

The Infallibility of Canonizations: A Revisionist History of the Arguments

WILLIAM DIEM
Gettysburg, PA

The Modern Consensus and the *Prima Facie* Problem

SINCE THE PUBLICATION OF *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* by Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini (later Pope Benedict XIV), a general consensus has emerged that formal canonizations of the saints are infallible papal acts.¹ Indeed it is so commonly held that the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* simply asserts, without any note of either controversy or explanation, that canonizations are infallible declarations.² More precisely, it is commonly held that, in canonizations, the pope infal-

¹ See Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, *De servorum Dei beatificatione et beatorum canonizatione*, esp. bk. I, chs. 43–45 (Venice: Antonius Foglierini, 1744), 195–212. Especially noteworthy treatments of the history and arguments of this position are found in Eric W. Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), and Max Schenk, *Die Unfehlbarkeit des Papstes in der Heiligsprechung: Ein zur Erhellung der theologiegeschichtlichen Seite der Frage* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1965). It is worth noting that there was a competing tradition still present in the eighteenth century; see for example, Lamindus Pritanius (Ludovico Antonio Muratori), *De ingeniorum moderatione in religionis negotio*, bk. I, ch. 17 (Venice: Johannis Baptistae Pasquali, 1752), 75–78.

² P. Molinari and G. B. O'Donnell, "Canonization of Saints (History and Procedure)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale, 2003), 66: "The bull of canonization infallibly declares the exemplariness of the saint's life and recognizes his or her role as a heavenly intercessor." It is, however, worth noting the restraint concerning the object of this declaration.

libly teaches that the one canonized is now in heaven.³

Yet, this position faces a rather significant objection. As Avery Cardinal Dulles notes, “it is difficult to see how [formal canonizations and the approval of religious institutes] fit under the object of infallibility as defined in the two Vatican councils.”⁴ What he means is this: the two Vatican councils connect the Church’s infallibility directly to the guarding and expounding of the deposit of faith handed down from the apostles. Hence Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* teaches, “this infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine of faith and morals, extends as far as the deposit of Revelation extends, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded.”⁵ So

³ As an early example of this now common opinion, see Camillo Beccari, “Beatification and Canonization,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907), 367: “What is the object of this infallible judgment of the pope? . . . My own opinion is that nothing else is defined than that the person canonized is in heaven.”

⁴ Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Magisterium: Teacher and Guardian of the Faith* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia, 2010), 78. He then quotes Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialog, “Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church: Common Statement,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 113–66, at 149: “The Church has the power to recognize authentic Christian holiness, yet canonization of its nature would not seem to convey infallible certitude that the holiness in question was actually present in the life of this or that historical individual.” This problem had been raised in the eighteenth century by Muratori, *De ingeniorum moderatione*, bk. I, ch. 17 (p. 76); see, Schenk, *Die Unfehlbarkeit*, 61.

⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, §25 (unless otherwise noted, translations of the documents of Vatican II come from the Vatican’s website as produced in Denzinger-Hünemann [DH], 43rd ed., English ed. R. Fastiggi and A. E. Nash [San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012]). Similarly, see Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, ch. 4, §13: “Neque enim fidei doctrina, quam Deus revelavit, velut philosophicum inventum proposita est humanis ingeniis perficienda, sed tamquam divinum depositum Christi Sponsae tradita, fideliter custodienda et infallibiliter declaranda” (“For the doctrine of the faith that God has revealed has not been proposed like a philosophical system to be perfected by human ingenuity; rather it has been committed to the spouse of Christ as a divine trust to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared”) (trans. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, as found in DH, no. 3020). See also Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 4, §6, “Neque enim Petri successoribus Spiritus Sanctus promissus est, ut eo revelante novam doctrinam patefacerent, sed ut eo assistente traditam per Apostolos revelationem seu fidei depositum sancte custodirent et fideliter exponerent” (“For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that they might disclose a new doctrine by his revelation, but rather that, with his assistance, they might reverently guard and faithfully explain the revelation or deposit of faith that was handed down through the apostles”) (trans. Neuner and Dupuis, in DH, no. 3070).

much is uncontroversial: the Church's infallibility is linked directly to her office as guardian and teacher of public revelation.

Now, we should note another uncontroversial point: that this infallible teaching authority extends not only to what has been *directly* revealed in public revelation—the primary or direct objects of infallibility—but extends also to those things that are necessarily connected with revealed truth by either a logical or a historical necessity. Defenders of the infallibility of canonizations—well aware that Christ revealed nothing about the fate of particular post-apostolic individuals—thus place canonizations among these secondary or indirect objects of infallibility. Hence, for example, Ludwig Ott writes, “to the secondary objects of infallibility belong . . . the canonization of saints, that is the final judgment that a member of the Church has been assumed into eternal bliss and may be the object of general veneration.”⁶ But what necessary connection is there between a particular historical individual's beatitude and the faith? As Dulles notes, “it is not easy to see how the fact that this or that saint possessed heroic virtue is either a necessary condition or a necessary consequence of Christian faith.”⁷

Now to complete the difficulties, we can consider the two lines of data that are examined leading up to a formal canonization and on which the determination of sainthood is ultimately made. Since the beginning of the practice of formal canonizations by the popes,⁸ two lines of investigation

⁶ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, IL: TAN, 1974), 299. Similarly Adolphe Tanquerey lists canonizations among the “indirect” objects of infallibility, noting that this thesis of the Church's infallibility is the *communis et vera sententia* in *Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae*, vol. 1, 16th ed. (Rome and Paris: Typis Societatis Sancti Joannis Evangelistae, 1919), 546–47 (no. 842).

⁷ Dulles, *Magisterium*, 91.

⁸ The first formal, papal canonization—so far as we can tell—was of St. Ulric of Augsburg by John XV in 993; see Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 57. For the point that a determination of sanctity must be based on these two lines of evidence, see Innocent III's bull of canonization of St. Homobonus in 1199: “duo tamen, virtus videlicet morum et virtus signorum, opera scilicet pietatis in vita et miraculorum signa post mortem, ut quis reputetur sanctus in militanti Ecclesia requiruntur.” He draws particular attention to the insufficiency of miracles alone: “frequenter angelus Satanae se in lucis angelum transfigurat et quidam faciunt opera sua bona, ut videantur ab hominibus, quidam etiam coruscant miraculis quorum tamen vita merito reprobatur (sicut de magis legitur Pharaonis), et etiam Antichristus, qui electos etiam, si fieri potest, inducet miraculis suis in errorem, ad id nec opera sufficiunt sola nec signa, sed cum illis praecedentibus ista succedunt, verum nobis praebent indicium sanctitatis” (*PL*, 214: 483–84). See also Innocent IV, *Apparatus in quinque libros decretalium*, bk. III, rub. 45, ch. 1, in *Audivimus*,

have been carried out to determine sanctity: The first is an examination of the person's life, and the second is an examination of miracles attributed to the person's intercession.

To the first of these, we must note that, while a thorough investigation of a person's life may give very good reason to determine that a person was holy and is now in glory, it is ultimately inconclusive insofar as we cannot read another person's soul.⁹ What's more, not even the individual can know his own state of grace with absolute certainty—the sentiment is clear in Paul: “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor 4:4). Trent is explicit: “For as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when he considers himself and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning his own grace, since no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.”¹⁰ Note carefully the distinction, in Trent, between those things on the one hand that are matters of divine revelation—the mercy of God, the merits of Christ, the efficacy of the sacraments—and on the other, those particular matters of fact that revelation does not touch—one's own response to these things. The former are certain as matters of faith; the latter are necessarily uncertain. Hence the problem: if even the individual himself cannot be absolutely certain of his own sanctity at any given moment, how can the pope determine—through an examination of the records of his life—the state in which an individual died years prior?¹¹

But here the defenders of infallibility will point to the second sort of evidence: our human investigations may lead us only to a likely belief that a person died in grace and is now in heaven, but God, doubtless, knows

which makes the same point—“non suffiunt miracula sine vite excelentia” (“miracles do not suffice without excellence of life”) (since even Pharoah's magicians worked wonders)—but on the other hand, the Church must not canonize persons of good life without miracles “quia in secreto potuerunt laxiorem vitam ducere” (“for they could have led less rigorous lives in secret”) (unless otherwise noted, all translations of non-magisterial texts are my own). See also Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, a. 8, ad 1, and a. 2 (produced in note 35); though, unlike these prior two, Aquinas's only expressed concern with either miracles or lives is that they be unreliably reported, not that they actually be diabolical or deceptive.

⁹ I Cor 2:11: “For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him?”

¹⁰ Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification* (1547), ch. 9 (trans. H. J. Schroeder in *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* [Rockford, IL: TAN, 1978]).

¹¹ On this point, consider also Gregory the Great, *Epistles*, bk. VII, Epistle 25 (to Gregoria).

the person's state with certainty, and can confirm the individual's salvation through miracles worked through his intercession. Thus the divine testimony of miracles supplies that certainty wanting from our investigation of his life. This, however, brings us back to the original problem: even if the miracles in question are perfectly clear divine testimony of God's favor toward the individual, the Church emphatically does not claim to teach the content of so-called private or special revelations infallibly. Vatican I writes, "for the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that they might disclose a new doctrine by his revelation, but rather that, with his assistance, they might reverently guard and faithfully explain the revelation or deposit of faith that was handed down through the apostles."¹²

Having laid out the *prima facie* case against the infallibility of canonization, I would like to examine the principal arguments adduced in its favor. Ott provides the very form of all the strongest arguments in a single line: "If the Church could err in her opinion [about saints], consequences would arise which would be incompatible with the sanctity of the Church."¹³ This is the fundamental argument. But which consequences specifically?

