

THE COMMUNITY OF FRIENDS OF
GOD:
COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AND THE
CONSTRUCTION OF AN INCLUSIVE
THEOLOGY OF SAINTS

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Abstract

Lawrence Cunningham, a Catholic theologian, appraises the study of the saints as a neglected element in the Christian tradition, even within the Roman Catholic tradition where the veneration of the saints is one of its distinctive features, and there is an elaborate system to canonize saints. Cunningham wrote his critique in 1980, and yet its validity remains true even today. Although the study of the saints is still marginal in Christian theology, there are some notable efforts dedicated to rethinking the theology of saints. This dissertation, which corresponds to those efforts, deals with one question that emerges from today's multi-faith context: "Is it possible for Christians to acknowledge individuals of non-Christian religious traditions as saints?" To give an affirmative answer to the question, this dissertation project proposes an inclusive theology of saints that includes non-Christian saintly figures. Assuming a confessional stance in the method of comparative theology, the primary purpose of this project is to enrich the Christian systematic theological discourse of saints and sainthood through learning from other traditions in this case Islam.

Saints in Islam are called the "friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*; sing. *walī Allāh*). The term is based on a Quranic verse, "Verily, the Friends of God have no fear nor sorrow" (10:62). Another textual ground for the saints in Islam is the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (pl. *ahādīth*; sing. *hadīth*). One famous *hadīth* related to the saints states that, "When they

are seen, God is remembered.” In this dissertation, I compare the notion of sainthood and saints from Christian perspectives with Islam, particularly with Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *walāya*.

As a comparative theology work, I will describe first the discourse of saint and sainthood in each religious tradition, i.e., Christianity and Islam, prior to doing the actual comparison. Chapters 1 to 4 serve this endeavor. Chapter 1 and 2 explore the discourse from Catholic and Protestant perspectives. I will focus on several Catholic theologians who developed their theologies of saints during and after the Second Vatican Council, i.e., Karl Rahner, Jean-Luc Marion, and Elizabeth Johnson. Besides, I will also draw insights from two prominent Protestant theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich. Chapter 3 introduces the topic of saints and sainthood in Islam from a phenomenological, textual, and theological perspective. Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of the *walāya* occupies the whole chapter 4. It is important to note that the chapter does not describe Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought exhaustively because I have already selected certain materials for the comparison.

The comparison yields three theological constructs as features of an inclusive theology of saints: saints as manifestations and revealers of God’s self-communication, the hiddenness of saints, and saints as companions. Each of these theological constructs will be explored in chapters 5 to 7. These theological constructs correspond to the proposed metaphor of the community of friends of God that could enrich the current Christian symbol of the communion of saints. Last, chapter 8 functions as an excursion to underline the practical side of my proposal of an inclusive theology of saints. I will provide two contemporary cases of Muslim-Christian cross veneration of saints to connect the more theoretical aspects of this dissertation with the living reality of people.

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INTRODUCTION

Veneration of the saints is a living practice in Christianity, although there are different opinions among Christian denominations about its validity. Some churches in the Protestant stream may raise objections to the practice of veneration of saints, and a few denominations in Protestantism keep the ancient practice. Despite today's secular context, veneration of the saints is still part and parcel of Christian practices around the world. This dissertation aims to shed new light on the Christian theology of saints through comparison with the Islamic theology of the "friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*).

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, I will argue that it is possible to broaden the Christian concept of sainthood to include Muslim saints (and by extension also saints of other traditions). To make this argument, I will use the comparative method, drawing inspiration from the Muslim understanding of sainthood, which, I argue, is compatible with and complementary to Karl Rahner's, Jean-Luc Marion's, and Elizabeth Johnson's theologies of the saint. The possibility of an inclusive theology of the saint, in itself, requires a theology of religions that recognizes elements of truth and revelation in Islam. Particularly, I will focus on Ibn 'Arabī's notion of *walāya* as the main partner of this comparison. Ibn Arabī is an influential thinker in Sunni Islamic spirituality and theology, and his works have permeated Muslim communities and continue to inspire them up to the present time.

A. Background

The topic of this dissertation began with a personal reason. As a Protestant from Indonesia, I grew up in a Christian environment that is different from, perhaps even apologetic toward, Catholicism. One of the contentious points was the theology of saints. Protestants are not supposed to venerate saints, including Mother Mary, like Catholics, because it might compromise Jesus Christ's role as the sole mediator. Moreover, the practice is construed as a form of idolatry that is highly offensive to God. I was taught that all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord are saints, and we are all part of the communion of saints. Though that apologetic tendency decreased after I went to theological training in a mainstream Protestant seminary that cultivated a more ecumenical vision, the questions regarding saints remained contentious ones. One time, out of curiosity, I asked a question to a Roman Catholic professor who was teaching my class: "Why do Catholics pray to dead people?" He then replied: "Is it not better for people to pray than not praying at all? At least they communicate with God and cultivate their spirituality."

After I finished my theological education in Indonesia, I went to a graduate program in the United States with a focus on Islamic studies. During this period, I encountered Sufism and the Islamic practice of veneration of saints. As a phenomenon, there are many similarities between the Catholic practice of veneration of saints and its Islamic counterpart. By learning more about the Islamic ideas of saints, along with some insights bridged during my undergraduate training, I managed to understand better the Catholic approach and ways in which I, as a Protestant, could learn from those two perspectives on saints.

The encounter with research conducted by A. Bagus Laksana, an Indonesian Jesuit, on Muslim and Catholic pilgrimage practices in Java, Indonesia, inspired me to write on

this dissertation topic.¹ I was captivated by his findings related to the phenomena of cross-veneration between Muslims and Catholics at several Indonesian shrines of saints. At that point, I was fascinated with the fact that Christian saints could draw the attention of Muslims and vice versa. Afterward, my colleague Michael VanZandt-Collins presented a research paper at the Comparative Theology Colloquium in our department that increased my interest in the phenomena of Muslim-Christian cross-veneration to saints.² In that paper, he explored the case of Frans van der Lugt, a Jesuit priest and humanitarian worker, who was killed in Syria in 2014. After his death, local Muslims and Christians remembered him and his vision in different ways, including visiting his tomb at the local Jesuit residence.³

As a theologian, I am interested in these phenomena of cross-veneration and the insights that could bring to Christian theology of saint and sainthood. Rather than dismissing those phenomena as syncretistic practices or popular religion, I prefer to explore theological rationales that help to illuminate Christian understanding of the practice. Such an attempt, I believe, will be useful in enriching the current Christian theology of saints in the contemporary context of the pluralistic world. Those phenomena generate a question: “Is it possible for Christians to acknowledge individuals of other traditions as saints?” To

¹ Albertus Bagus Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations Through Java* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2014). The book is based on his Boston College Ph.D. dissertation.

² He presented the paper at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Michael VanZandt-Collins, “Spiritual Space and Christian Witness in Syria: The Case of Frans van der Lugt, SJ.,” paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, GA, November 21-24, 2015. See also Michael VanZandt-Collins, “Toward Witnessing the Other: Syria, Islam and Frans van der Lugt,” *Religions* Vol. 11, No. 4 (2020): 174.

³ I will elaborate the case of Father Frans in chapter 8.

give an affirmation to the question, the goal of this dissertation is to construct an inclusive theology of saints.

B. Reconfiguring Saints and Sainthood: The Quest for an Inclusive Christian Theology of the Saints

When I did my initial research regarding the topic of theology of saints and the possibility of widening its scope to include non-Christian people, I encountered Lawrence Cunningham's study of saints. His study attempts to reformulate the Christian understanding of sainthood so that it can recognize people of different religions as saintly figures.⁴ Conscious to the decline of the practice of veneration of saints in modern times, especially in the West, he intends to keep alive the Christian tradition of saints. In this regard, Cunningham appraises the study of the saints as a neglected element in the Christian tradition, even within the Catholic tradition, where the veneration of the saints is one of its distinctive features.⁵ The Catholic tradition and Catholic theologians do have a more elaborate theology of the saints than their Protestant co-religionists. The Roman Catholic Church also has a clear set of rules regarding the canonization process in deciding who the saints are. Nevertheless, Cunningham considers all those as inadequate and demands a reexamination of the Christian theology of saints to make it more relevant to contemporary circumstances. He regards the traditional system of canonizing saints in the Roman Catholic Church as one of those problems.⁶

⁴ Lawrence Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980).

⁵ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 2.

⁶ I will explore his criticism of the Catholic procedure of canonization and his proposals in chapter 8. See also Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, chapter 2.

Cunningham wrote his critique in 1980, and yet its validity remains pertinent even today. Although the study of the saints is still marginal in Christian theology, there are some notable recent efforts dedicated to rethinking the theology of saints.⁷ Elizabeth Johnson, a prominent Catholic theologian, has written extensively on the issue of the communion of saints.⁸ An even more recent effort from a Catholic perspective is the sixty-sixth Annual Convention of Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA), held in 2011 with its theme “All the Saints.”⁹ Stephen R. Haynes offers another thought-provoking study of the saints on the phenomenon of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as a Protestant saint.¹⁰ Although Haynes’s book does not primarily employ a theological framework, it is valuable for my current project because it demonstrates how some contemporary Protestants, in their own fashion, do venerate saintly figures from their tradition.

⁷ It seems that scholars of religious studies, in contrast to Christian theologians, are more enthusiastic in pursuing the topic of sainthood. There are several serious studies that approach the phenomena of the veneration of the saints from various vantage points, including from multi-religious perspectives. See Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); another important work following Brown on this topic is the book edited by Paul Antony Hayward and James Howard-Johnston entitled *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Aviad M. Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); John Stratton Hawley, ed., *Saints and Virtues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Richard Kieckhefer and George Doherty Bond, eds., *Sainthood Its Manifestations in World Religions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Robert C. Neville, *Soldier, Sage, Saint* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1978); Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner eds., *Saints: Faith without Borders* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Colby Dickinson, ed., *The Postmodern Saints of France: Refiguring “the Holy” in Contemporary French Philosophy* (London: T&T Clark, 2013); Angie Heo, *The Political Lives of Saints: Christian-Muslim Mediation in Egypt* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018).

⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 1998). For Johnson’s elaboration on Mary, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2009).

⁹ Proceedings of 66th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America “All the Saints,” June 9-12, 2011, <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/issue/view/574>, accessed January 3, 2020.

¹⁰ Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

There are several ways of approaching the theology of the saints. One is by exploring ecclesiology, i.e., by rethinking the meaning of the church as the “Communion of Saints” (*Communio Sanctorum*). Some scholars have taken this approach, including Maureen A. Tilley,¹¹ Paul Lakeland,¹² and Christine Firer Hinze.¹³ Another way is to focus on the personhood of the saint. Elizabeth Johnson’s project shows this by focusing partially on personhood in the theology of saints by incorporating the notion of women’s practice of memory to reconstruct the meaning of the communion of saints.¹⁴ Haynes’ project also can be included as an example of the second way, but his approach adopts a religious studies perspective rather than a theological one.

Given how few theologians have written on the subject of sainthood, I believe there is a pressing need for Christian theology to pursue the rethinking of the theology of saints. More specifically, it is necessary to develop an inclusive framework for the theology of saints as the question related to non-Christian saintly figures has become an obvious blind spot for most literature associated with Christian theology of the saints. The essence of Cunningham’s project is how to approach the notion of sainthood more inclusively so that the saints could become meaningful to contemporary people, including Christians, non-Christians, and even non-religious people. Even though he limits his work inside Christian

¹¹ Maureen A. Tilley, “One Wholly Catholic: Saints and Sanctity in the Post-Apostolic Church,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 66 (2013), <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/5019>, accessed January 3, 2020.

¹² Paul Lakeland, “‘I Want To Be In That Number:’ Desire, Inclusivity, and the Church,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 66 (2013), <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/5020>, accessed January 3, 2020.

¹³ Christine Firer Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through: Ethics, Solidarity, and the Saints,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 66 (2013), <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ctsa/article/view/5022>, accessed January 3, 2020.

¹⁴ See Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, chapter 8 and 9.

boundaries, he hints at the importance of the discussion of the saints in the other religious traditions.¹⁵

One of the theological grounds for such a daring proposal is the Vatican Council II document *Lumen Gentium*. Here, the Council affirms the possibility of sanctity outside the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁶ Therefore, there is room for rethinking the theology of the saints from the perspective of the popular practice and observance (*vox populi*), not only from the standpoint of official canonization. As Cunningham has formulated, saints are those who lived paradigmatic lives and “...taught useful new ways of incarnating the Christian message into real life.”¹⁷ Here he reminds theologians and church officials to take what people have said about the saints seriously because those reports are the witness of the saints’ lives and works that reflect God’s grace.¹⁸ In the end, he redefines a saint as, “*a person so grasped by a religious vision that it becomes central to his or her life in a way that radically changes the person and leads others to glimpse the value of that vision.*”¹⁹

This dissertation continues the project of constructing an inclusive theology of saints by elucidating its theological reasoning from a Christian perspective. The emphasis on theological formulation makes the present study differ from Cunningham’s as I employ the method of comparative theology to draw insights on saints and sainthood not only from Christian perspectives but also from another religious tradition.

