic conquests of the seventh century removed the shrines of the Holy Land and other provinces from Christian control. During the iconoclastic controversy which lasted from 726 until 843 a party of monks and theologians mounted a concerted attack on the veneration of religious images. Many icons were destroyed and churches stripped of their decoration; even the status of relics was called into question. Women of the imperial family played an important role in these struggles and the public veneration of icons was restored briefly under the patronage of the Empress Irene (+803). The end of the controversy, generally called the "restoration of orthodoxy," seems to have provided the cult of icons with renewed status and impetus for growth.

There was an important revival of interest in and use of the relics of traditional saints around the year 1000. During the following two centuries many ancient monastic houses were reformed and, in the process, the cults of their traditional patron saints were

renewed. Frequently, as part of this process, the churches which housed the relics of the saints were rebuilt. Rodulphus Glaber (+ca.1047), describing a profusion of church building in Italy and France during the first decade of the new millennium, commented that it was as if "the world itself, shaking off the old, had covered itself with a shining robe of churches." In the 1130s Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis argued that it was necessary to rebuild his abbey's church because of crowding caused by the throng of pilgrims who "spilt out of every door." During this period, the concept of saintly patronage was based on the evolving social practices of lordship, feud, and gift exchange. Devout Christians gained the protection and intercession of the holy dead by bringing them gifts or providing them with services. A detailed picture of this process can be found in the stories gathered together in numerous miracle collections composed by monks at this time. The "family" of a patron saint included many people: the monks or canons of the community, the serfs who worked the lands of that community, the nobles who donated land to the saint, the pilgrims who brought offerings or simply their prayers to the shrine. In exchange for their services and gifts, the saint provided his or her friends with intercession in the divine court and protection against disease and enemies in this world. The power of the saints was also portrayed by monastic authors as an effective deterent to the saint's enemies. A story from the Anjou told how a son of a knight had injured himself while riding illegally on the property of the monastery of St. Albinus. The boy began to curse the saint and was struck dumb. His friends, attracted by his tears, led him back to his father. On the advice of the monks the boy came to their church where he lay prostrate in supplication before the relics of Albinus. Eventually he rose and told how the saint had appeared to him and loosed his tongue on the condition that he warn others not to treat the saints irreverently. The relationships between saint and servants were reciprocal, for the saints became obligated to their servants as can be seen in a story told by the monks of Conques about a man who had been punished by his master for having attended the feast of their patron St. Faith by having his eyes gouged out. The saint, bothered by the suffering incurred on her behalf, appeared to the man one night and promised him a cure saying, "With great shouts I have moved the righteousness of the divine judge to mercy as regards the injury which has been done to you. I have exhausted God through my incessant prayers until I could obtain this cure for your." In times of trouble, when they thought that their patron had deserted them, monastic communities sometimes performed a ritual humiliation of that saint's relics, in which they were taken out of their shrine, scattered on the floor of the church, and cursed as a means of forcing the saint to reverse the sagging fortunes of the community.

While the relics served as a focus for the charismatic power of the saints, the miracles were not thought to be performed not by the relics, but by the saints themselves, or, as the hagiographers themselves insisted, by God working through the saints. The relics themselves, of course, could be put to good use. One group of monks dunked a casket containing relics of their patron into a vat of wine from Sancerre and then drank its contents in an attempt to combat an outbreak of disease. When a nobleman tried to steal some vineyards which belonged to the monastery of Glanfeuil, its abbot threatened the malefactor with a reliquary of the monastery's patron, saying, "Almighty God through the merits of Blessed Maurus and other saints, whose relics are venerated and perserved in this small box, will claim punishment and vengeance from those who are scornful of his

own and their servants, and most especially he will extract it from you, who, devoted to the evil of pillage, causes such robbery to occur." Reliquaries were also brought forth from their shrines for other important occasions: processions which marked a feastday, journeys made by representatives of a monastic community in search of donations, episcopal councils held as part of the movement known as the Peace of God, and even battles fought to protect monastic property. The unscrupulous sometimes used falsified relics for the sake of religious sensationalism or profit. Rodulphus Glaber recorded how a "swindler" sold "the bones of some anonymous man from the lowest of places" as the relics of a martyr named Just. (For a translation of the text of this episode, click here.)