In light of space I must restrict myself to examining the arguments of two figures. These two are, however, the most important in the tradition, as between them they established—so far as I can tell—all of the strongest arguments in favor of the infallibility of canonizations. And at least one of the two is explicitly cited by almost every subsequent theologian to treat the topic.¹⁴ Thus for example, all four of the arguments provided by Lambertini in favor of the infallibility of canonizations are explicitly drawn from these two figures.¹⁵ I speak of Melchior Cano and Thomas Aquinas. Because his arguments present fewer interpretational difficulties, I propose to treat Cano first. I will argue that his proofs do not successfully arrive at a simple infallibility in canonizations—that is, they do not prove

¹² Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 4, §6. Vatican II sums up the teaching nicely in *Dei Verbum*, §10: "Quod quidem Magisterium non supra verbum Dei est, sed eidem ministrat, docens nonnisi quod traditum est . . ." ("This teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on") (DH, no. 4214).

¹³ Ott, *Fundamentals*, 299.

¹⁴ Kemp notes: "Cano's discussion is important because he and St. Thomas are the two theologians most frequently quoted by later writers" (*Canonization and Authority*, 157).

¹⁵ In *De Beatificatione et Canonizatione*, bk.I, ch. 43 (pp. 198–99), Lambertini produces a total of four arguments in favor of the infallibility of canonizations. The first he identifies in both Thomas and Cano; The second and third he takes from Thomas; The fourth is drawn from Cano.

that one canonized is certainly in heaven. Turning then to Aquinas, I will argue two further points: first, that, despite ambiguities in the text, reading Aquinas's arguments to establish a simple infallibility of canonizations renders his arguments invalid, and second, that placing those arguments in their historical context gives us compelling reason to conclude, *pace* Lambertini, that Aquinas never intended them to prove such a simple infallibility. Finally, I will argue that the arguments marshaled by these authors do prove a divine guarantee in canonization, but a more subtle guarantee than simple infallibility.

Melchior Cano

In his *De locis theologicis*, Melchior Cano (d. 1560) explicitly defends the infallibility of formal canonizations under the heading of conciliar authority.¹⁶ While Cano notes that individually his arguments may be inconclusive, nonetheless he thinks that joined together they are decisive.¹⁷ He offers three arguments, all of which echo through the tradition.

Cano's first argument is that, if we could call even one canonization into question, then we could call all the saints into question, even doctors like Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine. In fact, we could, without any crime, condemn them with the devils, beat them down with maledictions, and vex them with contumelies—a prospect from which all the faithful will recoil in horror. If the Church could err in placing a man in the catalog of saints, “it would not be terribly absurd, to eject from the Church the cults of all the saints consecrated since Clement [i.e., Pope Clement I, the last pope of the apostolic era]. Who could say something that is more stupid or imprudent?”¹⁸

¹⁶ Melchior Cano, *De locis theologicis*, bk. V, ch. 5, no. 43 (Salanticae: Mathias Gastius, 1558), 195–96.

¹⁷ Cano, *De locis theologicis*, bk. V, ch. 5, no. 43 (p. 196). Note that Cano does offer a prior argument that is also often cited, *viz.*, that he does injury to a martyr who prays for him. But this is offered not as an argument that canonizations are infallible, but that the denial of a canonization is a crime deserving strict ecclesiastical censure.

¹⁸ Cano, *De locis*, bk. V, ch. 5, no. 43: “Mox etiam, si unum aliquod huius generis decretum in quaestionem veniat, certe Hieronymi, Ambrosii, Augustini ac reliquorum sanctitatem sine crimine in quaestionem vocare poterimus: atque adeo asserere illos cum daemonibus condemnatos, Ita posses eos maledictis, ac vexare contumeliis, quae omnia aures sane fidelium perhorrescunt. Quod si viris iustis in divorum catalogum reponendis ecclesia errat, nimirum non esset valde absurdum, divorum omnium cultum ab ecclesia explodere eorum, qui post Clementem consecrati sunt. Quo quid aut stultius aut imprudentius dici potest?” (“Also, if one of these decrees should come into question, then certainly we could call the sanctity

Once we strip away the polemics, this is ultimately an argument from the practice of the Church. Francisco Suarez (d. 1617) takes this argument and develops it by appealing to a threefold division of practices he takes from Augustine.¹⁹ Augustine noted (Letter 54, ch. 5) that there are three sorts of practice in the Church: first, those that are prescribed in Scripture, and these we cannot doubt ought to be practiced; second, those things done differently in different parts of the Church, and these we ought to practice so long as they are not contrary to faith and morals; third, those practices observed by the whole Church, and of these—among which Suarez places the cult of each saint—he remarks that it would be most insolent madness to doubt whether we ought to observe and do them.

Robert Bellarmine (d. 1621), likewise adopted and refined Cano's argument: "If one were permitted to doubt whether a canonized saint were holy, one would be permitted to doubt whether he should be venerated: but this is false." The reason it is false is given in the line from Augustine we just saw quoted by Suarez: "it is most insolent to dispute whether it should be done as the whole Church does." Thus since "we are bound to

of Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine, and relics into question without crime; and place them, condemned, among the demons, so you could vex them with curses and contumelies, from which all the ears of the faithful rightly recoil in horror. For if the Church could err in placing the just in the catalog of the godly, doubtless it would hardly be absurd to throw out of the Church the cult of all the saints who have been consecrated after Clement. Who could say something more stupid or imprudent?" (p. 195).

¹⁹ Francisco Suarez, *Defensio fidei catholicae et apostolicae adversus anglicanae sectae errors*, bk. II, ch. 8, no. 9 (Conimbricæ, PT: Apud Didicum Gomez de Loureiro, Academiae Typographum, 1613), 167–68. His concluding line here is: "Ergo quando universa Ecclesia Catholica de aliquius Sancti felicitate non dubitat, et in illius cultu concordat, non licet viro Catholico, et prudenti disputare, quin ita faciendum sit" ("Therefore when the universal Catholic Church does not doubt the blessedness of some saint and is of one accord in his cult, it is not permissible for the Catholic and prudent man to dispute whether one should do so.") He presents another version of this argument in *Opus de triplici virtute theologica: fide, spe, et charitate*, tract I (*De fide*), disp. 5, sect. 8, n. 8: "Item, non licet fidelibus dubitare de gloria Sancti canonizati: id enim sub praecisa obligatione praecipiunt Pontifices in ipsa canonizatione: ergo oportet, ut illi praecepto non possit subesse error, alias deficeret Deus in re maxime necessaria Ecclesiae, quod est contra providentiam, et promissiones eius" ("It is not permissible for the faithful to doubt the glory of a canonized saint. For the Pontiffs command it under a 'specific obligation' [i.e., an obligation that binds in conscience] in the canonization itself: therefore it is necessary that that command not be able to be in error, otherwise God would fail in a thing most necessary for the Church, which would be contrary to his providence and promises") (Lugduni: Sumptibus Iacobi Cardon et Petri Cauellat, 1621, 104).

obey the pontiffs indicating the feast day of some saint; [and since one cannot] act against conscience: therefore we cannot doubt whether he is to be venerated who is canonized by the Church."²⁰

As Bellarmine produces it, I think this argument is remarkably strong. If we were permitted to doubt the sanctity of some saint, we could be bound in conscience not to venerate him. But we are bound to venerate him because that veneration is a practice of the whole Church, and in the case of a formal canonization it is a practice enjoined on the Church by the pope precisely as an obligation. Thus if we could doubt the sanctity of some saint, we would be forced either to reject a practice enjoined on us by the Church or to act against conscience.

Having noted the strength of the argument, I will for the moment point out but one further thing, namely, the force of the conclusion: Bellarmine concludes that one is not permitted to doubt that the saint is in fact a saint. The quotation from Augustine (marshaled by both Suarez and Bellarmine) concludes only that one is not permitted to doubt the practice of the Church. Even Cano's argument proved only that one could not doubt any particular decree of canonization.

Cano's second argument is that the matter of who is to be venerated is a question of morals, and therefore the Church would err in teaching morals if it erred in canonization. In a line that has been frequently quoted over the intervening centuries, he asserts, "it makes no difference whether you venerate a devil or a condemned man."²¹ Again, Bellarmine puts it in

²⁰ Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes de controversiis christianae fidei: de ecclesia triumphante sive de gloria et cultu sanctorum*, bk. I (*De sanctorum beatitudine*), ch. 9: "Primo: Quia si liceret dubitare, an sanctus canonizatus sit sanctus, liceret etiam dubitare, an sit colendus: at hac est falsum. Siquidem s. Augustinus in epist. 118 [according to the current enumeration of Augustine's letters this is actually Epistle 54]. dicit insolentissimae insaniae esse disputare, an sit faciendum, quod tota Ecclesia facit. Item ex Bernardo in epist. 174. ad canonicos lugdenenses, ubi loquens de colendis festis in honorem sanctorum, dicit: Ego quae accepi ab Ecclesia, securus teneo et trado. Praeterea: Omnes veteres, sine ulla dubitatione sanctos coluerunt, et colendos asseruerunt. Denique tenemur obedire pontifici in licenti diem festum alicujus sancti; nec tamen possumus contra conscientiam aliquid agere: ergo non possumus dubitare, an sit colendus ille, qui ab Ecclesia est canonizatus" (in *Roberti Cardinalis Bellarmini Opera Omnia*, 2nd ed. [Milan: Edente Natale Battezzati, 1858], 178).