¹⁵ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 4.

¹⁶ Vatican Council II document *Lumen Gentium* no. 50 (1964). Onwards will be cited as *LG*. Full English text is available online in http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, accessed December 29, 2019.

¹⁷ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 55.

¹⁸ See chapter 8 section B.

¹⁹ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 65. Italics from Cunningham

C. **Disciplinary Framework: Comparative Systematic Theology**

Comparative Theology offers an almost limitless number of possible themes in comparing religious traditions. However, it is more practical to focus on one religious tradition outside one's own as a partner of conversation to make a rigorous and more focused comparison. Accordingly, I will limit this comparison to only one religious tradition outside Christianity, namely Islam. The choice to restrict this comparison is in accord with Francis X. Clooney's suggestion of limiting the scope to conduct a more in-depth comparison.²⁰

There is no inherent restriction on the methodology used in Comparative Theology. Instead, it enables the use of a wide variety of methods. Nevertheless, as Catherine Cornille has observed, there is internal diversity in terms of types of comparative theology, ranging from confessional, meta-confessional, and inter-confessional.²¹ According to Cornille, the confessional approach "starts from the truth of a particular revelation which it seeks to elucidate through dialogue with another religion,"²² as opposed to meta-confessional one which "seeks to attain to a deeper truth behind the various religious expressions."²³ Clooney seems to choose the confessional approach since he defines comparative theology as "acts of faiths seeking understanding, which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but

²⁰ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 67-68.

²¹ Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," paper presented at the conference "Methods and Criteria for Comparative Theology" University of Paderborn, Germany, 8-10th August 2014, 18. See also Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), chapter 1.

²² Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," 4.

²³ Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," 4.

which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions.”²⁴ The definition implies that, first, comparative theology is an act of faith. Next, it demonstrates the openness to learn *from*, not only *about*, and the willingness to rearticulate one’s own faith in the light of the learning from the other faith traditions. In this dissertation, I opt for the confessional approach as my standpoint in the comparison between Muslim and Christian theologies of saints and sainthood.

The differences in determining who one’s audience is will always influence one’s approach.²⁵ As a Protestant Christian from Indonesia, I do not regard Comparative Theology as a solely academic inquiry, but also as a means to contribute and to influence society at large and, particularly the Christian community. To construct an inclusive theology of the saints that applies to contemporary Christian communities, maintaining an open and accountable confessional standpoint is essential. Moreover, using a faith-based approach is vital to develop a better Muslim-Christian relationship, not only in Indonesia but also in the rest of the world.

On the other hand, the commitment of a comparative theologian to utilize another religious tradition to enrich and transform his or her own religious tradition might be interpreted as a hegemonic gesture of “domestication.”²⁶ However, as noted by Cornille, such commitment emphasizes the epistemological realism and humility of the comparative theologian.²⁷ Rather than domestication, I respect the option to focus on Islam and learning

²⁴ Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 10. Catherine Cornille also prefers confessional approach. Catherine Cornille, “The Confessional Nature of Comparative Theology,” in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2014): 9-17.

²⁵ Cornille, “The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology,” 5.

²⁶ Cornille, “The Confessional Nature of Comparative Theology,” 13-14.

²⁷ Cornille, “The Confessional Nature of Comparative Theology,” 14.

from Muslim thoughts and practices that could enrich the understanding of my religious tradition as an act of humility and openness.

As I aim to make a comparison of theological concepts of sainthood from Christian and Muslim perspectives, it is crucial to limit the study. In this dissertation, I will focus on several Catholic theologians who developed their theologies of saints during and after the Second Vatican Council, i.e., Karl Rahner, Jean-Luc Marion, and Elizabeth Johnson, as well as on Ibn Arabī's highly influential conception of sainthood (*walāya*) in Islam. Besides, I will also draw insights from two prominent Protestant theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich. Throughout these chapters, I will not only explore similarities and differences between the two religious traditions' theological notions of sainthood but also seek new theological constructs for an inclusive theology of saints from a Christian perspective.²⁸ Therefore, the method of this dissertation is comparative systematic theology.²⁹ At the end of the comparison, the construction of an inclusive theology of saints will open the possibility of recognizing sainthood beyond the boundary of the Christian religious tradition. The comparison between those theologians will produce three theological constructs as features of a more inclusive theology of saints. They are (1) saints as manifestations and revealers of God's self-communication, (2) the hiddenness of saints, and (3) saints as companions. Each of these theological constructs will be explored in a separate chapter.

²⁸ An example of another comparative theology project on saints from a Muslim-Christian perspective, F. Dominic Longo wrote a study on saints and "spiritual grammar" from a comparative theology perspective by comparing Qushayrī and Jean Gerson. See F. Dominic Longo, *Spiritual Grammar: Genre and the Saintly Subject in Islam and Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

²⁹ For examples of comparative systematic theology, see Michelle Voss Roberts, ed., *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

Cornille describes six possible types of learning in comparative theology that correspond primarily to the confessional approach: intensification, rectification, recovery, reinterpretation, appropriation, and reaffirmation.³⁰ Intensification is arguably the most common type of learning in which a comparative theologian puts together similar texts or teachings of different religious traditions for reinforcing their meaning and truth.³¹ Rectification involves “the restoration of proper understanding of the other, and thus a new understanding of one’s tradition concerning the other.”³² The third type of learning, recovery, displays how the encounter with the other’s teachings and practices might bring insights to look at one’s religious tradition, including the forgotten, neglected, or marginalized aspects, and to motivate the recovery of those aspects.³³ Reinterpretation seeks to reinterpret one tradition through categories of another tradition. This type of learning is similar to the process of translation and inculturation where concepts from one tradition are transferred into a new cultural or religious context but comparative theology attempts to preserve “as much as possible the original meaning of symbols and categories and by reinterpreting one’s own religion in terms of the other.”³⁴ As the fifth type of learning, appropriation pursues the integration of aspects of the other tradition, such as symbols, texts, and practices, as elements for one’s own tradition.³⁵ The last type of learning is reaffirmation, where a comparative theologian, after the comparison, reaffirms the truths of his or her tradition. Cornille highlights that this type is not merely upholding

³⁰ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, chapter 4.

³¹ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 116.

³² Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 121.

³³ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 124.

³⁴ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 129.

³⁵ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 134.

the truth of one's tradition, because it comprises "a new focus on certain beliefs or practices one would not wish to lose or compromise in the process of engaging the religious other or a reassessment in which one's self-understanding is somewhat changed through exposure to other religious system and possibilities."³⁶ The three theological constructs presented in this dissertation will demonstrate some of these types of learning in comparative theology.

D. Limits and Further Study

This dissertation project intends to propose an inclusive theology of saints that could recognize the sanctity of non-Christian saintly figures. Assuming a confessional stance in the method of comparative theology, the primary purpose is to enrich the Christian systematic theological discourse of saints and sainthood through learning from the other tradition. Because I needed to mind the space, I decided to make some limitations in this dissertation. Firstly, I limit the discussion within Christianity by focusing only on the Roman Catholic and certain mainstream Protestant traditions. It means that I overlook the Orthodox and Anglican/Episcopal traditions despite their rich tradition of saints. Secondly, I limited my study of Islam to the Sunni and Sufi tradition by choosing Ibn 'Arabī as the main interlocutor and excluded Shi'ism almost entirely. Thirdly, since it is not possible to cover all of Ibn 'Arabī's rich elaboration of the topic of *walāya* throughout his corpus, I limit my discussion to several themes that correspond to these three theological constructs and a few of his most important writings.

³⁶ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 137-138.

For the next project related to the topic of theology of saints, I plan to incorporate the Orthodox and Anglican/Episcopal tradition of saints and sainthood to demonstrate how my proposal for an inclusive theology of saints fits in with the broader Christian tradition. Moreover, the tradition of saints from the Shi'ī tradition should become part of the next project, especially on the significant relations between martyrdom and commemorative devotions to the Imams and other holy figures.

E. Structure

I divide the dissertation into four parts that together comprise eight chapters. The first and second parts function as an introduction to the topic of saints and sainthood in Christianity (part one) and Islam (part two), in two chapters each. Chapter 1 describes the Catholic approach to saints and briefly takes up the three recent Catholic theologians' thoughts of saints and sainthood. Chapter 2 elaborates on the Protestant Reformers' criticism of the Catholic approach to saints and sainthood in their time, as well as the increasing interest on saints in liturgy among mainstream Protestant churches in the United States, concluding with Bonhoeffer's and Tillich's theology of saints. Chapter 3 introduces readers to the Islamic view of the "Friends of God" (*awliyā' Allāh*; sing. *walī*), a relative term for saints in Islam, from a phenomenological, textual, and theological perspective. Chapter 4 then elucidates Ibn 'Arabī's notion of *walāya* as the main comparative source for this study.

The third part comprises three chapters in which the three new theological constructs will be explained. Drawing insights from the universality of *walāya*, chapter 5 deals with Rahner's theology of saints concerning his concept of grace as God's self-

communication, and its implication for non-Christian people. Chapter 6 compares Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of the *malāmiyya*, one of his technical terms related to the types of saints, and Jean-Luc Marion’s account of sainthood guided by the idea of hiddenness. Chapter 7 probes the third theological construct, i.e., saints as companions, and how the companionship paradigm transforms both Christian understanding of saints and sainthood and Christian practices pertaining to them.

After delineating these three theological constructs as features of an inclusive theology of saints, chapter 8, as the only chapter in the fourth part, illustrates the practical side of such a proposal. First, I employ Cunningham’s idea of restoring the *vox populi* approach to saints and identify how it could enrich the current Christian practices related to saints, especially to the recognition of non-Christian saintly figures. Second, I provide two contemporary cases of Muslim-Christian cross veneration of a saint to connect the more theoretical aspects of this dissertation with the living reality of people. Last is the reflection on how the venture of constructing an inclusive theology of saints through comparison with Islam helps the redefinition of saints from a Christian perspective and some practical ideas to integrate the memory of non-Christian saints into Christian practices.

PART I

CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF SAINTS

CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY CATHOLIC DISCOURSE ON THEOLOGY OF SAINTS

There are numerous personal narratives of people who invoke or venerate saint figures in contemporary time. Robert Orsi, a famous scholar in the study of religions, mentions a story of a surgical nurse who helped his hospitalized mother. Orsi mother's aide was unable to locate a vein in her hand, so a surgical nurse came to help. After successfully finding the vein, she told them that she always prays to Saint Jude before looking for a vein.³⁷ In a remote village in Eastern India, Monica Besra claims that her stomach tumor healed miraculously after praying to Mother Teresa and keeping a Mother Teresa medallion on her stomach in 1998, one year after Teresa's death.³⁸ The Vatican counts this narrative as the first miracle of Mother Teresa. In Indonesia, a middle-aged man has been visiting the Ganjuran shrine, dedicated to Mother Mary, once a year for some years after experiencing a miraculous healing event.³⁹

³⁷ Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1.

³⁸ Many people, including Besra's husband, dispute her claim of miraculous healing. However, she stands firm on her conviction. In a BBC interview in 2016, she states, "Now I feel very good. Like for me, good things should happen to others also. I consider Mother Teresa to be like God. I always pray to her. I've heard that many people have been cured after praying to her...Many people don't believe that this was a miracle. Whether people believe it or not, I had faith and I was cured." See a short documentary about Monica Besra and her experience. "Mother Teresa's First 'Miracle,'" *BBC*, September 3, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-india-37256596/mother-teresa-cured-my-tumour>, accessed October 21, 2017.

³⁹ Mr. Andi fell from a mango tree but did not suffer heavy injuries because, instead of falling down on the ground below the tree, he fell to the softer ground on the side. Convinced that Jesus is the one who saved him, he decided to visit the Ganjuran shrine and did not feel any pain at all for the six hours trip with bus. When the pain suddenly came back after he got off from the bus, he interpreted it as God's warning of him being too proud. Learning his lesson, he decided to come in regular basis to the shrine and for the next

The few examples provided above show the liveliness of the practice of venerating saints and its relevance not only to theology as a field of study but also to the Christian lives and even to the larger society. However, the focus of this chapter is not the phenomena related to the saints per se or how it enhances popular religion.⁴⁰ Instead, I focus on theological discourses on the notion of sainthood from Catholic perspectives since Vatican Council II until today, in so far as it relates to my project of using comparative theology to construct an inclusive Christian theology of saints.