During the tenth and eleventh centuries the cults of female saints, in particular martyrs, began to reemerge in western Christendom. This was the period of great growth at Conques, where construction was begun of a new church "in which the body of the holy virgin was to be placed in a tomb so that it could be approached more easily for those who assiduously streamed in to see it." The iconography of the cult was striking: the tympanum of the church depicts her as a young woman kneeling in prayer to intercede for her pilgrims before an enthroned Christ, while a statue which held her relics shows a woman with a crown seated on a royal throne. New shrines of ancient female martyrs were also founded: Simeon of Trier (+1035) imported relics of Catherine of Alexandria into Germany, while Abbot Geoffrey (+1052) "rediscovered" the relics of Mary Magdalene at Vézelay. The legends of these women-as well as of such other female martyrs as Margaret of Antioch and Ursala of Cologne-were rewritten and widely circulated, sometimes in the vernacular as well as Latin, giving impetus to the celebration of their feasts and the collection of their relics. This vogue reached its apex in 1155 when graves unearthed outside the walls of Cologne were identified as those of Ursala and her eleven thousand companions in martyrdom, an identification which provided the churches of Europe with an enormous number of reliquaries in the following years. At one point a living holy woman, Hildegard of Bingen (+1179), was asked to determine the authenticity of some of these relics through her prophetic powers. Over these centuries women also gained virtually untrammeled access to shrines, as monastic reformers dropped their objections to female pilgrims entering male cloisters.

From the twelfth century on, traditional monastic shrines declined somewhat in importance. Such reformed orders as the Grandmontines and Cistercians were founded on an ideal of greater separation from society; their members specifically prayed to Stephen of Muret (+1124) and Bernard of Clairvaux (+1153) that those saints refrain from performing miracles at their tombs which would attract unwanted pilgrims. The mendicant orders, on the other hand, were dedicated to pastoral care. While they made use of relics and prayers to the saints in this task, in France (unlike Italy) they did not become the custodians of significant shrines. Traditional shrines of local importance were to some degree replaced in the later middle ages by shrines of international significance, such as that of Saint James in Compostela, those of the martyrs in Rome, that of Thomas Becket in Canterbury, and, most importantly, the holy places around Jerusalem. Traditional saints such as martyrs, both male and female, and traditional relic shrines never completely lost their allure. The devout laity of the later middle ages would have regularly called upon the powers of ancient saints. And the ancient relics were also used.

The head of St. Martial, for example, was displayed in Limoges both in 1364, on the occassion of the visit of the English prince Edward, and again in 1388, as part of an attempt both to end the Great Schism and to alleviate local famine.

The high middle ages was marked by the recognition of contemporary figures as saints shortly after their death. The tombs of some new saints, such as Bernard of Tiron (+1117) and Louis of Anjou (+1297), enjoyed brief vogues in attracting pilgrims, but more common were such figures as Louis IX (+1270) and Jean-Marie de Mailly (+1414), whose importance was linked to their holy example and powers of intercession rather than to shrines. Evidence from the official processes of canonization suggests that the perceived need for physical proximity to a saint's relics in order to receive a miracle was sharply declining at this time. While Margaret of Hungary (+1270), Catherine of Siena (+1380), and others thus became important patrons for late medieval Christians, their relics did not themseloves have the significance which would have been attached to them in an earlier period. This change reflects the personalism of relationships between the living and God, which had been evolving since the twelfth century. The bodies of these late medieval saints were nevertheless carefully preserved, generally by the members of the religious community in which they had lived, because the lack of putrefaction was regarded as one sign of sanctity. As a result, the "uncorrupted" bodies of such saints as Clare of Assisi (+1253) and Catherine of Bologna (+1463) can be viewed today in glass coffins at their shrines.