²¹ Cano, *De locis*, bk. V, ch. 5, no. 43: "Item multum refert ad communes ecclesiae mores scire, quos debeas religione colere: quare, si in illis erraret ecclesia, in moribus quoque graviter falleretur. Nec differt diabolus colas, an hominem condemnatum. Atque si ecclesia abstinentiae legem fogaret, quae vel rationi vel Evangelio adversa esset, turpiter ab illa profecto erraretur: turpiter ergo etiam errabit in doctrina

its most nuanced form by appealing to the communion of saints; he notes that, if the Church could err in canonizations, “those who are not saints would be defrauded of the suffrage of the living,” while “the living would be defrauded of the intercession of the saints, for they would often invoke the damned for the blessed”; in fact, “the Church would often ask for itself malediction in place of benediction, since in prayers to the saints it asks, that just as God glorified them in heaven, so he grant us grace on earth.”²²

morum, si legem ferat de colendo divo, quem colere si divus non est, et cum ratione et cum Evangelio pugnat” (“It matters a good deal for the common conduct of the Church to know whom you ought to worship with religious observance. Which is why, if the Church erred in those things, it would also be gravely deceived in conduct. It does not matter whether you worship a devil or a condemned man. And if the Church should give a law of abstinence which was against either reason or the Gospel, it would certainly err shamefully in so doing, therefore so also would it shamefully err in the moral doctrine, if it proposed a law honoring as a saint someone whose being so honored contradicts reason and the Gospel, if he is not a saint”) (p. 195). Again Suarez repeats the argument in *De fide*, bk. II, ch. 8, no. 8: “Secundo infertur, non posse errare Pontificem in Sanctorum canonizatione, ut recte docuit D. Thom. quodlib. 9. art. Ultimo, Anton. et Cano, supra, et Bellarm. lib. 1. de Sanctorum beatitudinem, cap. 5; . . . Ratio vero est: quia haec est pars quaedam materia moralis, et valde necessaria, ut Ecclesia non erret in cultu, et adoratione religionis; alias contingere posse, ut coleret hominem damnatum, et ad illum preces funderet; quod est etiam contra puritatem, et sanctitatem Ecclesiae” (“Second, it is concluded that the Pontiff cannot err in the canonization of the saints, as Saint Thomas [in QL IX, final article], Antoninus, Cano [above], Bellarmine [lib. 1 On the Beatitude of the Saints] rightly taught. . . . The reason is that this is a certain part of moral matters, and certainly necessary, namely that the Church not err in religious worship and adoration. Otherwise, it could happen that the Church honor a damned man and offer prayers to him, which is certainly against the purity and sanctity of the Church”) (p. 104). Lambertini quotes this passage of Cano and joins it to Aquinas’s second *sed contra* in *De Beatificatione et Canonizatione*, bk. I, ch. 43, no. 9 (p. 198). Notice that Cano does not explain precisely in which respect devil worship and veneration of a condemned soul are morally equivalent; this ambiguity, left unresolved by Cano though not by Bellarmine, proves significant, as we will see when we return to this point further on.

²² Bellarmine, *De sanctorum beatitudine*, “Secundo: Ex incommodis duobus; nam in primis fraudarentur non sancti suffragiis vivorum; nam pro canonizatis non licet orare. Ut enim Augustinus dicit, serm. 17. de verbis apostoli: Injuriam facit martyri qui orat pro martyre; et idem intelligendum de omnibus sanctis canonizatis, docet Innocentius, cap. *Cum Marthae*, de celebrat. Missarum: at si in hoc Ecclesia erraret, defraudaret eum, qui habetur sanctus, et non est, quicumque non oraret pro eo. Deinde fraudarentur etiam viventes intercessionibus sanctorum, invocarent enim saepe damnatos pro beatis, si Ecclesia in hoc erraret. Praeterea Ecclesia peteret sibi maledictionem pro benedictione, cum in orationibus sanctorum petit, ut sicut illos Deus glorificavit in coelis, sic nobis gratiam largiatur in terris. Et

This would be a nasty sort of irony if this were prayed of a condemned soul. Bellarmine closes here by qualifying the force of the conclusion: "Although the Church would not ask the malediction but materially, nonetheless it seems absurd." We will return to this argument below.

Finally, Cano makes another argument that will be repeated many times down to the present day: not even once has the Church been shown to have erred in these judgments.²³ The most obvious problem with such an argument is that, if canonizations are not infallible—particularly if they are not infallible because we have no direct access to the matter of fact they are claimed to establish—then there is in principle no way for us to find an error (unless the Church herself admit an error—but even then, all we would know is that there was some error; we would not know whether it was in the canonization or in the retraction). In other words the theory that canonizations are infallible is in principle unfalsifiable from direct observation.²⁴ I will consider this argument dispensed with.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) is generally considered the first theologian to have directly considered the question of the infallibility of canonizations, and the arguments he produced are—with those of Cano—frequently and explicitly cited in the subsequent literature—Lambertini styles him the *dux omnium qui pugnant pro summi Pontifici infallibilitate* (the leader of

quamvis eam maledictionem non peteret nisi materialiter, tamen hoc ipsum absurdum videtur" (pp. 438–39).

²³ Cano, *De locis*, bk. V, ch. 5, no. 43: "Ne igitur tantus error in ecclesia sit, deus peculiariter providere credendus est, ne ecclesia, quamlibet hominum testimonia sequatur, in sanctorum canonizatione erret. Cuius peculiarissimae providentiae abunde magnum argumentum est, quod nunquam infirmata est fides ab humanis testibus semel in huiusmodi iudiciis suscepta. Quod in causis civilibus saepe accedit" ("Lest there be such error in the Church, it is to be believed that God specifically provides that, whatever human testimony it follow, the Church not err in the canonization of the saints. It is a great argument for this most particular providence that the faith derived from human witnesses in such judgments has never, even once, been disproven, although that often happens in civil cases") (195–96). This is quoted by Lambertini, in presenting his fourth argument in favor of the infallibility of canonizations, in *De beatificatione et canonizatione*, bk. I, ch. 43, no. 14, (p. 199).

²⁴ It is worth noting that, even granting that we can determine that there has never been an error, the argument is still inconclusive. Thus, for example, Muratori follows Cano in holding that there has never actually been an error in canonization, although he admits the possibility that the Church could err in a canonization. Muratori, *De ingeniorum moderatione*, bk. I, ch. 17 (p. 77).

all those who fight for the infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff).²⁵ His treatment is found in *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, where he asks whether all the saints who have been canonized by the Church are in glory or whether some are in hell.

Before considering Aquinas, however, it may be desirable to consider his immediate context. While Aquinas was at the University of Paris, Bonaventure (d. 1274) held a series of disputed questions on evangelical perfection, and in the course of these, he defended mendicant poverty against the attacks of William of St. Amor, a defense found in his *De perfectione evangelica*, q. 2.²⁶ The series of questions was held in the fall of 1255,²⁷ during Aquinas's first Paris regency,²⁸ and shortly before Aquinas

²⁵ Lambertini, *De beatificatione et canonizatione*, 197 (this formulation is a condensation of what Lambertini writes in bk. 1, ch. 43, no. 4: "Pugnant vero pro Summi Pontificis infallibilitate caeteri mox referendi. Dux nempe omnium est Sanctus Thomas Quodlibet 9 art 16 ut infra latius exponetur" ("But others, who are to be referred to soon, fight for the infallibility of the Supreme Pontiff. Indeed the leader of them all is Saint Thomas, QL IX, a. 16 as will be discussed a greater length below"). As one noteworthy example of how Aquinas is read on this point, consider Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, ch. 43, where he somewhat facetiously cites *Quodlibet* IX to establish that Aquinas holds that the Church's infallible teaching authority extends even to dogmatic facts: "In his [Aquinas's] treatise on faith [here, in note 90, he cites *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 10, and *Quodlibet* IX, a. 16] he finds in the Church a doctrinal authority that is plenary and infallible, extending even, as in canonizing her saints, not merely to dogmatic truths, but also to dogmatic facts" (trans. Patrick Cummins [St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1953]).

²⁶ In St. Bonaventure, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Collegii S. Bonaventura, vol. 5 (Florence: Quaracchi, 1891). There is a possibility of confusion as this second question circulated separately under the title *De paupertate*. The specific passage we are concerned with is in the afterward to the article, "Replicatio adversus objectiones postea factas," sect. 4 "dubia," obj. 1 (p. 152). As a note, this dispute—being inherently polemical in purpose—gives life to the controversy. Aquinas's disputed questions are generally sanitized, recording only the most concise form of the strongest arguments. Bonaventure here records his objectors' every argument—with all their warts—to head off every evasion. The reader cannot but feel the vigor and vibrancy of the intellectual community that was the Latin Quarter in the thirteenth century.

²⁷ See Jay M. Hammond, "Bonaventure's *Legenda Major*," in *A Companion to Bonaventure*, ed. Jay Hammond, Wayne Hellman, Jared Goff (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 453–508, at 472.

²⁸ 1252–1259. See Jean-Pierre Torrell *St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 36–39, 96.

wrote *Quodlibet* IX.²⁹ Part of Bonaventure's defense is that the lives of the saints record that several of the saints (including among many others, Francis and a fourth-century Roman named Alexius) chose to give up their wealth and live off alms.³⁰ His adversaries called a number of assertions related to this argument into question, holding that it was dubious and uncertain that Alexius begged or that Francis worked miracles—and even if Francis did work miracles, so too have many evil men. In his reply, Bonaventure argues first that the lives of the saints, as they are recorded in the *legenda*, are models of Christian virtue, that is, that the written lives of the saints are worthy moral guides,³¹ and second that to deny that the miracles of the saints are sound evidence of their holiness is to accuse the Church of being a fool, by credulously accepting such signs as divine indications of sanctity.³² What is important is that neither of these arguments

²⁹ Torrell summarizes the various opinions concerning the date of the disputed questions, *Thomas Aquinas*, 1:210–11; cf. 61. René Gauthier (editor of the Leonine edition) dates it to Advent 1257, two years after Bonaventure's *De perfectione evangelica*.

³⁰ A whole series of *exempla* drawn from lives of the saints are given as arguments *sed contra*: Bonaventure, *De perfectione*, q. 2, a. 2, sc 16–23 (p. 138–39).