A. Canonization, Intercessory Roles, and Moral Exemplars: Three Features of the Saints in Catholic Teaching

The word “saint” in the Catholic tradition occupies an important place both in the formal teaching of the Catholic Church and lay Catholics’ imagination. That word refers to a person whose proximity to God has led him or her to live a holy life on earth and earned a place in heaven with God after death. The formal procedure to recognize someone as a saint is known as canonization.⁴¹ Although the process of canonization was not developed until around the tenth century,⁴² the Second Vatican Council’s *Lumen Gentium*

few months he was healed gradually without any medical treatment. Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices*, 180-81.

⁴⁰ There are excellent books focusing on the phenomena of saints and the relation between saintly figures and popular religions such as Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints & Society: Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982); Robert A. Scott, *Miracle Cures Saints, Pilgrimage, and the Healing Powers of Belief* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2010); Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997); Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*.

⁴¹ According to the latest 2004 edition of Roman Martyrology, there are approximately 6500 saints and blessed. George P. Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 6. For an online version of the Roman Martyrology, see Boston Catholic Journal, “Roman Martyrology,” <http://www.boston-catholic-journal.com/roman-martyrology-complete-in-english-for-daily-reflection.htm>, accessed December 16, 2017.

⁴² Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 44.

document confirms the belief that the veneration to Mary, the martyrs, and the saints has been preserved since the time of the early church.⁴³ It states that “The Church has always believed that the apostles and Christ’s martyrs who had given the supreme witness of faith and charity by the shedding of their blood, are closely joined with us in Christ, and she has always venerated them with special devotion, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary and the holy angels.”⁴⁴ George P. Evans claims that *Lumen Gentium* is “the most systematic treatment of the role of heaven’s saints in Christian life ever presented in official Church teaching.”⁴⁵

The most recent famous figures who received official canonization is Mother Teresa in 2016, only nineteen years after her death, and Oscar Romero in 2018. George P. Evans explains that the canonization does not elevate the status of the recipients as holier or closer to God, and, as a result, above other believers; rather, it only confirms the claim of them being in heaven as reliable.⁴⁶ A central element in determining saints is “their ability to perform miracles in their lifetime and, more importantly, after their death.”⁴⁷ This element is apparent in the formal process of canonization, as mentioned briefly above, related to the miracle attributed to Mother Teresa. Beatification requires one miracle, while canonization necessitates two more miracles.

⁴³ The main reason for the invention of canonization procedure, George P. Evans argues, is to determine which figures really worthy to be venerated. See Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints*, 57-58. Lawrence Cunningham challenges the official canonization, which he called the “bureaucratization of sanctity.” There are several deficiencies of the canonization such as total clericalization of the list of saints that undermines laity role in the church (which has been revised in the Second Vatican Council), the enduring prejudices of past historical contingency in the meaning of sanctity in present day (like negative view towards sexuality), and the necessity to comply with doctrinal orthodoxy that excludes many figures from the list. See Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 50-54.

⁴⁴ *LG* no. 50.

⁴⁵ Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints*, 43.

⁴⁶ Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints*, 3.

⁴⁷ Lawrence Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 23.

The canonization is a distinctive feature of the Catholic tradition because it does not exist in the Orthodox Church or Protestant churches.⁴⁸ Some contemporary Catholic theologians, such as Lawrence Cunningham and Elizabeth Johnson, criticize the official canonization of a saint and argue that canonization should occur “from below” by the recognition and acclamation of the people, which would be more similar to the model of the early Church.⁴⁹

The second distinctive feature of the traditional Catholic conception of saints is their role as intercessors between God and people. In this understanding, the role of Christ is more appropriate to be called mediation, while intercession signifies the secondary intervention by Mary, the angels, and the saints.⁵⁰ The idea of intercession is based on the ecclesiological differentiation of God’s people in three categories: the Church Triumphant, the Church Suffering, and the Church Militant. The first category refers to those who are already in heaven, the second to those in purgatory, while the third to those who are still on earth.⁵¹ Thus, the Catholic doctrine perceives the communion of saints as “the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head, and in a constant interchange of supernatural offices.”⁵² St. Jerome articulates this view by stating⁵³

⁴⁸ Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints*, 62.

⁴⁹ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*.

⁵⁰ T.B. Scannel, “Intercession,” ed. Charles George Herbermann, et. al., *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), 70.

⁵¹ Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints*, 4.

⁵² J. F. Sollier, “Communion of Saints,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. Charles George Herbermann (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 171.

⁵³ New Advent, “Against Vigilantius,” no.6, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3010.htm>, accessed October 21, 2017.

If Apostles and martyrs while still in the body can pray for others, when they ought still to be anxious for themselves, how much more must they do so when once they have won their crowns, overcome, and triumphed? A single man, Moses, oft wins pardon from God for six hundred thousand armed men; and (Acts 7:59-60) Stephen, the follower of his Lord and the first Christian martyr, entreats pardon for his persecutors; and when once they have entered on their life with Christ, shall they have less power than before? The Apostle Paul (Acts 27:37) says that two hundred and seventy-six souls were given to him in the ship; and when, after his dissolution, he has begun to be with Christ, must he shut his mouth, and be unable to say a word for those who throughout the whole world have believed in his Gospel? Shall Vigilantius the live dog be better than Paul the dead lion? I should be right in saying so after Ecclesiastes, if I admitted that Paul is dead in spirit. The truth is that the saints are not called dead, but are said to be asleep.

While prayer to the saints for their intercessory role is equivalent to requesting friends, priests, or anyone to pray for you, the difference lies in the status of the saints who are residing in heaven and, therefore, closer to God than humans who are still living. That is the reason why the dominant paradigm in the practice of veneration of saints in the Catholic tradition has been the patron-client, where the saints function as more powerful patrons and people as dependent clients.⁵⁴ One of its practical consequences in Christian practices throughout the ages has been the practice of pilgrimage to shrines of saints.⁵⁵

Protestant movements fiercely object to the intercessory role of the saints. The Reformers, who mainly opposed to some problems regarding the practice of veneration of the saints in Christian communities at their time, especially regarding the invocation of the saints, insisted on a direct relationship between God and God's people through Christ

⁵⁴ Evans, *101 Questions and Answers on Saints*, 34.

⁵⁵ Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 26. A shrine is usually a place to keep a relic of a saint. For a historical study on the connection between shrines, relics, and the cult of saints, see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, chapter 5.

only.⁵⁶ The decree of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) regarding the saints countered the Protestant view and assumed the validity of the invocation and veneration of the relics of the saints. The decree states that,⁵⁷

[T]hey [the Catholic and Apostolic Church] especially instruct the faithful diligently concerning the intercession and invocation of saints; the honor (paid) to relics; and the legitimate use of images: teaching them, that the saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their own prayers to God for men; that it is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers, aid, (and) help for obtaining benefits from God, through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is our alone Redeemer and Savior.

Lumen Gentium perpetuates the teaching. It emphasizes the proximity of the heavenly saints to God that enables them to intercede for the living people. The intercessory role of the saints symbolizes the unity of God's people. *Lumen Gentium* confirms that⁵⁸

Therefore the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who have gone to sleep in the peace of Christ is not in the least weakened or interrupted, but on the contrary, according to the perpetual faith of the Church, is strengthened by communication of spiritual goods. For by reason of the fact that those in heaven are more closely united with Christ, they establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness, lend nobility to the worship which the Church offers to God here on earth and in many ways contribute to its greater edification. For after they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord, through Him and with Him and in Him they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, showing forth the merits which they won on earth through the one Mediator between God and man, serving God in all things and filling up in their flesh those things which are lacking of the sufferings of Christ for His Body which is the Church. Thus by their brotherly interest our weakness is greatly strengthened.

⁵⁶ Some Protestant Reformers' criticism to the practice of veneration of the saints will be elaborated further in chapter 2 section A.

⁵⁷ Hanover Historical Texts Project, "The Council of Trent, The Twenty-Fifth Session," <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html>, accessed December 29, 2019. This is a scanned version from J. Waterworth, ed., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: C. Dolman, 1848), 234-237.

⁵⁸ *LG* no. 49.

At the same time, both the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council acknowledge the vulnerability of the veneration of saints. It is not immune to abusive practices, so both councils instruct Christians to refrain from the wrongful behaviors, such as superstition, lasciviousness, reveling, and drunkenness, and to seek the higher goal of nurturing love and enriching worship of God.⁵⁹

The third feature of the saints, according to the Catholic Church, is their role as moral exemplars.⁶⁰ For instance, the Council of Trent states that the goal of the intercessory role is not the miracle or to gain favor from God, but for the faithful to grow in faith and “order their own lives and manners in imitation of the saints.”⁶¹ The role of saints as moral exemplar does not occupy a lot of place in the decree of the Council of Trent, but the short reference above does point to the traditional role of the saints as a moral exemplar in Catholic teaching. *Lumen Gentium* elucidates further the feature of the saints as moral exemplars for the faithful. Thus, it is worth quoting the statement in length⁶²

When we look at the lives of those who have faithfully followed Christ, we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the City that is to come and at the same time we are shown a most safe path by which among the vicissitudes of this world, in keeping with the state in life and condition proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, perfect holiness.

One of the requirements in the canonization necessitates a local bishop to review the complete biography of a prospective saint. The purpose of this evaluating process is

⁵⁹ “The Council of Trent, The Twenty-Fifth Session;” see also *LG* no. 51.

⁶⁰ Other Christian denominations shared a similar conviction in perceiving the saints as role model or moral exemplar.

⁶¹ “The Council of Trent, The Twenty-Fifth Session.”

⁶² *LG* no. 50.

not only to give an account of miracles but to demonstrate the moral qualities and exemplary behaviors of the saints. Thus, believers might emulate those qualities and behaviors in their own life. Cunningham also notes that “Many saints were held up as models of Christian virtue and practice; in other words, their personae were as important for the lessons they exemplified as for their thaumaturgical capacities.”⁶³ This feature is more apparent in the thoughts of contemporary Catholic thinkers, as I will show in the next sections.

B. Saints as Tangible Manifestations of God’s Grace in History: Karl Rahner’s Theology of Saints

Karl Rahner, arguably the most influential Catholic theologian of the 20th century, has laid certain foundations for the theology of saints in the contemporary period. His theology remains faithful to the Catholic Church teaching on saints, while, at the same time, attempting to clarify the meaning of saints in order to make it intelligible for modern readers.

Rahner’s theology begins from anthropology. A human being cannot perceive God’s self-revelation alone as an individual. Instead, God’s self-revelation always happens through inter-communicative existence: other human beings, nature, and social structures, even a religious one.⁶⁴ Rahner suggests that this is what grace is: God embraces humanity

⁶³ Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 47.

⁶⁴ Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, Vol. V, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), 119-120.

with love for them to know and have a relationship with God.⁶⁵ The church is an eschatological community formed in God's grace through Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

Pondering on the canonization of the saints by the Catholic Church, Rahner starts with a question: "[W]hy the Church has the power to canonize a person, i.e. is able after his death to declare with the infallibility of her teaching and pastoral authority that this person belongs to the number of those who are finally saved."⁶⁷ Miracles and infallible authority of apostolic succession are not adequate answers because one may question what the source of the Catholic Church's authority is. The more appropriate response to the question is because canonization is a necessary part of the church's realization of her own being.⁶⁸ As the holy church, she must testify to God's grace in the most concrete way to prove that "God really has redeemed, he really has poured out his Spirit, he really has done mighty things for sinners, he has let his light shine in the darkness. His light shines, it is visible, and there is a tangible assembly of those whom he has called out of the kingdom of darkness and whom he has brought into the kingdom of the Son of his love."⁶⁹ Rahner explicates that this proclamation of holiness does not negate the weakness of sin among her members, but the church still does it as a sign of God's grace that affects her and her members. This proclamation of holiness is also an eschatological statement of faith, where it is grace that reigns not the law.⁷⁰ The canonization of saints functions as a statement of

⁶⁵ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 119-120.

⁶⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 329-130.

⁶⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. III, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 92.

⁶⁸ Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," 93.

⁶⁹ Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," 94.

⁷⁰ Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," 95.

her holiness in the most concrete form. The list should begin with Mary, the Proto-martyr,⁷¹ and the Apostles but must be expanded to other concrete figures in history that reflect the Church's own holiness to demonstrate the continued manifestation of God's grace.⁷²

Next, Rahner elaborates on the intercessory role of the saints in a new light. If traditionally Christ is perceived to be the only mediator while saints function as intercessors, Rahner asserts that the saints are many mediations to Christ, the one mediator.⁷³ To clarify the role of the saints, one must first understand the role of Christ as the mediator:⁷⁴

we wish to conceive these 'mediations' not as dependent subordinate modes of participation in the unique mediatorship of Christ, but, reversing the process, we shall try to understand the mediatorship of Christ as the eschatologically perfect and consequently the highest, the unique 'case' of human intercommunication before God and of the solidarity in salvation of all men. This also makes it clear right from the very beginning that Christ's unique mediatorship does not suspend this saving intercommunication and solidarity, but perfects it, since the latter is both the necessary precondition for Christ's mediatorship, and also its effect.