This period also witnessed a steady growth in the importance of shrines dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Christ himself. Both figures had been of great devotional importance throughout the history of Christianity, but from the twelfth century the faithful came to approach them more directly. Because of the doctrines of the Assumption and the Ascension, corporal relics of the usual sort were lacking. The cathedral of Chartres claimed to possess the Virgin's tunic which made it one of the earliest and most prominent Marian sanctuaries in France. More common were statues of the Virgin which acquired miraculous reputations. One of the earliest was fashioned from gold in Clermont at the end of the tenth century. By the end of the next century others could be found at Coutances, Bayeaux, and elsewhere. Still later Marian statues came to be painted black: the first mention of the black Virgin of Rocamadour was in 1235, while King Louis IX of France brought a similar statue from Palestine to Le Puy in 1254. Since devotion to the relics of Christ centered on bits of the savior's body discarded before his death and resurrection, it took on a sometimes bizarre quality. The monks of Saint-Médard displayed one of the savior's milkteeth, while the abbeys of Charroux and Coulombs both claimed to possess his foreskin. Images also served as the centerpieces of important shrines such as that of Christ's *Volto Santo* ("Holy Face") at Lucca. The eucharist, which was the real presence of the body and blood of Christ, came to be treated like a relic in many forms of devotion.

Over the course of the later middle ages, relics came to be displayed more prominently in the churches of the later middle ages than they had been in earlier periods. New fragments of saintly bodies were eagerly sought and placed in ornate reliquaries. The progress of the crusades and the development of trading links to the east, not to mention

the sack of Constantinople in 1204, also opened a large market in the sale and trading of relics which brought small pieces of the remains of martyrs, many of them women such as Catherine of Alexandria, into the communal and private collections of the west. In 1248 that vigorous crusader Louis IX had Sainte Chapelle dedicated as a form of relic treasury: the building even imitated a reliquary in its very shape. Preachers used exemplary stories gleaned from the lives of the saints to spice up their sermons. Prominently displayed works of art, works of vernacular hagiography, and translations of such works as the *Golden Legend* of Jacapo da Voragine brought the stories of the saints to a wider audience. Glass-fronted reliquaries made bits of holy bodies visible to the faithful. Confraternities adopted appropriate saints as their patrons and celebrated their feasts in elaborate fashion. Books of hours promoted the observance of many feasts, as well as the cult of the Virgin Mary, in the home. Individuals and communities sought the aid of "specialist" saints with particular problems, such as Saint Roch for the plague and Saint Margaret for difficult childbirths. During the Hundred Years War, St. Martial developed a reputation among both armies for the ability to liberate prisoners. Saintly intercession came to be institutionalized in the granting of indulgences.

Images of the saints or of incidents taken from their lives were an important adjunct to the cult of relics. The walls of churches in western Christendom were often decorated in frescoes which could serve a didactic purpose for the laity. Reliquaries often bore images describing the deeds of the saint whose bone rested inside or sometimes took on the very form of the saint in a kind of sculptured bust. Painted images of saints commonly called icons were a particular staple of Byzantine devotion. Indeed icons took on many of the characteristics and functions of relics, which by the eleventh century they had virtually surpassed in importance throughout eastern Christendom. The veneration of relics was also inseparable from the liturgical cult of the saints. Every region of Christendom celebrated its own calendar of feasts dedicated to saints. Those feasts served to create a sacred time in much the same way shrines of the saints served to create a sacred space.