³¹ Bonaventure, *De perfectione*, “Replicatio Adversus Objectiones Postea Factas,” sect. 4 “dubia,” ad 1: “Nam si in dubium revocetur, quod legitur in legenda sancti Alexii et legenda beati Francisci; pari ratione in dubium venit quicquid legitur in legendis aliorum Sanctorum: ergo omnia exempla virtutum et gesta Sanctorum iam revocantur in dubium. Sed dubia imitari vel credere periculosum est; ac per hoc perit fides, devotio et reverentia, quae habetur in Sanctis, si in dubium revocentur cetera, quae narrantur de ipsis” (“For if the things we read in the *legenda* of Saint Alexius and blessed Francis were called into doubt, by the same token whatever we read in the *legenda* of any other saint comes into doubt: And therefore all the examples of the virtues and the deeds of the saints are called into doubt. But such hesitation [to imitate or to believe] is dangerous, and through such hesitation, the faith, devotion, and the reverence, which is had for the saints, would be destroyed, if the other things that are narrated about them were called into doubt”).

³² Bonaventure, *De perfectione*, “Replicatio Adversus Objectiones Postea Factas,” sect. 4 “dubia,” ad 1: “Si miracula, quae fecerunt non sunt testimonia efficacia ad sanctitatem eorum astruendam, stultizat hodie Ecclesia, quae propter testimonia miraculorum sanctos canonizat” (“If the miracles which they worked are not testimony sufficient for establishing their sanctity, then the Church today, which canonizes saints on account of the testimony of miracles, acts a fool”). While some have taken this to be an implicit argument for the infallibility of canonizations (e.g., Schenk, *Die Unfehlbarkeit*, 14), it would be a rather weak argument—as Donald S. Prudlo rightly notes (*Certain Sainthood: Canonization and the Origins of Papal Infallibility in the Medieval Church* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015], 126). But it need not be taken to speak of infallibility at all. And if it is not so taken then it is a strong argument. The argument is a *reductio*, and the impossibility it argues

needs to be read as implying that the Church infallibly teaches that saints are in heaven.³³ The first treats only their lives as known in the *legenda*. The second need only be taken to assert that it is censurable to imply that the Church has credulously accepted identifiably fraudulent miracles as a sign of sanctity.

Thus the timely and very practical context of Aquinas's speculative question, "whether all the saints who have been canonized by the Church are in glory, or whether some of them are in Hell?" He considers two objections: first (as we already argued), that no one can be certain of another's state, just as he cannot be certain of his own;³⁴ second, that a judgment formed from a fallible middle is itself able to err, but the Church relies on

from is that the Church play the fool, by accepting identifiably fraudulent miracles as evidence of sanctity (what the objector was implying). The impossibility is not that the Church err, but that it err in a way that makes it a fool. There is quite a bit that falls between being a credulous fool and being infallible. All Bonaventure's argument implies, then, is that the Church is not the former. And so read, the argument is strong and is open to none of the accusations of naiveté that could be brought against it were it implying infallibility.

³³ Note that while shortly thereafter he writes, "est horribilissimum et incredibilissimum, quod Deus permetteret sic errare universaliter populum sanctum suum . . ." he has moved on to a new argument (this is labeled the "ad 2" by the editors) and is referring to error in ecclesiastical approval of religious orders, not to canonizations of saints, *pace* Prudlo (*Certain Sainthood*, 125). Moreover, while Prudlo cites Schenk as the source of this last quotation—and asserts that Schenk agrees with Tanner, Turrianus, and others that Bonaventure is here speaking of canonizations (*Certain Sainthood*, 126, fn. 10), the explicit purpose of the section in Schenk (*Unfehlbarkeit*, 12-14) is to show, rightly, that this passage (which the cited authors evidently were paraphrasing) is not actually speaking of canonizations but of the approval of religious orders. Prudlo falls into precisely the misunderstanding of these passages that his secondary source was quoting them in order to refute, and he is simply wrong to assert that Schenk concurs with Turrianus and Tanner.

³⁴ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, arg. 1: "Nullus enim potest esse ita certus de statu alicuius sicut ipsemet, quia *quae sunt hominis* nemo nouit *nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est*, ut dicitur I Corinthiorum II [v. 11]; set homo non potest esse certus de se ipso utrum sit in statu salutis: Ecclesiastes. IX [v. 1]: Nemo scit utrum sit dignus odio vel amore; ergo multo minus Papa scit; ergo potest in canonizando errare" ("For no one can be so certain of someone's state as the man himself, for no one knows the things of man but the spirit of the man which is in him, as it is said in I Corinthians 2:11, but man cannot be certain of himself whether he is in a state of salvation—Ecclesiastes 9:1: No one knows whether he is worthy of hate or love. Therefore much less does the Pope know, and therefore he can err in canonizing"). (Leonine ed., vol. 25/1-2).

fallible human testimony in examining both the saint's life and miracles.³⁵ Aquinas's replies to both amount to asserting that God guides the pontiff and the Church, thus obviating the objections.³⁶ In neither of the replies does he attempt to prove that God does in fact guide the Church in these matters. That was the work of the corpus. Although they seem to assert more, all the replies actually prove is that, *if* God guides the Church in canonization, then the objections are irrelevant. (It is worth noting that the reply to the second objection in particular does seem to assert such a guarantee of assistance. We will return to this in the conclusion.)

Aquinas presents a total of three arguments that canonized saints are all in heaven: two as arguments *sed contra*, and one in his response. The first of these arguments *sed contra* is straightforward, strong, and frequently cited:³⁷ "There can be no damnable error in the Church; but there would be a damnable error if one who was a sinner were venerated as a saint, for then some, knowing his sin or heresy, could be led into error, if this should happen. Therefore the Church cannot err in such matters."³⁸ The force of the argument is drawn from the fact that saints are held up as models of Christian virtue, and thus the canonization of a saint can be interpreted as a sort of moral teaching. This argument echoes Bonaventure's argument

³⁵ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, arg. 2, "Praeterea. Quicumque in iudicando innititur medio fallibili, potest errare; sed ecclesia in canonizando sanctos innititur testimonio humano, cum inquirat per testes de uita et miraculis; ergo, cum testimonium hominum sit fallibile, uidetur quod ecclesia in canonizando sanctos possit errare" ("Further, anyone who begins to judge with a fallible means of proof can err in judging; but the Church in canonizing the saints begins with human testimony, since it inquires into the life and miracles through witnesses; therefore since the testimony of man is fallible, it seems that the Church can err in canonizing saints").

³⁶ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, ad 1 ("Ad primum ergo dicendum quod pontifex, cuius est canonizare sanctos, potest certificari de statu alicuius per inquisitionem uite et attestationem miraculorum, et praecipue per instinctum Spiritus sancti, qui omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei") and ad 2: "Ad secundum dicendum quod divina prouidentia praeseruat ecclesiam ne in talibus per fallibile testimonium hominum fallatur" ("divine providence preserves the Church lest she be deceived by the fallible testimony of men").

³⁷ E.g., Lambertini gives it as his first argument in favor of the infallibility of canonizations, *De beatificatione et canonizatione*, bk. I, ch. 43, no. 9 (p. 198). Interestingly he joins it with Cano's argument that it does not matter whether one worship a devil or a condemned soul; by joining them he seems to conflate two distinct sorts of moral error.

³⁸ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, sc 1: "Set contra. In ecclesia non potest esse error dampnabilis; set hic esset error dampnabilis, si ueneretur tamquam sanctus qui fuit peccator, quia aliqui scientes peccata eius uel heresim, si ita contigerit, possent ad errorem perducere; ergo ecclesia in talibus errare non potest."

concerning the *legenda*'s being reliable moral guides.

The thrust of both Bonaventure's argument and Aquinas's first *sed contra* is evidently not—as some commentators³⁹ would have it be—that the saints are infallibly in heaven, but that their lives, such as they are known to us, are examples of Christian virtue and worthy of emulation. This is perfectly explicit in Bonaventure. In Aquinas, note that the impossible situation only follows if the sinner's sin is known. The Church does not lead anyone into damnable error if the canonized simply is not in heaven. The impossibility follows only if the person is not in heaven because of some *known* fault.

Moving to the second argument *sed contra*, we find a considerably weaker argument and it seems to have achieved a well-deserved obscurity in the tradition (although I would note that Aquinas does not necessarily approve of an argument *sed contra*). It starts from Augustine's point that, if we admit any lie in Scripture, our faith—which depends on Scripture—will be shaken.⁴⁰ It then concludes that: "Just as we are bound to believe that which is in sacred Scripture, so too that which is determined by the whole Church in common. . . . Therefore it is not possible that the common judgment of the whole Church should be in error, and so [we reach] the same [conclusion] as the preceding [argument]."⁴¹ This argument proceeds by drawing a false equivalence between the magisterium's infallibility and Scripture's inerrancy. Augustine holds that we must not admit any error of any sort in Scripture because he holds that Scripture is truly inspired by God, such that God is truly its Author, and that therefore everything it asserts is truly asserted by God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived.⁴² Magisterial teaching has never been understood as *inspired* in the manner

³⁹ Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood*, 124–25.

⁴⁰ Epistle 28, ch. 3, nos. 3–4.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, sc 2, "Praeterea. Augustinus dicit in epistola ad Ieronimum quod si in scriptura canonica aliquod mendacium admittatur, nutabit fides nostra, que ex scriptura canonica dependet; set, sicut tenemur credere id quod est in sacra scriptura, ita id quod communiter per ecclesiam determinatur, unde hereticus iudicatur qui sentit contra determinationem conciliorum; ergo commune iudicium ecclesiae erroneum esse non potest. Et sic idem quod prius."