God's grace or God's self-communication works universally upon all humans through their encounter with the world and other human beings. Human's capacity to perceive it is derived from their "inter-communicative existence," which is part of their own being.⁷⁵ This relates to human salvation and is made tangibly "...in the absolute quality and

⁷¹ The Proto-martyr usually refers to St. Stephen as the first martyr (Acts 7: 54-60). The term "Proto-martyr" sometimes is used to call the first martyrs of different countries. E.A. Livingstone, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁷² Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," 96-97.

⁷³ Karl Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. IX, trans. Graham Harrison (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 169-184.

⁷⁴ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 173-174.

⁷⁵ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 174.

unfathomable depths of the love of one's neighbor."⁷⁶ In other words, Rahner understands God's self-communication as a constant act of God towards human beings that takes place through the concrete manifestations of human conditions. God's self-communication invites humans to proceed towards God. This process might happen unconsciously and anonymously as well.⁷⁷

Thus, what is unique about Christ as the sole mediator? If God's grace is universally given, what is the function of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? Rahner takes the humanity of Jesus Christ seriously as the Word made flesh because it signifies "the eschaton of the history of this [God] self-communication."⁷⁸ Jesus Christ is the pinnacle of God's grace and the most tangible manifestation of God's grace in history.⁷⁹ By way of sequence, Christ's mediatorship for human salvation is established, and all inter-communicative mediations are connected to Christ. Rahner affirms that⁸⁰

[i]t is undoubtedly clear that all 'mediation' is a mediation to the end of immediacy, and not a 'medial' something which is inserted between and thus keeps separate the objects of mediation. And in a formally similar manner it applies also to the mediation of Christ's manhood to God and the mediations on the part of one justified person for another in relation both to Christ and God. If the man Jesus' mediation to God does not destroy God's immediacy but actually constitutes it as such, it cannot be held that any 'mediation' to Jesus Christ, even at the level of concepts, straightway eliminates the possibility of a relation of immediacy with him.

⁷⁶ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 177.

⁷⁷ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 178. This is the theological foundation of Rahner where he argues in his classic piece regarding the fate of the non-Christians as "anonymous Christians." See Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions" and Karl Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore, MD: Helicon Press, 1969), 390-398.

⁷⁸ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 179.

⁷⁹ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 182.

⁸⁰ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 183.

Therefore, the saving intercommunication of all humans does not revoke the sole mediatorship of Christ because the second becomes the precondition of the first. The mediations of the saints in Catholic understanding, Rahner suggests, is “essentially nothing other than this saving intercommunication of everyone with everyone else.”⁸¹ This mediative function is not the function of particular saints but all believers because the so-called saints are just a few examples of the whole communion of saints that links to Christ as the head.

Related to the traditional moral exemplary role of the saints, Rahner also shines new light upon that issue. If official canonization proclaims the concrete manifestation of the church’s holiness while the saints as mediations are linked to Christ, then the saints can function as creators of new models of the Christian life. As God’s grace relates to history, holiness is always historically bounded. Loving one’s neighbors is part and parcel of one’s love for God and Christ. However, it must appear in a tangible way in salvation history, not just as an abstract ideal. Thus, the saints manifest this love through their tangible deeds, which in classical terms might be defined as a moral exemplar. Nonetheless, different contexts in history might cause different ways of holiness to appear.⁸² Rahner says⁸³

we must not conceive the holiness of the Church and of the Saints merely as the complete fulfillment of an always equal and static, supernaturally moral debit which floats as an unchangeable ideal over the history of the Church and which is realized ever anew by new generations of the Church under her direction. The Church has a genuine history, a unique history of salvation and hence also of holiness. Even though the ‘essence’ of Christian holiness

⁸¹ Rahner, “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” 184.

⁸² Maureen A. Tilley argues that the word “holy,” attached to the “church,” is not a static idea. Tilley examines several cases in the early church history where the term “holy” is interpreted differently in different times and places. See Tilley, “One Wholly Catholic,” 1-15.

⁸³ Rahner, “The Church of the Saints,” 99.

remains always the same, it does not simply always ‘happen’ in the ‘same way’ in each Saint.

In other words, holiness is not static. Throughout history, the church needs to recognize different modes of holiness made manifest by different people. This recognition does not mean that the old modes become out-modeled or meaningless.⁸⁴ Rather, the new modes of holiness signify the constancy of God’s grace in the world that tangibly takes form to bring about the continuous transformation of Christians in their ongoing engagement with the changing world. As a result, there is no single standard of being a saint that works all the time because new situations trigger a new way of being a follower of Christ. Rahner lauded the saints as ⁸⁵

[t]hey are the initiators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age. They create a new style; they prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they show experimentally that one can be a Christian even in ‘this’ way; they make such a type of person believable as a Christian type. Their significance begins therefore not merely after they are dead. Their death is rather the seal put on their task of being creative models, a task which they had in the Church during their lifetime, and their living-on means that the example they have given remains in the Church as a permanent form.

There is an aspect of hiddenness in this understanding of sainthood because the new mode of the Christian life of saints might not always be self-evident to their contemporaries.⁸⁶ The history of Christian holiness must be discovered throughout history as there are numerous ways of imitating Christ. Each believer must be authentic in his or her way of following Christ,⁸⁷ although they might become unrecognizable in the eyes of

⁸⁴ Rahner, “The Church of the Saints,” 102.

⁸⁵ Rahner, “The Church of the Saints,” 100.

⁸⁶ Rahner, “The Church of the Saints,” 102.

⁸⁷ Rahner, “The Church of the Saints,” 102.

their contemporaries.⁸⁸ Rather than talking about moral exemplar, Rahner emphasizes the saints as a creative exemplar of Christian holiness.

This raises several questions for an inclusive theology of saints. Does Rahner's theological construct allow for the recognition of non-Christian saints? If the saints are the actual embodiment of God's self-communication or grace given freely to all humans, then it should not be entirely impossible. On the other hand, does the connection of the saints to the Church and Christ impede such a possibility? Is it possible to move forward Rahner's anonymous Christian into anonymous saints?

C. Remembering the Saints as Friends of God and Prophets: Elizabeth Johnson's Feminist Perspective on the Saints

Elizabeth Johnson, a prominent Catholic theologian, approaches the Christian concept of the communion of saints from a feminist theological perspective. She identifies two different paradigms regarding the idea of saints in the history of Christianity. The first paradigm is companionship, while the second is a patron-petitioner paradigm. The last model became the dominant paradigm up until the modern era. In her book, Johnson criticizes the patron-petitioner paradigm as incompatible with feminist values and with the

⁸⁸ Pope Francis' statement about Martin Luther might be the most recent example of it. See Catholic Herald, "Pope Francis: Martin Luther wanted to 'renew the Church, not divide her,'" January 19, 2017, <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/01/19/pope-francis-martin-luther-wanted-to-renew-the-church-not-divide-her/>, accessed December 15, 2017. In addition to that, article 28 of *From Conflict to Communion* states "In light of the renewal of Catholic theology evident in the Second Vatican Council, Catholics today can appreciate Martin Luther's reforming concerns and regard them with more openness than seemed possible earlier." See Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. "From Conflict to Communion." http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html#The_first_ecumenical_commemoration, accessed January 9, 2020.

religious spirit of humanity in modern/postmodern culture.⁸⁹ Instead, she suggests that the companionship model is more compelling for today's context. Therefore, she advocates the return of companionship paradigm as the central model for the Christian theology of the saints.

Johnson lists several reasons behind the decline of the Christian practice of venerating the saints. To begin with, Catholic teaching in the post-Vatican II era has drawn people closer to God's mercy through Christ as the only mediator. Consequently, such development undermined the needs for other mediators, like the saints and Mary.⁹⁰ The second reason is rooted in the shift of cultures, especially in the North American context, that changed the pattern of human interaction. Contemporary people find the hagiography of saints less attractive because they are "too perfect, too miraculous, too otherworldly, too eccentric to have anything useful to say."⁹¹ The last reason is related to the deterioration of the dead's presence in people's awareness.⁹² Facing those difficulties, Johnson optimistically believes that the ancient concept of the communion of saints will satisfy people's spiritual nourishment in the present time. She argues for the necessity of companionship paradigm with its emphasis on memory and hope as follow:⁹³

The memory and hope of the Christian community of faith are grounded on the foundational narrative of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Interwoven with this story are the stories of countless other women and men who have responded in vastly different ways to the Spirit's call to discipleship....Retrieving the symbol of the communion of saints would therefore contribute to a mature spirituality.

⁸⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 93.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 16.

⁹¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 18.

⁹² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 19.

⁹³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 65.

Johnson elucidates the companionship paradigm using the metaphor “friends of God and prophets” to emphasize the relationship between people of God who are moved by God’s own Spirit. The companionship paradigm seeks to unleash the liberating power of the communion of saints in the face of today’s problems. Johnson speaks of the use of this symbol in the movement for women’s equal participation in church and society, especially to retain women’s dignity as equal disciples.⁹⁴ Not only that, the companionship paradigm perceives all Christians, the living and the dead, as one circle of friendship centered “...on the graciousness of the living God.”⁹⁵ Different from the hierarchical feature of the patron-petitioner paradigm, the key term of companionship paradigm is mutuality, where the saints are not the mediator between God and disciples, but standing together with their sisters and brothers through one Spirit.⁹⁶

The term “friends of God and prophets” signifies a deep and reciprocal relationship with God that motivates the members to be in solidarity with those who suffer and brings the hope of liberation.⁹⁷ Johnson points to the Scriptures as the foundation of the

⁹⁴ The patron-petitioners paradigm supports the sexist attitude in the church history, which brought about destructive effect on women because “women’s history of holiness has been largely erased from the collective memory of the church. Furthermore, even when they are remembered, exemplary women’s lives are interpreted as models of virtue that support the male-dominated status quo and cast women into submission.” This is the first critique. The second one is the persistent ecclesiastical control against the narratives of holy women that prevent them from empowering women. Thirdly, the established hierarchical pattern of the paradigm is justifying the unequal relationship between men and women. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 26-29.

⁹⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 79.

⁹⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 81.

⁹⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 41. Christine Firer Hinze made a similar move when she emphasizes the ethical dimension of the communion of saints by employing solidarity as a key term. If Johnson criticizes the hierarchical position of the saints between Christ and the faithful by placing the deceased saints as companions, Hinze illustrates the relationship as “over, under, around, and through” and explains “Over us, must be charity—our source and fulfillment in love freely given by God, and returned in love of God in self, neighbor, and God’s creation, in communion with all the saints. Under us, must be humility—a meekness and poverty of spirit, a continually cultivated grounding in *la Realidad*, in its weight, and its demands. Around and Through us: active, solidary relationships, dispositions and practices marked

companionship paradigm as it was developed by the early Christians. The tradition of friendship and prophecy demonstrated in the Gospels is a continuation from the Hebrew Bible, especially the wisdom tradition. The wisdom tradition indicates that “the passion of God is clearly directed toward lifting oppressions and bringing life to the world.”⁹⁸ Hence, the concept of the communion of saints in the New Testament expresses the connection between Christians after they had experienced the transformative grace of the one Holy God that brought them new awareness as one holy people.⁹⁹ Christ is the primary factor that bounds the whole community as the communion of saints, as Johnson states:¹⁰⁰

Its extensive use [of the word “the saints”] in reference to the community of living Christians reflects the heat and vigor of their sense of the presence and action of God in their midst through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which leads to a sharing of physical and spiritual goods among themselves and an impulse to proclaim this messianic coming as good news. The whole church is a communion of saints. Saints are all the living people who form the eschatological community, chosen and beloved, called, gifted, and sent by God. While sinners, they are nevertheless redeemed in Christ and their lives aim to reflect this in their passionate faith in God and their loving responsibility toward the world.

People perceived this radical sense of connectedness as the work of God’s grace, which extended their connection even beyond death.¹⁰¹ Thus, Johnson argues that the faithful

by a *mysticism* of open eyes that sees reality in its interdependence, suffering, brokenness and beauty; an *asceticism* that cultivates, in our opulence, capacities for courageous, decentered living with and for the poor and oppressed majorities who comprise this holy communion; and a martyr’s posture of faithful, vulnerable witness—an unclenched life-orientation ready to bear the ‘weight of reality’ and the ‘sufferings due to solidarity,’ discerningly entering into at-times risky struggles to incarnate an inclusive common good that is, ultimately, as big as God.” Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 59. Italics from Hinze.