As in the earlier middle ages, some of the practices undertaken by lay people in association with the cult of the saints moved outside of the bounds of clerical control and thus clerical approval. One famous example, chronicled by the modern historian Jean-Claude Schmitt, is provided by a cult which developed near the village of Sandrans in the mountainous Dombes region of France. The shrine was used by the local laity in particular for the curing of sick infants and it centered on the bones of a greyhound named Guinefort who was believed to have once saved the life of his master's son and heir, only to be killed in a canine version of martyrdom. Eager laypeople also frequently obtained dubious or fraudulent relics, as the mention of the "pygges' bones" which belonged to Chaucer's pardoner has famously made clear. Aside from the writings of a very few intellectual iconoclasts such as Claudius of Turin (+827), most clerical critics of relic veneration did not focus on the practices employed by the laity, rather they regretted the lack of clerical supervision or of proper guarantees of the relics which were venerated. (For some translated excerpts from Claudius' work, click here.) Perhaps the most famous medieval diatribe against the cult of relics is to be found in the first book of Guibert of Nogent's *De pignoribus sanctorum* (*On Saints and their Relics*). Guibert (+c.1125), however, was personally devoted to the veneration of relics and on close

examination his work is clearly a plea for closer clerical control over lay religious expression, rather than the proto-rationalist critique of superstition which some have tried to make it. The abbot of Nogent particularly cherished the importance of hagiographic traditions in guaranteeing the authenticity of relics, "[Relics] are things worthy of our reverence and honor in exchange for their example and protection. In these matters the only method for calling a person a saint which should be considered authentic is one which relies not on opinion, but on timeworn tradition or the evidence of trustworthy writers." One of the most striking aspects of the cult of relics in medieval Christendom was the success which the clerical hierarchy, urged on by men like Guibert, had in imposing norms of practice on the laity.

There was a slow but profound transformation of the piety of the cult of saints in the late medieval west, one which increased the importance of private devotion to the saints in local churches and chapels, a devotion based on images, reliquaries, and liturgical prayer. Women, both as saint and as devotee, played an important role in this more domestic piety. Lay reading of vernacular hagiography grew in scope. A devotional manual addressed to women which appeared in several editions around 1600 charged its reader to "read the stories and consider the constancy of the female martyrs and saints," explicitly mentioning Elizabeth of Hungary, the martyrs Barbara and Cecilia, and others. Paintings of the Annunciation frequently showed the Virgin in the pose of an idealized pious laywoman, in her chamber reading and surrounded by woodcuts or other reminders of female saints.

Ever so slowly the importance of the great shrines-with the exception of those dedicated to Mary and Christ-waned. The new pilgrimage shrines of the fifteenth century such as Wilsnack were similarly almost all dedicated not to the saints, but to Christ or the Virgin. While the criticisms of the reformers ended the veneration of relics, pilgrimage, and indeed most of the trappings of the cult of saints in Protestant regions during the sixteenth century, they continued unabated in Catholic areas. In Spain, Italy, and elsewhere, relics of female saints and of the Virgin Mary seem to have grown in relative importance to those of male saints during the early modern period. In eastern Christendom, almost completely under Islamic domination after 1453, the great shrines were abandoned or converted to mosques, yet relics and icons continued to nourish what was becoming, in many regions, a minority faith.

The Protestant Reformations of the sixteenth century, however, often involved a much more radical reaction against the cult of saints and their relics. Reform theologians and preachers in particular rejected the idea of saintly intercession, which was thought in Lutheran terminology to constitute a reliance on works rather than on faith. John Calvin composed a systematic critique of the cult of relics in the vernacular (*Traité des reliques*, 1547), in which he rejected the veneration of relics on theological grounds and delighted in such absurdities as the multiple heads of John the Baptist enshrined in various churches throughout Europe. Theological opposition often turned to violent iconoclasm on the part of Huguenots during the Wars of Religion. Relic collections were destroyed and the statues of the saints in many French churches still bear the scars of attack. The

Council of Trent took many steps to reorganize the practice of the cult of saints and the means by which saints were canonized within early modern Catholicism.

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