⁴² Cf. Augustine, *In genesi ad litteram* 2.9.20: "Breviter dicendum est de figura coeli hoc scisse auctores nostros quod veritas habet; sed Spiritum Dei, qui per ipsos loquebatur, noluisse ista docere homines nulli salutis profutura" ("It must be stated very briefly that our authors knew the shape of the sky whatever may be the truth of the matter. But the Spirit of God who was speaking through them did not wish to teach people about such things which would contribute nothing to their salvation") (Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill, O.P., ed. John E. Rotelle [Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002]).

Augustine holds Scripture to be. The only guarantee of infallibility that the Church has ever claimed the magisterium to have is when it teaches specifically on faith and morals.

If the argument followed, it would prove that the magisterium is guaranteed never to err in any way, regardless of subject matter. But with this discrepancy between the infallibility of the magisterium and the inspiration of Scripture noted, to proceed with the argument would beg the question, for an error in the Church's teaching justifies questioning the authority of the Church and the faith that the Church teaches *only if* the teaching concerns faith and morals (that is, if it is an error concerning the things that the Church is guaranteed to teach infallibly). But whether canonizations are among those things is precisely what is being disputed.⁴³ I consider this argument dispensed with and will not return to it.

We can then turn to the body. Most of Aquinas's response is spent discussing how God providentially provides for the Church, directing her through the Holy Spirit, lest she err in teaching things that are "necessary for salvation." He distinguishes three classes of things that the Church judges. The first are those we just mentioned that concern what is necessary for salvation, and he says of these that "it is certain that it is impossible for the judgment of the universal Church to err in things which pertain to the faith."⁴⁴ The second class he mentions concerns particular matters of fact: "But in other matters—those which pertain to particular facts, as when the Church deals with possessions, or criminal cases, or others things of this sort—it is possible that the judgment of the Church err on account of false witnesses."⁴⁵ He then asserts that canonizations belong to a third

⁴³ This point was made by Muratori: "Ceterum si in his contingeret error . . . nihil probri in Ecclesiam aut in Romanum Pontificem recideret, cum sacrorum Pastorum coelestis praerogativa sita sit in immunitate non ab omnibus erroribus, sed ab erroribus in doctrina Christi, et in factis per Apostolorum calamum aut vocem traditis. Ecclesiam in aliis falli posse iam vidimus sine dedecore suo, sine fidei detriment" ("If some error arose in these things . . . nothing shameful would redound to the Church or to the Roman Pontiff, for the prerogative of the holy, heavenly Pastors lies not in immunity from all errors, but from errors in the teaching of Christ, and in the facts handed down through the voice or pen of the apostles. We have seen already that the Church can fail in other things without disgrace and without detriment to the faith") (*De ingeniorum moderatione*, bk. I, ch. 17, [p. 77]; see Schenk, *Die Unfehlbarkeit*, 60).

⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, corp.: "Certum est quod iudicium ecclesiae uniuersalis errare in hiis que ad fidem pertinent, impossibile est."

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, corp.: "In aliis uero sentenciis, que ad particularia facta pertinent, ut cum agitur de possessionibus uel de criminibus uel de huiusmodi, possibile est iudicium ecclesie errare propter falsos testes."

class that falls between these other two. And he then immediately and somewhat puzzlingly proceeds, saying, “yet because the honor we show the saints is a certain profession of faith, i.e., the faith by which we believe in the glory of the saints, it is a thing to be piously believed [*pie credendum est*] that the judgment of the Church could not err even in these matters.”⁴⁶

There are two things that need to be cleared up: The first is what sort of faith is indicated when he claims that honoring the saints is a “certain profession of faith”? The second is what is the force of the conclusion he draws from this fact, that is, what he means by *pie credendum est*. To the first issue, there are two ways of interpreting the veneration of saints as a “certain profession of faith.” The first possible interpretation is that in honoring, for example, Augustine, I profess my faith that Augustine is in heaven; that is, the “certain profession of faith” refers to the faith in the glory of the specific individual in question.⁴⁷ But this is trivial—obviously honoring Augustine as a saint shows that I believe he is a saint. It also renders the conclusion either rank question-begging or a patent *non-sequitur*. How does the fact that I believe that Augustine is a saint pertain to *that* faith that carries a divine guarantee? When I cross the road, I make a certain profession of faith that Houston drivers will yield to pedestrians, but there is—alas—no divine guarantee that *that* faith is well placed, nor would there be such a guarantee even if the Church attempted to define it. Does, then, the specific faith whereby I believe that Augustine is a saint—and which I obviously profess in honoring him—have a guarantee of infallibility when the Church declares it? But that is of course precisely the matter in question. Moreover, if my faith that the individual saint is in heaven is the same faith which the Church is guaranteed to teach infallibly, then one would naturally need to place the canonization of the saints in the first class of judgments; that is, it would be of the faith, and thus a thing which the Church simply cannot err in teaching. But Aquinas is explicit that canonizations are not in that class of judgment.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Quodlibet* IX, q. 8, corp.: “Canonizatio uero sanctorum medium est inter hec duo; quia tamen honor quem sanctis exhibemus quedam professio fidei est, qua sanctorum gloriam credimus, pie credendum est, quod nec etiam in hiis iudicium ecclesiae errare possit.”

⁴⁷ This is how Prudlo reads the argument: “The faithful make a quasi-profession of faith in the glory of *the* saint” (*Certain Sainthood*, 128; emphasis mine). Although in the translation given in the appendix, he preserves the ambiguous plural.

⁴⁸ St. Antoninus (d. 1459) draws attention to this point. After first examining Joannes Neopolitanus’s treatment of this text of Aquinas—in the course of which John places canonizations among those things of which the Church cannot err, since “praeponuntur per canonizationem sancti ut exemplar fidei et sanctae vitae

Hence we must consider the other way the phrase can be taken, that is, to refer to the fact that in honoring Augustine I profess my faith in the glory of the saints *generically*, that is, my faith that God glorifies those who love and serve him as he commands in the Gospel. Thus interpreted, the argument has force, for it successfully ties the canonization of a saint to something that the Church is known to be guaranteed to teach without error, for these divine promises are matters of revelation and faith, and they are necessary for salvation, and they thus fall under a guarantee of infallibility. This interpretation also shows how canonizations are midway between matters of particular fact and matters of faith. The matter of faith (concerning which the Church cannot err) is the general set of truths revealed about salvation, which makes belief in the glory of the saints intelligible, while the particular historical fact (of which the Church can err) is the particular facts of this person's life and eternal state.

But so interpreted, the reply proves little more than the first *sed contra* did. With "faith in the glory of the saints" so understood, the argument proves that it would be a denial of the very faith that the Church is guaranteed to teach faithfully for the Church to honor as a saint one whose life is known not to fulfill the demands of the Gospel, for *that* would be tantamount to denying the faith which was revealed in the Gospel, and which the Church is guaranteed to guard infallibly. If the Church were to propose as a saint someone whose life was known to include grave moral failures, it would thereby implicitly either falsify or distort the promises and demands of the Gospel. But if this is the faith the text is speaking of,

et ab omnibus adorandi, et in necessariis sui invocandi" ("In canonization, the saints are proposed as an example of faith, and of holy life, as ones to be adored by all, and as ones to be invoked in their necessities")—Antoninus continues here: "Sed Thomas in quodlib. ponit canonizationem sanctorum in tertio genere eorum, quae fiunt per Papam, de quibus dicit, quod etsi, Papa possit errare; pie tamen credendum est, quod Deus non permetteret ecclesiam in huiusmodi errare: et forte ratio est, quia et talis determinatio pertinet ad ecclesiam universalem; sit tamen per attestaciones hominum quae fallere possunt" ("But in the quodlibet, Aquinas places the canonization of saints in a third category of things done by the pope, of which acts he says that, although the pope could err, it is still to be piously believed that God would not allow the Church to err in this way. The reason is that, while such a determination [of sanctity] pertains to the universal Church, it nonetheless comes about through the testimonies of men, which can mislead") (*Summa theologiae moralis* III, tit. 12, ch. 8 [Verona: Ex Typographia Seminarii, Apud Augustinum Carattonium, 1740], cols. 541–42). Again, Prudlo is simply wrong when he writes that, "St. Antoninus . . . [cites] John's quodlibet as evidence of infallibility in canonizations, and . . . [claims] that John accurately relays Thomas's teaching" (*Certain Sainthood*, 173).

the conclusion can claim no more than that the Church could not propose as a saint one whose life is *known* to have fallen short of sanctity. After all, in what sense could it amount to a denial of this faith in the demands and promises of Christ for the Church to honor one who ostensibly lived the Gospel calling, yet who secretly failed?

Consider the Salmanticenses' likening the assent owed to the canonization of a saint to that owed to a consecrated Host.⁴⁹ I demonstrate in my act of adoration two sets of belief. One set pertains to the promise of Christ that he is truly and substantially present under the species of bread after the priest duly consecrates the Host. The second is that this here and now before my eyes is a duly consecrated Host. The first of these is the one I am bound to believe by faith, and which the Church is divinely guaranteed to teach faithfully, as it is the thing that God revealed. And my faith in that remains pure and untouched if I err in my second judgment, and either the man at the altar is not actually a priest, or the "host" is a rice cake, or the formula he used is invalid, or he was saying a dry mass.

The second thing that must be cleared up is the strength of the conclusion. From his argument, Aquinas concludes not that "the Church cannot err" in these matters—which would directly answer the question under consideration—but that "it is a thing that is to be piously believed [*pie credendum est*] that the Church could not err." The two are of course not the same. We may wonder why one would assert that one should believe something, without also asserting that it is actually true, but it stands, first, that Aquinas does make a point of adding the qualification to his conclusion, and second, that the qualification effectively carves out the possibility that the Church might in fact err. We may at this point ask whether there was some reason he thought it necessary to qualify the conclusion this way.