⁹⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 41.

⁹⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 50. The communion of saints in the early church refers to two mysterious relationships: the sharing of the mystery of the Eucharistic Liturgy and the spiritual bond of love among all faithful, whether the dead or alive. See Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 46.

¹⁰⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 60.

¹⁰¹ Johnson perceives the early Christian communities as egalitarian communities guided by the power of the Spirit. Certain syllogism can represent their relationship: “if living persons shared in the life of

dead were not treated primarily as objects of a cult or exemplars to be emulated, but as “a compact throng of faithful people whose journey Christians are now called upon to share and continue.”¹⁰²

Later on, during the age of martyrs, the companionship paradigm, with its emphasis on memory and hope, continued to rule.¹⁰³ The Christian practice of calling upon martyrs for prayers was a way to incite the collective memory that strengthened solidarity between those who are alive and those who have departed.¹⁰⁴ The solidarity then motivated the living disciples to care for the world because they share a mutual relationship with the departed saints in a communion of hope.¹⁰⁵ This way, the companionship model nurtured and sustained the Christian faith along with generations of Christians. However, starting in the late third century and especially in the late fifth century, the patron-petitioners model replaced the previous one.¹⁰⁶ The departed saints were no longer treated as partners of hope but as mediators and intercessors in a web of power and neediness.¹⁰⁷ The saints occupied the heavenly spots alongside Jesus Christ and Mary in a hierarchical structure. Their role shifted to patronizing those who are pouring out prayers and devotions to them.¹⁰⁸ From

God, and if the dead were likewise still clasped by the living God, then both the living and the dead were united to each other, forged into one community by the same vivifying Spirit.” Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 65.

¹⁰² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 68.

¹⁰³ Johnson categorizes the age of martyrs as the first three centuries of Christianity until the time it was recognized as an established religion by Constantine. See Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 78.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 81.

¹⁰⁶ In agreement with Johnson’s observation, Tilley demonstrates that holiness in the early church strongly pertained to the membership in the holy church, so there was a pervasive sense of community rather than personal holiness. However, that sense gradually shifted throughout the patristic period. The emphasis upon the term communion of saints has changed from “communion” to “saints.” As a result, “holiness became the purview of a select few: the martyrs, the ascetics, and those who exercised the cardinal and theological virtues to an eminent degree.” See Tilley, “One Wholly Catholic,” 9

¹⁰⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 87.

this time onward to the current time, the patron-petitioners paradigm occupied a central place in the Christian imagination of saints, leaving behind the companionship paradigm as a forgotten one which Johnson's attempts to recuperate.¹⁰⁹

Johnson notes two moments of church reform that potentially brought the companionship paradigm of the communion of saints back to the center of Christian practice and doctrine. The first one is the Protestant Reformation with its fierce criticism of the veneration of saints, while the other is the Second Vatican Council. Unfortunately, Protestant worship and spirituality has been losing any interest in the saints almost to the point of total rejection until relatively recent times. Consequently, Johnson can only justify her theological position by utilizing the *Lumen Gentium* document of the Second Vatican Council. Contrasted to the post-Reformation Catholic ecclesiology, which put too much emphasis on the *communion* in the Church as an institution, the second Vatican Council stresses the *communion* of the church in a more spiritual manner, namely as participation in the Trinitarian mystery of God that shares a communion of life, love, and truth. This communion is not exclusive but open and dialogical. It connects the church with other Christian communities and extends God's grace to all people, including people of other faiths as well as atheists.¹¹⁰

Besides mutual relationships, the other main component of the companionship paradigm is the memory of which Johnson has derived from the women's practice of memory.¹¹¹ The ancient Christian practice of remembering the saints in liturgical prayer

¹⁰⁹ I will elaborate Johnson's point on these two paradigms in chapter 7.

¹¹⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 115.

¹¹¹ Women's practice of memory refers to contemporary endeavors by feminist scholars to liberate women who historically suffered from oppression and marginalization through remembering the narratives of female figures. Johnson provides four examples of women's practice of memory through the figures of

invites the believers to partake in honoring the memory of the saints. This is the highest form of venerating the saints.¹¹² When Christians name the saints in the liturgy, they pray to God “in gratitude for their lives and in hope of sharing their destiny.”¹¹³ Other forms of veneration of the saints, including personal or group invocation, have never been imposed on the believers, despite being encouraged. As mentioned in *Lumen Gentium*, honoring the saints is appropriate behavior. Nevertheless, it does not equal an obligation.¹¹⁴ While it is true that Christians have been invoking the saints to intercede for them for centuries, Johnson interprets it as an expression of the strong communal bond of which the living ask the dead members to encourage them through prayer.¹¹⁵ Thus, the pitfall of hierarchical relationship with the veneration of saints, which is highly criticized from a feminist point of view, would be transformed into a mutual one:¹¹⁶

If we understand relationship between the living and the dead....along the lines of the companionship model, then saints in heaven are not situated *between* believers and Christ in a hierarchy of patronage, but are *with* their companions on earth in one community of grace...We remember these friends of God and prophets definitively with Christ and ask them to remember before God their sisters and brothers who are still on the way: thus the bond of *koinonia* is activated.

Hagar, Mary Magdalene, the virgin martyrs in early church, and numerous anonymous women who are oppressed. These practices links the feminist scholarship and the communion of saints as they “...recover lost memory, rectify distortion, reassess value, and respeak the silence surrounding women’s lives before God...” Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 142. In this attempt, the goal is to reclaim the place of women’s victories and defeats as an integral part of the Christian tradition. See Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 159. Following Johnson, Hinze employs the notion of dangerous memories of “the exploited, abused, defeated, blessed dead.” Their memories continue to remind the living of Christ’s suffering and redeeming power. The memories also empower the living to live in solidarity with those exploited, abused, and oppressed to the point of martyrdom. Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 54-55. See also chapter 7 fn. 862.

¹¹² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 124.

¹¹³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 131.

¹¹⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 125.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 132.

¹¹⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 132. Italics from Johnson.

In this regard, the companionship paradigm retains its liberating power by connecting today's faithful people to the whole people of God in the past through God's grace.¹¹⁷ To be precise, Johnson argues that such a relationship is established and sustained through memory and hope. When today's disciples remember the communion of saints, they experience the core of the gospel, i.e., "the coming into being of suppressed selves, newly energized with the fire of the Spirit to bless, to work for justice, to follow Christ by forging new paths of discipleship."¹¹⁸

Johnson employs the template "narrative memory in solidarity" to construct her thoughts. The remembrance of the saints is not a passive activity, but an active one. It inspires people to struggle and gives them hope for God's promise of justice and love.¹¹⁹ People of God's narratives, especially the female ones who are often forgotten or silenced, open "possibilities for the future; their lives bespeak an unfinished agenda that is now in our hands; their memory is a challenge to action; their companionship points the way."¹²⁰ I will not explore this idea until later chapters. For now, it is enough to introduce five basic rudiments of the companionship paradigm offered by Johnson: "the universality of the communion among people, the possibility of holiness in ordinary and secular situations, paradigmatic figures as companions, relationship through memory and hope, and the inclusion of the cosmic world."¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 134.

¹¹⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 163.

¹¹⁹ In agreement with Johnson, Hinze imagines the universal church as not only a holy community but also as the church of the poor itself. Solidarity with the poor defines the church's being and belonging. Therefore, the communion of saints consists of poor and the oppressed where their narratives are interwoven to other people's narratives. Hinze, "Over, Under, Around, and Through," 35.

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 169.

¹²¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 122.

Johnson's proposal of a companionship paradigm gives a solid basis for the construction of an inclusive theology of the saints from a Christian perspective. Johnson explicitly states, "From every angle the symbol of the communion of saints crosses boundaries, bespeaking a communal participation in the gracious holiness of God brought about by the play of Spirit-Sophia from generation to generation and across the wide world."¹²² Moreover, she argues that holiness brought by God's grace transforms people through consecration of their very being.¹²³ However, she did not explore this possibility further, and I endeavor to do that in this dissertation.

D. The Invisibility of the Saint according to Jean-Luc Marion

Jean-Luc Marion, a prominent Catholic philosopher and theologian, wrote a short piece on the topic of sainthood.¹²⁴ His view is rooted in his phenomenological perspective, and, in this section, I will summarize his thought with the help of Petra Elain Turner.¹²⁵

Different from other approaches described above, Marion is more skeptical of the possibility of recognizing the saints. The saint, just like the Holy One, remains invisible. Here, Marion emphasizes the invisibility of the saints as a theological consequence of holiness as God's nature. Marion states, "[t]o call anyone holy, one must first know what this word *holiness* actually means, have direct experience of it oneself, and, finally, be able

¹²² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 8.

¹²³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 56.

¹²⁴ Jean-Luc Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," in *Saints: Faith without Borders*, eds. Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 355-362.

¹²⁵ Petra Elaine Turner, "The Unknown Saint: Reflections on Jean-Luc Marion's Understanding of Holiness," in *The Postmodern Saints of France: Refiguring "The Holy" in Contemporary French Philosophy*, ed. Colby Dickinson (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 231-248.

to legitimately assign the quality thus signified to someone.”¹²⁶ Any attempt to define sainthood or holiness risks self-idolatry, mainly because any group’s definition of saint remains their own “particular fantasy of perfection.”¹²⁷ Turner explains this reason by explicating that “[i]f one’s definition of holiness matches what an individual perceives of it, as well as what she finds within herself, and she uses this definition as her sole rubric, she is setting forth her understanding of holiness as an idol.”¹²⁸ Secondly, because all idolatry is rooted in self-idolatry, claiming to know sanctity equalizes a claim to have experienced holiness, whereas “holiness is unaware of itself.”¹²⁹ Another reason for not claiming to know a saint is that no human being can determine another person’s virtue.¹³⁰ Marion concludes that invisibility is a unique feature of holiness and sanctity. Unlike other virtues, no one can formally attribute holiness to anyone else, including himself or herself.¹³¹

The impossibility for someone to know holiness is comparable to the impossibility of witnessing death. A survivor of a death camp, who is very close to death, cannot talk about her experience of being dead simply because she did not experience it.¹³² Marion thus states that “[a]t best we can imagine it, and thus our opinions, our views, and our presumed doctrines about death remain perfectly arbitrary, know nothing about it, and reflect only our fantasies.”¹³³ Talking about experiencing death requires someone who dies

¹²⁶ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 355.

¹²⁷ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 356.

¹²⁸ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 235.

¹²⁹ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 356.

¹³⁰ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 357.

¹³¹ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 357.

¹³² Marion “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 357-358

¹³³ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 359.

and then comes back to life, and, yet, no one has ever done such thing except Jesus Christ.¹³⁴ This is the paradox of death. How is this comparable to the paradox of holiness that renders holiness invisible?

Holiness characterizes God's unique being as the Wholly Other. Marion gives a biblical account of how God's holiness prevents any human being from approaching and encountering God in totality. This idea is related to Marion's idea of an idol, where any object of gaze will end up as an idol.¹³⁵ God's holiness manifests as invisible because a human being cannot experience it fully; a human cannot objectify God's holiness. Moreover, holiness shed light on human sinfulness of which characterizes human as a separate entity from God.¹³⁶ At this point, it is necessary for Christ to make God's holiness manifest in the world. Nonetheless, as the manifestation of holiness, Christ is invisible from the world's point of view and only visible to those who are of the holy.¹³⁷ Consequently, one could perceive the holiness of Christ only to the degree they can "bear" it, like the disciples at Emmaus who witness "the visible sign of the thing that as such is invisible, in the breaking of the bread."¹³⁸ Invisibility remains in the domain of holiness.

At this point, we can conclude that Marion aims in his writing¹³⁹

to emphasize holiness' invisibility to perception and resistance to definition. As such, talking about the recognition of holiness seems to be antithetical to his project. However, while an individual might not be able to adequately express or comprehensively define holiness, she nonetheless experiences the

¹³⁴ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 359.

¹³⁵ Marion says, "The idol fascinates and captivates the gaze precisely because everything in it must expose itself to the gaze, attract, fill, and hold it." Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 10. By stopping one's gaze on an object, she or he has made that object an idol because true icon will take the person beyond the object, without intentionality of a gaze.

¹³⁶ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 360

¹³⁷ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 361.

¹³⁸ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 361.

¹³⁹ Turner, "The Unknown Saint," 239.

impact of the phenomenon upon her. This impact is so profound that the manifestation of holiness, although perceptually invisible, inscribes itself in the individual's response to it, and in her alternation because of it. It is this inscription that enjoins a recognition of the phenomenon.

Marion's notion of the invisibility of saint intertwined with his phenomenological theory of which the emphasis is not on the individual who perceives but on the gift itself. The gift, in this case, God's holiness, "frees the intuitions of the given from a governing intentionality, it also restructures the individual, casting the perceiving individual as primarily a receiver, or the gifted one."¹⁴⁰

Afterward, Marion refers to Blaise Pascal's three orders to clarify his idea of the invisibility of saints. The orders ascend from lower order to the highest. To begin with is the order of the flesh which related to the body, power in the world, particularly "the power of princes who govern the visibility of the senses."¹⁴¹ Next is the order of the mind, which signifies people of knowledge, such as scholars and philosophers. The highest one is the order of the heart where love rules its activities and holiness.¹⁴² Those who belong to the lower order could not see those of the higher-order. Subsequently, Marion applies this law to the invisibility of the saints: "Saints remain invisible to which does not belong to holiness, exactly as scholars and thinkers remain invisible to the world of the flesh....The holiness of saints remains and must remain invisible to that which does not itself belong to holiness."¹⁴³

It is obvious now that, for Marion, the invisibility of the saints does not mean one cannot become a saint. I agree with Turner that "[c]onsequently, the saint, in Marion's

¹⁴⁰ Turner, "The Unknown Saint," 240.

¹⁴¹ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 361.

¹⁴² Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 361-362.

¹⁴³ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 362.

view, is she who recognizes a more profound sense of her own limitations before the face of the holy, and a more intense awe in the presence of this ungraspable excess. The holiness of the saint, in other words, remains hidden, even from herself in a profoundly self-abnegating ignorance.”¹⁴⁴ This way, one’s ignorance of one’s holiness marks his or her true sanctity derived from the ungraspable phenomenality of God’s own holiness.¹⁴⁵ The ignorance stems from the fact that the manifestation of God’s holiness incites a human’s sense of unworthiness and sinfulness in the face of the Wholly Other, rather than consciously claiming his or her inclusion to that holiness. To conclude, a saint is the one “whose perspective is utterly governed by the manifestation of the holy, who has completely abandoned the perspective of the world for the continual progress into the infinitude of the saint.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 233.

¹⁴⁵ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 235.

¹⁴⁶ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 244-245.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY PROTESTANT DISCOURSE ON THEOLOGY OF SAINTS

A few years ago, I facilitated a Bible study for adults in a Protestant church near Jakarta. I do not remember what the main topic was, but the discussion went toward the theme of saints in Catholic thought. One of the participants asked, “Why do Catholics worship Mary and their saints? Is it not idolatry?” I was unprepared for the question. It represents a typical Indonesian Protestant stereotype of Catholic thoughts and practices. After a moment of silence, I replied as follows, “the difference between Protestant and Catholic theology is that Catholics firmly affirms the relationship between believers even after death, while we, Protestants, do not see the human relationship in a similar fashion.” At that time, I merely repeated what I had heard from a Catholic professor who taught me a liturgical class in seminary. Still, I did intend to provide an answer that might help the one who inquires to understand the topic from a Catholic point of view. Never have I imagined that I would have to ponder the issue of saints in a dissertation.

One of my culture shocks during my early years in the United States is how Protestant churches in the US are different from Indonesian Protestant churches, even when they belong to the same denomination. The difference is not only in the architecture or interior design of the church buildings but mainly in the liturgy. I still remember my first experience in a Lutheran church in Virginia, where it looked completely different from a Lutheran church in Indonesia. There were many stained-glass windows in the interior, showing Bible stories and Jesus Christ. In addition to that, the priest loudly proclaimed

“the Gospel according to Saint Mark” before reading the Gospel. My wife’s reaction when we attended a Sunday service in a Lutheran church in Newton for the first time was similar to my first experience in the Lutheran church in Virginia. She asked me, “Is this a Lutheran church? Really??” This striking difference is most likely due to what is called “liturgical renewal” in Protestant churches guided by the ecumenical spirit in the 1980s.¹⁴⁷ I will touch upon this theme briefly later in the second section.

In general, Protestants do not talk much about saints and theology of saints.¹⁴⁸ When I grew up, I knew that I was a saint and that I belonged to the community of saints. Nonetheless, I was aware that my understanding was somewhat different from the Catholic teaching on saints. My opinion at that time was informed primarily by the reading of Paul’s letter to Christian communities in the New Testament and the recitation of the Apostles’ Creed every week during Sunday service. The Protestant view of sainthood relates to the notion of salvation. Robert Benne wrote in *Ordinary Saints* that, “We are saints because we believe in the promise of God in Christ, not because of the holiness of our lives.”¹⁴⁹ God in Christ has loved us unconditionally despite our sins and, thus, we are saints in the eyes of God who redeemed us. Benne states further, “We need not earn our sainthood. As a *response* to that love, however, we must practice what it means to be beloved of God.”¹⁵⁰ As a result, many Protestants approach the theology of saints with little, if not zero, interest.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Benne, *Ordinary Saints: An Introduction to the Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 58.

¹⁴⁸ In this dissertation, I do not identify the Anglican/Episcopal Church as part of Protestantism. For more information on the Anglican/Episcopal perspective on the idea of saints, see Michael Perham, *The Communion of Saints: An Examination of the Place of the Christian Dead in the Belief, Worship, and Calendars of the Church* (London: SPCK, 1980).

¹⁴⁹ Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 56.

¹⁵⁰ Benne, *Ordinary Saints*, 56.

Following the topic of this dissertation, I believe Christianity today needs a fresh understanding of the theology of saints. Therefore, this chapter tries to probe the current discourse of the theology of saints from Protestant perspectives amid the Protestants' lack of interest regarding the theology of saints. In the first section, I will delineate the Protestant Reformers' thoughts on the theology of saints, especially their criticism of Catholic teaching and practice regarding the invocation of saints at their time. Understanding these foundational figures' positions is indispensable in understanding both contemporary Protestant theology of saints and Protestant churches' practice. The following section will survey the current shape of Protestant practice related to the saints, especially from the liturgical point of view related to the All Saints' Day. The survey is a crucial step to see how contemporary Protestant churches understand and embody the Protestant tradition while at the same time remaining faithful to an ecumenical vision and commitment. Last, the third section elaborates on the thoughts of two prominent Protestant theologians of the twentieth century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich, regarding the theology of saints. These two figures are more well-known for other aspects of their thought, so I will investigate how each figure utilizes the notion of saint and sainthood in their writings.

A. Protestant Reformers' Criticism of the Veneration of Saints

It is impossible to understand the current Protestant approach to the theology of saints without understanding the Protestant Reformers' criticism of the veneration of saints at their time. Three main critiques interrelates with one another. To begin with, Protestant Reformers affirmed the role of Jesus Christ as the only mediator between divinity and humanity. They suspected that the pervasive practice of invocation of the saints, as much

as the Catholic Church's teaching of the saints, obscured the mediatory role of Christ at best or denied it entirely at worst. Secondly, the Reformers believed that the invocation of saints is unnecessary and dangerous, for it could bring people into superstition, if not idolatry. Last, related to the second critique, the Reformers wished to retrieve the biblical understanding of saints as primarily the people of God. The faithful people are the communion of saints themselves. These three critiques will be apparent in the description of the Reformers' thoughts of saints below.

Martin Luther (1438-1546), the pioneer of Protestant Reformation, wrote in the *Smalcald Articles* (1537) under the heading "Concerning the Invocation of Saints" that the invocation of saints contradicts the chief article of faith, i.e., the primacy of Jesus Christ in human salvation.¹⁵¹ Luther argued that the invocation of the saints is an innovation, for it has no precedent in the Scripture. Furthermore, he asserted the possibility of idolatry attached to the practice of the invocation of the saint:¹⁵²

And although the angels in heaven pray for us (as Christ Himself also does), and in the same way also the saints on earth, and perhaps those in heaven pray for us, it does not follow from this that we ought to invoke angels and saints; pray to them; keep fasts and hold festivals for them; celebrate Masses, make sacrifice, establish churches, altars, or worship services for them; serve them in still other ways; and consider them as helpers in time of need, assign all kinds of assistance to them, and attribute a specific function to particular saints, as the papists teach and do. This is idolatry. Such honor belongs to God alone.

¹⁵¹ The first and chief article of the *Smalcald Article* mentions the role of Jesus Christ as mediator whose blood enabled human salvation based on divine grace through faith, not human's merit. Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Wengert Timothy J., trans. Charles Arand, et. al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 31.

¹⁵² Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," 35-36.

In his explanation of the first of the Ten Commandments in the *Large Catechism* (1529), Luther warned people to avoid pagan examples of idolatry by venerating gods, deities, and demi-gods according to their needs and hearts' desire.¹⁵³ He explains that making an image and praying to it does not entail idolatry. Still, when a person seeks help and consolation from creatures other than God, including saints or the devil, that is idolatry. The reason is that "It neither cares for God nor expects good things from him sufficiently to trust that he wants to help, nor does it believe that whatever good it encounters comes from God."¹⁵⁴ Luther also criticized the collection of the relics of saints because it has nothing to do with helping Christians attaining holiness. What makes a person holy is the Word of God.¹⁵⁵

Related to the holiness of a person, Luther believed that the communion of saints consists of faithful people. He interpreted the phrase *communion sanctorum* of the Apostles' Creed as a community of saints, namely a community composed of saints.¹⁵⁶ He elaborated further the meaning of it as follows:¹⁵⁷

I believe that there is on earth a holy little flock and community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses. I was brought into it by the Holy Spirit and incorporated into it through the fact that I have heard and still hear God's Word, which is the beginning point of entering it. Before we had come into this community, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ. The Holy Spirit

¹⁵³ Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Wengert Timothy J., trans. Charles Arand, et. al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 388.

¹⁵⁴ Luther, "The Large Catechism," 388.

¹⁵⁵ Luther, "The Large Catechism," 399.

¹⁵⁶ Luther, "The Large Catechism," 437.

¹⁵⁷ Luther, "The Large Catechism," 437-438.

will remain with the holy community or Christian people until the Last Day. Through it he gathers us, using it to teach and preach the Word. By it he creates and increases holiness, causing it daily to grow and become strong in the faith and in its fruits, which the Spirit produces.

For Luther, all believers belong to the holy community empowered by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a believer can be called a saint in the process of sanctification. In his *Commentary on Galatians* (1531), Luther criticized the view that the saints are only those who are in heaven and the hermits and monks on earth. Based on the Scriptures, he argues, all who believe in Christ are the saints, and they are called to live a holy life in the world.¹⁵⁸

Luther perceived the life of believers as a constant battle between being righteous and sinful, between spirit and flesh. The sinful nature of human beings can only be transformed by God's grace, not human merit. A Christian attains righteousness in front of God only because God has imputed righteousness into his or her being.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, a believer is not just a saint but also a sinner. To maintain a holy life, believers might follow the examples of the deceased. In Luther's early writing, *Fourteen Consolations* (1520), he asserted the necessity for believers to imitate the example of the saints, i.e., "the virtue of their suffering."¹⁶⁰ However, he put very little value in moral books and tales of the saints that widely circulated at his time.¹⁶¹ The best way to learn about the saints and to imitate them is by reading the Bible. In *Preface to the Psalms* (1528), he affirmed that in the Book of Psalms "...we find, not what this or that saint did, but what the chief of all saints did,

¹⁵⁸ Martin Luther, "A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1962), 160.

¹⁵⁹ Luther, "A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," 151.

¹⁶⁰ Martin Luther, "Fourteen Consolations," in *Luther's Works: Devotional Writings I*, Vol. 42, ed. Martin O. Dietrich (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 137.

¹⁶¹ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Psalms," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York, N.Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1962), 37.

and what all saints still do. In it is shown their attitude to God, to their friends, to their foes; and their manner of life and behavior in the face of manifold dangers and sufferings.”¹⁶² However, despite this first rule regarding the Scripture, Luther utilized a story of St. Christopher as an example of the virtue of suffering in his *Sermon at Coburg* (1530).¹⁶³

Lastly, concerning Luther’s thought of the larger communion of saints, particularly the deceased saints and Mary, whom Christians are not supposed to invoke, the question may be asked what their particular role is, apart from being the role models for faith and life of the believers. Phillip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey suggest an interesting position. While Luther understands Christ as the only mediator in the relationship between the believers and God, thus invoking the saints is unnecessary, his mature understanding of the communion of saints maintains the belief of the saints and Mary as residing in heaven and continuously praying for the faithful on the earth.¹⁶⁴ In *A Sermon Preparing To Die* (1519), Luther assures his readers, “In Christ he offers you the image of life, of grace, and of salvation so that you may not be horrified by the images of sin, death, and hell....He commands his angels, all saints, all creatures to join him in watching over you, to be concerned about your soul, and to receive him.”¹⁶⁵ As rightly observed by Berndt Hamm, this sermon shows how in Luther’s understanding, Christ and the whole heavenly and earthly community of saints play the role of intercessor for the dying as “...near and visible

¹⁶² Luther, “Preface to the Psalms,” 37-38.