⁴⁹ Collegii Salmanticensis, *Cursus theologicus* vol. 7 (Lugduni: Sumptibus Joannis Antonii Huguetaan, et Sociorum, 1679), tract. 17 (*De fide*) disp. I, dub. 4, sect. 7, no. 149: "Ecclesia in canonizatione Santorum non proponit illorum beatitudinem ut credendam per fidem divinam, sed illorum personas ut colendas. Ut autem dulciae cultum Sanctis tribuamus, opus non est, quod per fidem supernaturalem credamus illos dignos esse tali honore; sufficit enim inferior assensus, ut ex adoratione, quam exhibemus erga hostiam probabiliter consecratam, aperte liquet" ("In the canonization of the saints, the Church does not propose their beatitude as a thing to be believed with divine faith but their persons as things to be honored. In order for us to give the honor of *dulia* to the saints, it is not necessary that we believe through supernatural faith that they are worthy of such honor; a lesser assent suffices, as is made obvious from the example of the adoration which we give to a host that is probably consecrated") (p. 50). Lambertini treats this point in *De Beatificatione et Canonizatione*, bk. I, ch. 43, no. 23 (p. 210). Muratori offers the same example and analysis, *De Ingeniorum Moderatione*, bk. I, ch. 17 (p. 77).

And there was. The “should be piously believed” is not just an odd circumlocution serving to soften the conclusion for some unspecified purpose, but it is at the heart of the response itself. “Possible” and “impossible” are exhaustive and mutually exclusive. The third, middle category of judgment (to which Aquinas assigns canonizations) is distinguished from the first precisely in this: that it is not “*certain* that it is impossible” but it is “*to be piously believed* that it would not be possible.” A thing that “one should piously believe would not be possible” is midway between a thing that is “certainly impossible” and a thing that is unqualifiedly “possible.” The “should piously believe” is thus integral to the very structure of the article and should not be lightly dismissed.

A further consideration bears mention. Given the historical controversy from which this question was born, Aquinas had a vested interest in giving the most forceful defense he could of the authority of canonizations. Consequently, if Aquinas leaves open the possibility of error in canonization—even if tacitly—we should think this was deliberate. Had such a possibility not been left deliberately, given the larger context of the question and its ramifications on the mendicant dispute, we would expect Aquinas to have firmly and unambiguously denied it. But he did leave the possibility open.

In short, in light of the arguments he adduces, I am reading Aquinas to hold (albeit tacitly) that the Church might in fact err, but to hold explicitly that (even if she did err) we ought not believe she has erred. Now someone might well object that his concluding expression that “it is to be piously believed that the Church cannot err” means not, as I interpret it, that the Church *might* err though we ought not *believe* she has, but instead means that it is a likely opinion that the Church is simply inerrant in such decisions, such that it is less than pious to admit even in the abstract the possibility that the Church could or has erred. I think the strongest response to this objection can be drawn from Aquinas’s historical context, to which we must now return.

The Legal Tradition

While Aquinas is generally acknowledged to have been the first *theologian* to consider the issue directly, he was not the first scholar to consider directly whether a canonization might be in error; by the time Aquinas wrote this question, the issue had already been discussed by the canon lawyers—and an early consensus (a consensus which—according to Eric Kemp—would last for centuries⁵⁰) had begun to be forged.

⁵⁰ Kemp, *Canonization and Authority*, 157: “The first person to be conscious of any

The first canon lawyer to address the issue was Innocent IV (d. 1254). In commenting on the recently published decretals of Gregory IX, he takes up the question of the pope's exclusive right to canonize saints. After defending this exclusive right, he directly considers the question of the possibility of a pope's erring in such a canonization. His treatment is short but significant. He writes, "even if the Church should have erred—which is not a thing that should be believed [*quod non est credendum*]⁵¹—then God would accept prayers offered in good faith through such [a non-saint]." He continues by giving a reason for this argument: "We do not deny that it is licit for anyone to extend prayers to any deceased person—whom one believes a good man—in order that he might intercede for him before God: we deny only that he can make a solemn office or solemn prayers for him."⁵¹

Two things are significant in this brief passage, a passage Aquinas likely read.⁵² The first is that Innocent explicitly makes the same distinction I argued was found in Aquinas, and he does so using the same vocabulary and grammatical structure Aquinas used. The Church might err, but we should not believe it has. Second, he gives an argument why it would not matter if the Church did err: God accepts prayers offered in good faith. Invincible ignorance does not diminish the efficacy of the prayer, nor does such error bring about some grave and irreparable harm, a belief seen in the fact that the Church does not forbid us to pray (albeit privately) to people who are not canonized, but whom the one praying sincerely believes to have been a holy person. Said otherwise, if praying in good faith to one who is not in heaven were to bring about some serious harm, and if God were not able to make up for our mistake, then it would be morally wrong to pray to one who is not certainly in heaven. But no one holds that it is wrong. Therefore there is no serious harm done, and God can supply for

conflict between the canonists and the theologians on this matter seems to have been the [seventeenth-century] Spanish Jesuit, Juan Azor."

⁵¹ Innocent IV, *Apparatus in quinque libros decretalium*, bk. III, rub. 45, ch. 1, in "Audiivimus": "Item non negamus, quin cuilibet liceat alicui defuncto, quem credebatur bonum virum, porrigere preces, ut pro eo intercedat ad Deum: quia Deus fidem eorum attendit, negamus tantum pro eis licet facere officium solemne, vel preces solemnes." Slightly before this in ch. 1, he says: "Item dicimus, quod etiam si ecclesia erraret, quod non est credendum, tamen preces per talem bona fide porrectas Deus acceptaret" ("We say: even if the Church erred—which is not a thing to be believed—nonetheless God would accept prayers offered in good faith through [the intercession of] such [a false-saint]").

⁵² While such citations are rare, Aquinas cites this commentary already in his *In III Sent.*, d. 5, q. 3, a. 3, arg. 4.

the errors in our prayers. One must not overlook the significance of this last point. Innocent is anticipating Cano's argument that it makes no difference whether we venerate a devil or a lost soul, not only rejecting it but offering a compelling, if brief, counter-argument.

A second figure in this decretalist tradition who needs to be noted is Henry of Segusio, known as Hostiensis (d. 1271). In his commentary on the decretals of Gregory IX,⁵³ he considers this question in the same context, and his conclusion follows Innocent IV quite closely: "If the Church erred in this canonization, which though it is not to be believed [*non est credendum*], still could happen"—here he directs the reader to his commentary on a canon concerning the possibility of error in excommunications—"nonetheless," he continues, "God accepts prayers extended in good faith in the honor of such an individual, for all things are made clean in the faith of Christ, and be it that the truth of the canonization is wanting, still his faith is not wanting."⁵⁴

Both of these decretalists are defending precisely the odd conclusion Aquinas appears to draw in his conclusion: that the Church might err, but

⁵³ Would Aquinas have read this work or at least have been exposed to its arguments as he conducted *Quodlibet* IX? Kenneth Pennington records that Hostiensis lectured on the decretals at Paris in the 1230s and further suggests that he wrote a first, now-lost, edition of his commentary on the decretals at that time ("An Earlier Recension of Hostiensis's *Lectura* on the Decretals," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law* 17 [1987]: 77–90, at 81.). He further dates the Oxford recension (the second of three if indeed he wrote one while at Paris), to the years 1254–1265. We know further that the 1275 taxation list from the University booksellers includes an entry for an *Apparatus Hostiensis*; see H. Denifle (*Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, ed. A. Chatelain, vol. 1 [Paris: Ex typis fratrum Delalain, 1899], 648). Hence it is altogether possible that Aquinas would have had access to some form of this commentary (either the Paris version—whether a published text or a *reportatio* of the lectures—or the Oxford text). This conclusion is also endorsed by Torrell, who considers it certain that Aquinas read Hostiensis (*Thomas Aquinas*, 1:134n60): "Henry of Suso, Hostiensis . . . whom Thomas surely read . . ."

⁵⁴ Hostiensis, *Lectura sive Apparatus Domini Hostiensis Super Quinque Decretalium Libros Commentaria*, bk. III, tit. 45 (*De reliquiis*), 1 (*Audivimus*): "Quid si Ecclesia in hac canonizatione erret, quod non est credendum, licet accidere possit, ut patet in eo, quod legitur et notatur infra De sententia excommunicationis, A nobis, [citation]. Dicas quod nihilominus preces in honorem talis bona fide porrectas Deus acceptat, [citation]. Omnia enim in fide Christi purgantur [citation]. Et esto, quod veritas canonizationis deficiat, non tamen deficit fides ipsius, sicut [citations regarding baptism]. Illud etiam non negamus quin cuilibet in secreto liceat aliqui defuncto quem credit sanctam preces porrigere, ut pro ipso ad dominum intercedat: quia et Deus fidem eius attendit. Non tamen licet pro tali officium sollemne facere, vel preces sollemne publice emittere" ([Joannes Schottus, 1512], vol. 2, fol. 185).

we should not *believe* that the Church *has* erred. Moreover we find them using the same language that Aquinas employs to draw this distinction. And Hostiensis, not unlike Aquinas, draws on the fallibility of the Church in rendering judicial sentences to support the thesis.

A second thing that is quite significant is that both of these lawyers anticipate and directly address Cano's argument that it makes no difference whether you pray to a devil or a condemned man—an argument we already saw that Bellarmine weakened considerably when he noted that the false worship would be merely material. For both Innocent and Hostiensis, it perfectly well does make a difference whether you pray to a devil or a condemned man, assuming you pray to the condemned man in good faith. And both of them actually provide a strong argument for why it does matter.

The echo of the decretalists in Aquinas is striking. And I find it difficult to believe that someone could read these passages side by side and conclude, as Donald Prudlo does, that Aquinas is clearly rejecting the decretalists' "tidy canonical solution."⁵⁵ Had Aquinas meant to reject the then-current theory—that canonizations could be in error, though we should not think they were—we would expect him to distinguish himself clearly from that theory, rather than speak in a manner that could be naturally interpreted as being of a piece with the current consensus.