¹⁶³ Martin Luther, “Sermon at Coburg,” in *The Catholic Luther: His Early Writings*, eds. Peter D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 68-69.

¹⁶⁴ Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey, introduction to *The Catholic Luther: His Early Writings*, by Martin Luther, eds. Philip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey (New York: Paulist Press, 2016), 10.

¹⁶⁵ Martin Luther, “A Sermon Preparing To Die,” in *Luther’s Works: Devotional Writings 1*, Vol. 42, ed. Martin O. Dietrich (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 111.

means of grace.”¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, it is telling to remember that in some of his devotional writings, Luther “...still employs the forms, terminology, and imagery which shaped the piety and thus the whole religious outlook of his era, but he uses them to communicate the gospel. He does so without compromising the gospel.”¹⁶⁷

Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), another German Reformer and a companion of Luther, drafted the *Augsburg Confession* for the Diet of Augsburg in 1530. This document has become one of the standard confessions of the Lutheran Church today. In article twenty-one “Concerning the Cult of the Saints,” the document declares that Jesus Christ is the “only one single reconciler and mediator set up between God and humanity.... (1 Tim. 2:5). He is the only savior, the only high priest, the mercy seat, and intercessor before God (Rom. 8:34).”¹⁶⁸ It also states that Jesus alone will hear people’s prayers and that the cult of the saints is meant for the people to imitate the good work of the saints. For instance, the King of Germany may follow the example of David in his war against an enemy as “...both hold a royal office that demands defense and protection of their subjects.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore, based on the Scripture, calling upon the saints or seeking help is not permissible.

In *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* (1531), Melanchthon underlines the fact that the invocation of saints is an innovation because the church fathers and ancient writers

¹⁶⁶ Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation*, Lutheran Quarterly Books (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 122.

¹⁶⁷ Martin O. Dietrich, introduction to *Luther’s Works: Devotional Writings I*, Vol. 42, by Martin Luther, ed. Martin O. Dietrich (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), xiv.

¹⁶⁸ Philip Melanchthon, “The Augsburg Confession,” in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 58.

¹⁶⁹ Melanchthon, “The Augsburg Confession,” 58.

did not support it. They recommended the believers to honor but not to invoke the saints.¹⁷⁰

His main objection to the practice of invocation of saints is similar to Luther, i.e., that it endangers Christ's role as the only intercessor and mediator of redemption. Melanchthon wrote at length about his objection:¹⁷¹

Moreover, the opponents not only require invocation in the veneration of the saints, they also apply the merits of the saints to the others and turn the saints not only into intercessors but also into propitiators. In no way is this to be tolerated. For this completely transfers to the saints the honor that properly belongs to Christ. It makes them mediators and propitiators. And even though they distinguish between mediators of intercession and mediators of redemption, they deviously still make the saints mediators of redemption....People imagine that Christ is more severe and that the saints are more easily conciliated, and so they rely more on the mercy of the saints than on the mercy of Christ. Thus, they flee from Christ and turn to the saints. In this way, they actually make them mediators of redemption.

The right way to honor the deceased saints should be done in three ways. First of all, by thanking God for bestowing examples of God's mercy through their lives. Second, through consolidating one's own faith. Last is through an emulation of the saints' faith and virtues by each person's unique calling.¹⁷²

From Melanchthon's as well as Luther's writings, both authors do not forsake the theology of saints as a whole but focused on purging some aspects that they consider to be wrong, superstitious, or even idolatrous, particularly the prevalent practice of invocation of the saints. Moreover, both authors did not deny the actuality of saints in heaven. Melanchthon affirms that Mary and the saints in heaven are praying for the church.¹⁷³ "To

¹⁷⁰ Philip Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 238.

¹⁷¹ Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," 239.

¹⁷² Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," 238.

¹⁷³ Melanchthon, "Apology of the Augsburg Confession," 241.

be sure, concerning the saints we grant that in heaven they pray for the church in general, just as they prayed for the entire church while living.”¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, he quickly dismisses the invocation of the saints because the Scripture says nothing about it and, thus, there is no justification for the practice.

John Calvin (1509-1564), another principal figure of Protestant Reformation, shared a similar criticism regarding the practice of invocation of the saints. Christ is the only mediator who intercedes with the Father for the sake of the believers, and all intercession of saints are made in Christ’s name.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, Calvin encourages believers to pray for one another as they are from the same Body of Christ and attributed their prayers only to Christ.¹⁷⁶ He equates the belief in the merits of martyrs and saints as a denial of Christ’s glory, “What is this but to leave Christ only a name, to make him another common saintlet who can scarcely be distinguished in the throng? He, he alone, deserved to be preached; he alone set forth; he alone named; he alone looked to when there was a question of obtaining forgiveness of sins, expiation, sanctification.”¹⁷⁷ Grace that is poured out through Christ has surpassed the power of sin and by “...this alone, not by the merit of their life or death, have all the saints been saved, as Peter eloquently witnesses [cf. Acts 15:11]. So, then, one who would rest the worthiness of any saint anywhere save in God’s mercy would be contemptuous of God and his Anointed.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Melancthon, “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” 238.

¹⁷⁵ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 876-877.

¹⁷⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 878.

¹⁷⁷ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 673.

¹⁷⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 674.

Calvin's main rejection of the intercession of saints can be found in his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (Institutes of the Christian Religion) book III chapter XX numbers 21-27. He asserts that the first problem of the invocation of saints lies in how people substitute Christ for the merit of saints to secure God's mercy. For Calvin, this is an act of transferring the role of sole intercession from Christ to the saints. It is wrong because there is no basis from the Scripture to support it, so it is an innovation.¹⁷⁹ Afterward, the misconduct regarding the intercession of saints also misled people to superstition as "...gradually they attributed to each a particular function, so that for a diversity of business sometimes one intercessor would be called upon, sometimes another."¹⁸⁰ Calvin claims that each person then adopted a particular saint, which can be likened to a guardian deity to put their faith on. Last, he also claims that many people then mistakenly came to call upon saints "not as helpers but as determiners of their salvation."¹⁸¹ In short, Calvin firmly believed that although the living saints (Christians in general) may intercede for each other, intercession by the dead has no precedent in the Scripture and thus prohibited.¹⁸² Calvin's opponents justified the practice of invoking departed saints by pointing to how the Israelites were calling on the name of Abraham. Calvin refutes that view by pointing to the fact that it was not an act of intercession but giving honor through remembrance.¹⁸³ He underlines the nature of the communion of the saints as limited only to living believers, not to include the departed. The reason is that the living cannot have any contact with the dead.

¹⁷⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 879.

¹⁸⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 880.

¹⁸¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 880.

¹⁸² Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 882.

¹⁸³ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 884.

Accordingly, the deceased saints do not engage in earthly matters.¹⁸⁴ To strengthen his argument, he quotes a verse in the Epistle of James in which the readers are advised to confess sins to one another and to pray for one another (James 5:16) but implicitly excludes the dead.¹⁸⁵ Calvin confidently concludes,¹⁸⁶

Therefore this one reason is enough to condemn this error [*of the relationship between the living and the dead*]: prayer rightly begun springs from faith, and faith, from hearing God's Word [Rom. 10:14, 17], where no mention is made of fictitious intercession; for superstition has rashly taken to itself advocates who had not been given by God.

In agreement with Luther's idea, Calvin perceives the communion of the saints as what the church is, visible and invisible. He urges Christians to believe that they are the full members of this communion, saved through Christ, and earn the benefit of God.¹⁸⁷ The church consists of the elect people of God by "...grace of adoption and....by sanctification of the Holy Spirit."¹⁸⁸ It includes not only the living saints on earth but "...all the elect from the beginning of the world."¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the nature of the communion of saints as excluding the deceased people speaks more about the nature of death as total separation from life and not about the loss of membership when a saint passes away. In my opinion, Calvin is different from Luther in his perception of the departed saints. Luther is more daring in affirming the tradition regarding the community of saints as a community of saints in heaven and on earth. On the other hand, Calvin acknowledges the scope of the

¹⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 883.

¹⁸⁵ Calvin mentions that his opponents argued that prayers for the dead have been a custom for thirteen hundred years. The argument is not valid, according to Calvin, because it is lacking testimonies from the Scriptures. Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 681.

¹⁸⁶ Italics mine. Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 887.

¹⁸⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 1014-1015.

¹⁸⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 1021.

¹⁸⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 2, 1021.

communion of saints as consisting of all elected God's people since the beginning of the world. Nevertheless, he prefers to be silent about the fate of the departed saints, for that is more of the domain of God, especially when there are verses in Scripture that explicitly affirm the disconnection between the deceased and living people.

When Luther and Calvin speak of the believers as saints, both agree that Christians are not only holy people but also sinners at the same time. Both Reformers accept the concept of the imputed grace of God as the means of human salvation. This means that the nature of humans is not holy, but God made them holy. That is the reason, for instance, why Calvin declares that the sins "...of the saints are pardonable, not because of their nature as saints, but because they obtain pardon from God's mercy."¹⁹⁰ How does this relate to the concept of forgiveness of sin through baptism? According to Calvin, it refers to the guilt of sin, not to the substance. God in the Spirit strengthens Christians in their struggle against sin so that they may attain victory. Nevertheless, "...sin ceases only to reign; it does not also cease to dwell in them."¹⁹¹ On another note, what distinguishes Calvin from Luther is the former's emphasis on the role of law in the life of the saints. No matter how far the saints move forward with the Spirit toward what is righteous in the eyes of God, their flesh will always vex their journey. In this regard, the law is "...like a whip to an idle and balky ass, to arouse it to work."¹⁹² The law is beneficial for the saints in accommodating their life in accordance to the righteousness of God and limiting their sinful nature. As rightly observed by John T. McNeill, the journey of life toward perfection that

¹⁹⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 423.

¹⁹¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 603.

¹⁹² Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 361.

Calvin has in his mind is never entirely attainable in this life.¹⁹³ Therefore, the emphasis is on the sanctification process instead of on the goal. Furthermore, the law is perhaps the reason why Calvin does not need to emphasize the departed saints as role models of faith and virtue for the living saints. The testimony from the Scripture is enough in that regard, and the law will help the believers to live a righteous life befitting their status as children and elected people of God.

Moreover, compared to Luther, Calvin has a stricter reservation for any image of God and saints. The images are useless, if not dangerous, because they cannot represent God's mysteries. He despises the images as primarily a projection of human's self, "[t]he pictures or statues that they dedicate to saints—what are they but examples of the most abandoned lust and obscenity?"¹⁹⁴ For Calvin, the differentiation between *latria* (worship) and *dulia* (veneration) in which the first is used exclusively for God while the latter for the saints is an invalid supporting argument for the veneration of saints. The distinction is an excuse to transfer divine honor to angels and the dead so that the honor given to the saints and God has no real different meaning.¹⁹⁵ What Calvin wants to avoid is the danger of idolatry lurking around the practice of venerating or honoring what is not God. He justifies his position with the case of Cornelius in Acts 10:25 when Peter disallowed Cornelius when the latter was about to prostrate before Peter even though he had no intention to worship Peter in place of God. Similarly, the angel in the Book of Revelation (19:10; 22:8-9) rebuked John for kneeling down before the angel, although it is crystal clear that John had

¹⁹³ John T. McNeill, introduction to *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1, by John Calvin, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), lx.

¹⁹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 106.

¹⁹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 118.

no intention to honor the angel in the same way as honoring God. The reason, said Calvin, is that "...because any reverential act that has been joined with religion cannot but savor of something divine, he could not have "knelt" to the angel without detracting from God's glory."¹⁹⁶ Calvin concludes that to maintain the unity of God, humans should not "...pluck away even a particle of his [God] glory and that he must retain what is his own."¹⁹⁷

B. Contemporary Protestant Churches' Approach to Saints

The Protestant Reformers' sharp criticism towards the teaching and practice related to the saints in the Catholic Church has shaped Protestant churches in a different mode that disengages with the discourse of the saints. As a result, the literature on the topic of the theology of saints is scarce.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, the Protestant churches' practice related to saints is designed to be dissimilar to that of the Catholic Church to avoid imitation of the later, which is condemned to be wrong, impure, or even idolatrous. However, Benne has

¹⁹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 119.

¹⁹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, 119-120.