Very briefly, I would like to bolster this contention that Aquinas is in fact adopting the decretalists position by looking at his subsequent commentators. In the course of correcting John of Naples's misinterpretation of Aquinas, St. Antoninus explicitly attributes to Aquinas the belief that the pope might be able to err in such acts as canonizations: "Thomas places the canonization of the saints in a third category of things done by the pope, of which things he says, that although the pope could err [*etsi Papa possit errare*], still it is piously to be believed that the God would not permit His Church to err in this way."⁵⁶ Antoninus here makes explicit the possibility that Aquinas tacitly left standing. No matter how one reads this line, Antoninus is taking Aquinas to be bracketing the question of whether the pope can err, and only addressing what we should believe. In so doing, Antoninus places Aquinas in the decretalist tradition.

In the next century, we find Thomas de Vio Cajetan (d. 1534) also reading Aquinas thus, though he is even more explicit and forceful. In the course of defending indulgences, he draws a parallel between the granting

⁵⁵ Prudlo, *Certain Sainthood*, 129 and 76.

⁵⁶ Latin produced above, see note 48.

of an indulgence and the canonization of a saint.⁵⁷ What he says about the fallibility of canonizations is perfectly clear. First, he notes that for the Church to err in canonization would not amount to a lie or a false teaching, since he says, “for what does not pertain to the faith is not understood to be affirmed and proclaimed except with a grain of salt.”⁵⁸ That is, in canonizations there are two facts at play; one is essential, *de fide*, and the other is not, and only the former is to be taken to be asserted without qualification. This is a development of the point that I consider Aquinas to be making: canonizations are midway between matters of faith and particular matters of fact, in the sense that the judgment that this person is in heaven is a conclusion based on both the promise and demands of the Gospel and the particular fact that this person fulfilled the demands and merited the promise. The Church is only guaranteed not to err concerning the first of these two, because the purpose of the Church’s authority is only to teach the first—the second is purely ancillary to the end of the Church’s teaching office. In putting it thus, Cajetan touches with a needle the error in Aquinas’s second argument *sed contra*. Cajetan continues, asserting without qualification that “a human error can intervene in the canonization of some saint (as S. Thomas says),”⁵⁹ and lest there be any ambiguity, he claims that, “if someone believes that the Roman Pontiff cannot err in

⁵⁷ Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *De indulgentiis in decem capita divisus*, ch. 8, in *Opuscula Omnia Reverend. D. D. Thomae de Vio* (Antwerp, BE: Apud Viduam et haeredes Ioannis Stelsii, 1567), vol. 1, tract. 15, 96. An extended quotation from this passage is produced in Lambertini, *De beatificatione et canonizatione*, bk. I, ch. 43, (p. 196). Lambertini is explicit that Cajetan is adopting the decretalists’ position.

⁵⁸ Cajetan, *De indulgentiis in decem capita divisus*, ch. 8: “Ita quod dato, quod iste canonizatus non esset sanctus, sed damnatus, ecclesiae doctrina aut praedicatio non esset mendax aut falsa: quia hic non pertinentia ad fidem non intelliguntur affirmari, et praedicari nisi cum grano salis, hoc est stantibus communiter paesumptis. Praesumit enim ecclesia cononizationem rite factam, et similiter indulgentiam rite datam: et sic praedicat indulgentias valere quantum sonant” (“taking it as granted, [for the sake of argument,] that this canonized saint is not holy, but damned, the doctrine and pronouncement of the Church would not be false or a lie: for what does not pertain to the faith is not understood to be affirmed and proclaimed except with a grain of salt, that is, with the things commonly presumed in place. For the Church presumes that the canonization has been duly carried out, and likewise that the indulgence has been duly granted: and therefore that the indulgence really is as good as it sounds”); also cited in Lambertini, *De Beatificatione et Canonizatione*, 196.

⁵⁹ Cajetan, *De indulgentiis in decem capita divisus*, ch. 8: “Sed sicut potest intervenire error humanus in canonizatione alicuius Sancti (ut san. Tho. dicit) ita potest intervenire error humanus in collatione indulgentiae.”

these particular acts . . . he also believes the pontiff is not human.”⁶⁰

What of the possibility of our detecting errors in such judgments? He ruled this out at the beginning of the passage: “By law the presumption is in favor of the judge, unless there is a manifest error.”⁶¹ But he later warns that one should not try to determine in which cases there is such an error “unless one wishes to be wrong.”⁶² Cajetan, like the decretalists, is perfectly clear that the Church *could* err in canonization.⁶³ Yet he also holds that we should not think the Church has erred in any particular case—the presumption is always given to the judge unless an error is manifest, and we are not in a position to judge the Church. But notice not just that he adopts the decretalists’ position, but that he attributes it to Aquinas. While Cajetan certainly is not an infallible interpreter of Aquinas, neither is he a stranger to Aquinas’s thought. If he thought Aquinas held the decretalists’ position, it should, I suggest, give pause to anyone who insists that Aquinas is manifestly rejecting it.

After a consideration of historical context combined with careful analysis of their actual texts (setting aside anachronistic categories and assumptions), it is, I would argue, no great stretch to place Innocent IV, Hostiensis, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Antoninus, and Cajetan on the same line, defending essentially the same attitude toward the authority of canonizations. It may, then, have been only through a series of errors that Aquinas came to be regarded as the *dux omnium qui pugnant pro summi Pontifici infallibilitate*. But as fascinating as the possibility may be that

⁶⁰ Cajetan, *De indulgentiis in decem capita divisus*, ch. 8: “Si quis autem putet Rom. pontif. non posse errare in istis particularibus actionibus (quales sunt dispensationes bonorum, tam temporalium quam spiritualium ecclesiae) putet quoque ipsum non esse hominem.” While this line is explicitly referring to the granting of indulgences, the point of the whole passage is that indulgences and canonizations are alike in being open to error.

⁶¹ Cajetan, *De indulgentiis in decem capita divisus*, ch. 8: “Praesumitur enim de iure pro iudice semper, nisi manifeste appareat error, et supponens ex causa legitima datam tantam indulgentiam, veritatem praedicat: sicut absque falsitate praedicat talem sanctum, supponens illum [esse?] canonizatum.”

⁶² Cajetan, *De indulgentiis in decem capita divisus*, ch. 8: “ideo noli velle indicare an ista; vel illa causa posita in indulgentia, sit sufficiens, si non vis errare.” Again, while the line is explicitly speaking of indulgences, none the less the force of the passage is precisely likening them to canonizations in this respect.

⁶³ Lambertini forthrightly acknowledges that Cajetan is adopting their position (*De beatificatione et canonizatione*, 196). Hence Prudlo is simply wrong to assert that no one after the fourteenth century held the decretalists’ position (*Certain Sainthood*, 177). Further, as noted earlier, this decretalist position also seems to have survived into the seventeenth century among the lawyers.

Aquinas was adopting the decretalists' position, ultimately what matters is not what Aquinas believed, but what his oft-cited arguments actually prove. And on that question I am quite confident: they prove something less than simple infallibility.

Conclusions

Before we conclude, we must ask, why the incongruous discrepancy between fact and belief proposed by the decretalists, Cajetan, and, I would argue also, both Bonaventure and Aquinas? If the Church might well err, why should we not sometimes believe she has? Two things need to be noted.

First, briefly consider the four remaining arguments for the infallibility of canonizations that have not been dispensed with. The first is that the veneration of the saints is a certain profession of faith. We noted already that the faith the Church is guarded from error in teaching is the faith that God rewards with eternal glory those who respond appropriately to the Gospel. While that faith would be implicitly denied if the Church proposed as a saint one whose life was known not to have conformed to the Gospel's call to holiness, it is not compromised if, through invincible ignorance, the Church makes an error of fact in determining who so responded, just as my faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is not compromised if I make a factual error about whether the host before me now has been duly consecrated, although it would be compromised if I offered *latría* to a host I knew not to be consecrated.

Second, if we consider Aquinas's argument from the first *sed contra*, namely, that if the Church could err in canonization she might lead people into moral error by proposing a sinner as a saint, it should be noted, again, that scandal is given, and moral confusion arises, only if the sin is known, as is clear in the text itself. The argument, by its own force, cannot preclude the possibility either of a hidden sin or that the person is not in heaven because he never existed. The same is also true of Bonaventure's defense of the *legenda* as worthy moral examples.

Third if we consider Cano's argument from the practice of the Church, namely, that if we could doubt the status of the saint, we could reject the universal practice of the Church in venerating the saints, or if we consider Bellarmine's more subtle version of the argument that we could find ourselves in a crisis of conscience (bound by the Church's authority to honor one as a saint whom we believe positively unworthy of such veneration), then we may note that the impossibilities follow only if we have a sound reason to doubt the Church's judgment. Indeed Bellarmine's conclusion is explicitly *not* that the saint is in fact in heaven, but that

one is *not permitted to doubt* that the saint should be venerated—which is nothing else than the view of the decretalists and is exactly what I am suggesting was Aquinas's view.

Finally, if we consider Cano's argument that it makes no difference whether one venerate a demon or a condemned soul, this argument was anticipated and refuted by the decretalists: it makes no difference if the veneration of a condemned man was offered knowingly. Venerating a condemned soul out of invincible ignorance is no formal sin, and it causes no irreparable harm.

Each of these is a strong argument and each proceeds as a *reductio ad absurdum*. Yet the absurdities they leverage are all avoided if the Church can never propose as a saint one who lived and died in a way that was patently not an appropriate response to the Gospel's call to holiness. *That* is the conclusion supported by the arguments. None of these absurdities follows if the one who is canonized is excluded from glory because of some hidden, secret fault, nor do they follow if the person in question is purely legendary.

The second thing that must be noted to explain the disparity between fact and belief is that, if the above arguments successfully prove that the Church could not propose a person whose life patently did not merit heaven, then it follows that the faithful will never have an objectively sound reason to call a canonization into question; as Cajetan pointed out, the competent authority to judge receives the benefit of the doubt, unless an error is manifest (a point wholly in line with Bonaventure's argument that we accuse the Church of playing the fool if we deny that miracles are trustworthy indications of holiness). But the one thing that the arguments we have considered validly concluded was precisely that there could never be a manifest error in canonizations. Hence, it will necessarily be rash, temerarious, and presumptuous for a member of the Church to deny the sanctity of a canonized saint. As Cajetan noted, one should not try to find an error in such judgment, unless one wishes to be wrong.

These last two points may also shed light on Aquinas's treatment of the subject, and in particular his reply to the second objection. If Aquinas is defending the decretalists' consensus, then his assertion of providential assistance should be read (in light of the argument in the corpus) as a qualified assistance that prevents the Church from falling into a particular sort of error, namely, the error of proposing as a saint one whose life is marred by grave and known moral fault, thereby falsifying the Gospel and leading the faithful into error in matters necessary for salvation. So read, his unique contribution to this tradition would be, for the first time, offering an explanation for why (as the decretalists held) the faithful are never to

reject a saint, even though the canonization could have been wrong. That was, we might note, all that the mendicants needed to prove to defend their orders.

Hence I propose two things: First, that the Church does possess a real sort of divinely guaranteed infallibility in canonizations; this is not however the infallibility theologians since Lambertini typically assign canonizations. According to the conclusion I believe we can reach with certitude, the faithful can be sure that the Church will never impose on the whole Church the cult of one whose life is manifestly not in conformity with the call of the Gospel—said otherwise, it is guaranteed that the saints led lives worthy of veneration and imitation insofar as we know them.⁶⁴ Consequently, the Church cannot err in canonization insofar as the Church, in proposing a saint as a model of Christian virtue, thereby indirectly teaches concerning morals, which the Church is guaranteed to teach infallibly. But this infallibility, of itself, does not guarantee that each canonized saint is ultimately in heaven, or actually died in a state of grace, or even that he existed. It guarantees only that the person's life as it is known is worthy of emulation and glory, leaving intact the fact that our knowledge of such things is necessarily limited and only probable. The Church's determinations of such matters, which are not of themselves *de fide* or *de necessariis ad salutem*, are to be taken *cum grano salis*, while only those implicit assertions that touch on what is necessary for salvation are guaranteed to be inerrant. Canonizations, so understood, are like liturgical norms which, though not infallible, are nonetheless guaranteed not to contradict the faith. The likeness to liturgical norms is fitting given that a canonization is in fact a form of liturgical norm determining whom the Church venerates.⁶⁵

Second and consequently, although one may—I think—hold that the Church *could* err in canonizing, one may not hold that the Church *has* erred in any given canonization without thereby incurring the censure

⁶⁴ It is worth noting the congruity between this conclusion and the reserved claim of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §828: “By canonizing some of the faithful, i.e., by solemnly proclaiming that they practiced heroic virtue and lived in fidelity to God's grace, the Church recognizes the power of the Spirit of holiness within her and sustains the hope of believers by proposing the saints to them as models and intercessors.”

⁶⁵ Indeed, Muratori understood canonizations as disciplinary rather than doctrinal acts: “Disciplinae leges eorum cultum ita indicere possunt, et ad universam Ecclesiam extendere, ut non solum pium ac laudabile sit, huiusmodi Sanctos invocare, et sibi adsciscere patronos apud Deum, sed etiam impietatem sapiat eorum cultum improbare, atque contemnere” (*De ingeniorum moderatione*, bk. I, ch. 17 [p. 76]).

of temerity. One will never have an objectively sound reason to deny the sanctity of any particular saint.

My claim, then, is that the arguments from the theological tradition used to defend the absolute infallibility of canonizations are insufficient to establish such a guarantee.⁶⁶ In short, I hold that it is no more than a mistaken, if pious, opinion that canonizations are infallible declarations that the saint is in heaven, and therefore, that to insist that they are infallible is to open the faith to ridicule and to erect a very real and unnecessary barrier to true Christian unity. But of course, I submit to the Church's determination of the matter if and when it is given.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Indeed I am not sure that many of the historical authors advancing them understood themselves to be defending infallibility in the modern theological sense of the term. I cannot read Bellarmine's arguments, with as many unambiguous qualifications as he provides, and conclude that he means to ascribe to canonizations the sort of infallibility that was defined at Vatican I. Aside from what has already been treated, note the fourth argument that Bellarmine provides: If we do not doubt the existence of Pompey and Caesar (though attested to only by fallible historians) why would we not believe in the sanctity of the saints when it is attested through miracles? Although "miracula magna, et diligenter examinata, faciunt rem evidentem credibilem" ("great and diligently examined miracles make a thing evidently credible") (*De sanctorum beatitudine*, ch. 9), such evident credibility obviously does not amount to a divinely revealed guarantee of magisterial infallibility, and Bellarmine certainly realized this. One might do well here to note the case of Augustus Triumphus, who explicitly defends the inerrancy of the Church in canonization, and who was (until Lambertini) commonly cited in defense of the infallibility of canonizations. While he said the pope "non errat," he first qualified, "secundum praesentem justitiam," speaking of which human justice he says it, "potest falli et fallere," which amounts to saying the pope cannot lie (though he can err)—or as Lambertini summarizes, the pope may "materialiter mentiatur" (see Augustinus Triumphus, *De potestate ecclesiae*, q. 14, a. 4, as well as Lambertini *De Beatificatione et De Canonizatione*, bk. I, ch. 43, no. 3 [p. 196–97]). Even as recently as 1907, Beccari, in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, puzzlingly writes: "Theologians generally agree as to the fact of papal infallibility in this matter of canonization, but disagree as to the quality of certitude due to a papal decree in such matter. . . . [The majority hold] such a pronouncement to be theologically certain, not being of Divine Faith as its purport has not been immediately revealed, nor of ecclesiastical Faith as having thus far not been defined by the Church" (2:367). How can a papal decree be infallible while falling under neither divine nor ecclesiastical faith? What sense is there in calling an infallible decree merely *certa*? While I confess I may be missing some subtlety, it seems to me that either there is at least an implicit divine guarantee that formal canonizations be true (in which case the individual's sanctity and beatitude will be *de fide ecclesiastica*) or there is no such guarantee (and in that case there is no theological basis for claiming that the teaching is simply infallible).

⁶⁷ It may be worth here noting that in their "Doctrinal Commentary on the Conclud-

In discussions of God's guarantees to the Church, the onus falls to those defending some guarantee to show either that it is explicit in revelation or that it is necessary for the Church to carry out her divine mission. To the first, Christ made no explicit promise that the Church can discern without error who is in heaven. To the second, the purpose of the visible Church is to make saints of the living not of the dead.⁶⁸ N.V.

ing formula of the *Professio fidei*" (issued concurrently with John Paul II's *Ad Tuendam Fidem*), Joseph Ratzinger and Tarcisio Bertone include the canonizations of saints as an example of a truth "connected to revelation by historical necessity" and therefore "to be held definitively" (no. 13). Dulles notes (*Magisterium*, 91, esp. note 12) that presumably the authors did not mean to settle current controversies in proposing this as an example, and he quotes Ratzinger's later clarification: "The listing of some doctrinal examples as examples does not grant them any other weight than what they had before" (from Ratzinger, "Stellungnahme," *Stimmen der Zeit* 217 [1999]: 168–71). See also Dulles, *Magisterium*, 86n7, where Dulles discusses the authority of this commentary, noting that "it does not emanate from the congregation as such" and yet it was "composed by the Congregation as a whole and approved by the cardinals in assembly and also by the pope."

- ⁶⁸ Which raises a line of argument we do not have space to follow, namely, the historical incongruities. If (as, e.g., Suarez claims) the canonization of saints is "re maxime necessaria Ecclesiae," how did the Church manage to struggle on for the first millenium with no formally canonized saints? As Muratori argued: "Quomodo vero dicamus necessarium hominibus, fidei et Ecclesiae esse cultum novi alicuius sancti, fidemque de illius beatitudine coelesti? *Utile* est, non necessarium ista habere, ista scire. Innumerae aliae veritates sunt, quas novisse in utilitatem Christianorum cederet, et illas tamen certo decernere numquam sibi tribuit aut tribuere potest Ecclesia" ("But how do we say that the cult of some new saint and the faith in his heavenly beatitude are necessary for men, for the faith, and for the Church? To have such things—to know such things—is *useful*, not necessary. There are innumerable other truths that it would be useful for Christians to know, and yet the Church never grants to herself, nor could she grant to herself, [the task and ability] to discern them with certainty") (*De ingeniorum moderatione*, bk. I, ch. 17 [p. 77]). See also Schenk, *Die Unfehlbarkeit*, 60–61. On the other hand, if the very universality of the cult in the Church is what forms the basis of the guarantee (as the argument from the Church's practice seems to suppose), would not those saints honored in the Church's calendar without formal canonization be just as certainly saints? And yet we have numerous cases of universally venerated saints being removed from the calendar because of every sort of historical uncertainty (e.g., St. Sabina or the very Alexius whose example was cited and defended by Bonaventure; see in particular *Calendarium Romanum: Ex Decreto Sacrosancti Oecumenici concilii Vaticani II Instauratum Auctoritate Pauli PP. VI Promulgatum* [Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1969], 68–70) or of widely venerated saints whose cult was suppressed because of new historical knowledge of the individual (Barlaam and Josephat) or a reevaluation of the previously established facts (St. Philomena). I would like to thank Eric J. DeMeuse, for his numerous helpful comments on this paper, and William H. Marshner.