¹⁹⁸ Apart from some books which by nature are polemics or apologetics toward Catholic theology of saints, I found only a few books that ponder the meaning of saints from Protestant perspective and attempt to relate with a wider Christian tradition. Obviously, I do not claim the list to be exhaustive. In 1928, Earl Marlatt wrote a book that attempted to underline Protestant features in the lives of Saint Augustine (of Hippo), Saint Bernard (of Clairvaux), and Saint Francis (of Asisi). Earl Marlatt, *Protestant Saints*, (New York: H. Holt and Co., 1928). James Wm. McClendon, Jr. attempts to gain a fresh understanding of saints in historic sense through the lens of ethics. He does it not by consulting a list of official saints but by looking at the life stories of contemporary exemplary figures such as Dag Hammarskjöld and Martin Luther King Jr. See James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology; How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974). Robert Benne discusses the role of "ordinary saints" through various aspects of a Christian life, including the cultivation of personal character, which interrelates with God, family, work, church, and public life. See Benne, *Ordinary Saints*. Last, I found Nadia Bolz-Weber's *Accidental Saints* interesting. Written in a popular style, and with some vulgar language, the author, who is a Protestant pastor, highlights the Protestant teaching of a Christian as saint and sinner in a contemporary setting by telling stories of herself and other people whom are plagued with imperfection, yet are still striving to be perfect in the light of God's grace. See Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People* (New York: Convergent Books, 2015).

mentioned in the beginning, Protestant churches have undergone a shift in the liturgy in the context of the so-called “liturgical renewals” in the 1980s, primarily through the Lima Liturgy.¹⁹⁹ Nowadays, Protestant churches have been reinvigorating the notion of the communion of saints, not only referring to the living saints but also the departed ones.²⁰⁰ Protestant churches still reject the veneration and invocation of saints but recognize the importance of communion of saints as one community in Christ, witnesses of faith, and exemplary figures to imitate.

In this section, I will elaborate on the three aspects of contemporary Protestant churches’ approach to saints through some examples. It is important to remember that the “liturgical shift” is primarily a mainstream Protestant phenomenon. Therefore, the examples provided here will be from those who belong to the mainstream Protestant churches, i.e., the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America (ELCA) and Presbyterian Church in the US (PC USA).

The ELCA underlines the people of God as the most important symbolic expression of the church and as representing “...the saints of God around the world and throughout the ages.”²⁰¹ Thus, it is recommendable to have baptism, a symbol of acceptance into the community, on All Saints’ Day or other days that represent the centrality of the

¹⁹⁹ The Liturgy Lima is the milestone in the Protestant liturgical movement. It was firstly drafted for the meeting of the Faith and Order commission in Lima, Peru, and later used as liturgical text at the Vancouver assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1983. The liturgy encouraged other churches to adopt and modify the liturgy with more inclusive features. See Gordon Lathrop, “The Lima Liturgy and Beyond: Moving Forward Ecumenically,” *Ecumenical Review* Vol. 48, No. 1 (1996): 63.

²⁰⁰ For the shift of perceptions related to saints in the Lutheran tradition, see Robert Kolb, *For All the Saints: Changing Perceptions of Martyrdom and Sainthood in the Lutheran Reformation* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987).

²⁰¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *With the Whole Church: A Study Guide for Renewing Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 22.

congregation.²⁰² All Saints' Day is one of the lesser festivals in the liturgical calendar. All lesser festivals are directly related to figures or events mentioned in the Scripture, especially the New Testament, such as the apostles, Mary, Mary Magdalene, and the martyrs, except for the Reformation Day (October 31) and All Saints' Day (November 1).²⁰³

ELCA incorporates daily commemoration for special figures in the liturgical calendar. The rubrics of the calendar are saints, martyrs missionaries, renewers of the Church, renewers of society, pastors and bishop, theologians, and artists and scientists.²⁰⁴ These people are exemplars for Christians because of their specific deeds. The list is a mixture of men and women from Biblical figures and events, church fathers, martyrs throughout the age, abbots and nuns, kings, hymn writers, and other famous or not-so-famous figures.²⁰⁵ Surprisingly, one can find Catholic saints such as Francis of Assisi (October 4 - renewer of the Church), Francis Xavier (December 3 – missionary), Teresa of Avila (December 14 – renewer of the Church), and Thomas Aquinas (January 28 – teacher). There are also contemporary figures such as Martin Luther King Jr. (January 15 – renewer of society, martyr), Albert Schweitzer (September 4 – missionary), and Dag Hammarskjöld (September 18 – peacemaker). The special commemoration given to all people in the list emphasizes their role as witnesses of faith and examples for the faithful people to emulate. Also, as explained by Philip Pfatteicher, the celebration of saints' days in the lesser festival is not about those saints per se but about remembering God's work in their lives. The saints

²⁰² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *With the Whole Church*, 47.

²⁰³ Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 30-36.

²⁰⁴ Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 36-38.

²⁰⁵ Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, *Lutheran Book of Worship*, 10-12.

are dissimilar to the heroes of the world. Instead, in them, “the new creation is perceived and celebrated; the saints’ days are celebrations of the transforming grace of God, which lifts and changes and makes new the faltering and the meanness of ordinary human lives.”²⁰⁶ In other words, the celebration of the saints is related to the people whose very lives are transformed by God through the Christ event and still undergoing sanctification.

The All Saints’ Day is a celebration of all saints, known and unknown. Those who are living should particularly commemorate the departed beloved ones who have brought impact to their lives through their presence in the past and continue to inspire the living ones through precious memories. Rev. Thomas L. Weitzel provides an example of a liturgy for the All Saints’ Day service, which incorporates a commemoration of the dead people. He suggests congregations to include an insert in the bulletin that explains the meaning of the day and why it is related to the commemoration of the departed ones.²⁰⁷ The liturgy starts with a dialogue replacing the Kyrie. The dialogue mentions some of the biblical figures as the saints “whose robes are washed white in the blood of the Lamb,” while the people are “the saints who are the living body of Christ, the Church.”²⁰⁸ It reminds people of their status as saints who are part of the same body of Christ as those biblical figures.

²⁰⁶ Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship: Lutheran Liturgy in Its Ecumenical Context* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 19-20.

²⁰⁷ The insert states: “All Saints’ Day is a universal festival of the Church. This festival day directs our attention to the richness of Christian history and the varied experiences of the grace of God by lifting up the lives of the saints.

The custom of commemorating all the martyrs of the Church on a single day goes back at least to the third century. All Saints’ Day (Nov. 1) celebrates not only the martyrs and saints, but all the people of God, living and dead, who together form the mystical body of Christ.

Below are the names of the members (and friends) of _____ Lutheran Church who have died since All Saints’ Day last year. We remember them in our prayers today, and we give thanks for their lives. We remember and find strength in their faith and the faith of all the saints both known to us and known only to God.” Italics mine. Thomas L. Weitzel, “Worship Ideas for All Saints,” <http://www.liturgybytlw.com/Pentecost/AllSts.html>, accessed December 29, 2019.

²⁰⁸ Weitzel, “Worship Ideas for All Saints.”

Afterward, the prayer of the church begins with thanksgiving for and remembrance of the church members who have died since last All Saints' Day by mentioning their names and reciting these words: "In our prayers, we ask that God would grant them eternal rest and that we would be kept in communion with all the saints until we are reunited with them around the heavenly throne of God and the Lamb."²⁰⁹ The final prayer utilizes a prayer suggested for the funeral rite that emphasizes the relation between the living and departed saints.²¹⁰ During the communion, there is also some modification in words such as these words,²¹¹

We remember and hold fast to Christ's examples of faith and life as the saints before us have done. We remember his living among outcasts and sinners, his concern for the poor, his life of prayer and worship, and his teachings about your love. But chiefly we remember his life-giving passion and death, his glorious resurrection and ascension, and his promise to come again to raise us and all the faithful departed to live together eternally in fellowship with him in his heavenly kingdom.

It is evident that the commemoration of the dead is not strictly about remembering, but an expression of hope in the future resurrection and eternal communion through Christ. This

²⁰⁹ Weitzel, "Worship Ideas for All Saints."

²¹⁰ "O God, the generations rise and pass away before you. You are the strength of those who labor; you are the rest of the blessed dead. We rejoice in the company of your saints. We remember all who have lived in faith, all who have peacefully died, and especially those most dear to us who rest in you, whose names we remember before you now. (*People may offer names of friends or relatives who have died.*) Give us in time our portion with those who have trusted in you and have striven to do your holy will. To your name, with the Church on earth and the Church in heaven, we ascribe all honor and glory, now and forever." Weitzel, "Worship Ideas for All Saints." Italics from Weitzel. See also, Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, *Occasional Services: A Companion to Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 122.

²¹¹ Weitzel, "Worship Ideas for All Saints."

theological aspect is visible in the All Saints' Day celebration in some Lutheran congregations.²¹²

The PC USA, in its explanation for All Saints' Day, mentions how historically the day was an opportunity to honor all known and unknown saints. However, rather than commemorating the lives of particular saints of the past, the Reformed tradition celebrates the day more as a reminder of "...the ongoing sanctification of the whole people of God....[and] give glory to God for the ordinary, holy lives of the believers in this and every age."²¹³ In one of the recommended prayers from PC USA, the focus on sanctification links to the larger communion of saints who accompany God in heaven.²¹⁴ That understanding is also prevalent in the proper preface from *The Book of Common Worship* for All Saints' Day service. It states, "You have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses, saints and

²¹² For example, see First Lutheran Church, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, "All Saints' Day Liturgy," http://www.feautor.org/uploads/contributions/12069228397/all_saints_sunday_liturgy.pdf, accessed December 29, 2019.

²¹³ Presbyterian Church (USA) Presbyterian Mission, "All Saints' Day | The Christian Year," <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/worship/christianyear/all-saints-day/>, accessed April 13, 2018.

²¹⁴ A prayer for All Saints' Day inspired by Luke 6:20-31 in year C states: "Faithful God, source of every blessing: teach us to love our enemies, to bless those who curse us, to pray for those who persecute us, to turn the other cheek, to share our possessions, to give to those who are in need, and to do to others as we would have them do to us, *so that we may join that company of blessed saints who feast with you in heaven*; through Jesus Christ our Lord." Italics mine. Presbyterian Church (USA), "Prayers for All Saints' Day," https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/prayers_for_all_saints_day.pdf, accessed December 29, 2019.

Besides that, the Great Thanksgiving in the All Saints' Day liturgy from the Book of Common Worship begins with these words: "It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, O Lord our God, creator and ruler of the universe. We praise you for saints and martyrs, for the faithful in every age who have followed your Son and witnessed to his resurrection. From every race and tongue, from every people and nation, you have gathered them into your kingdom. You have shown them the path of life and filled them with the joy of your presence.

How glorious is your heavenly realm where the multitude of your saints rejoice with Christ! Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with angels and archangels, with prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and with all the faithful of every time and place, who forever sing to the glory of your name." The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 387.

martyrs, faithful people in every age, that, strengthened by their witness, and supported by their fellowship, we may run with perseverance the race that is set before us, and with them receive the unfading crown of glory.”²¹⁵ Similar to its Lutheran counterpart, PC USA also recommends All Saints’ Day as one of the special days in a year for a baptismal covenant.²¹⁶

Furthermore, PC USA endorses the All Saints’ Day as an appropriate time to remember the members who have died in the past year and pray that the living might be counted among the faithful in eternity.²¹⁷ The suggested act of remembrance underlines the interrelatedness between an individual with other human beings.²¹⁸ As an example of the local Presbyterian congregation, the First Presbyterian Church in Borger, Texas, held All Saints’ Day liturgy in 2008 with a commemoration for the departed ones. It starts with a brief explanation of why the church celebrated All Saints’ Day as follows:²¹⁹

This All Saints Celebration offers us a chance to remember, or learn about, the great cloud of witnesses who have made us who we are today. We lift up exemplars from the long and deep family history of our traditions and from the immediate family story in our local churches. This celebration is an opportunity to nurture all of us, now, in our vocation as Christians. When we the people of God come together, we share the stories of faith with one another, and listen for how God is speaking to them through these stories and through our being together NOW. In doing this we are standing in the

²¹⁵ The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, *Book of Common Worship*, 136.

²¹⁶ The Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, *Book of Common Worship*, 464.

²¹⁷ Presbyterian Mission Agency, “All Saints’ Day | The Christian Year.”

²¹⁸ Accompanied with a hand bell and candles, the reading for this occasions says “No person is an island, entire of itself. Each is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. With thanksgiving, we remember....[name of the deceased person]. Each person's death diminishes me, for I am involved in humankind. Therefore, ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for you.” Presbyterian Mission Agency, “Act of Remembrance Reading,” <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/act-remembrance/>, accessed April 14, 2018.

²¹⁹ Emphasis from the bulletin. First Presbyterian Church Borger, Texas, “All Saints Day Celebration,” Church Bulletin November 2, 2008, <http://www.firstpresbyterianborger.org/2008-09%20newsletter/Nov08bulletin.pdf>, accessed April 14, 2018.

stream of history which has been created by these stories. At the same time, we are continuing the creation of the stories and carrying them on into the future. Today, as we gather to commemorate this All Saints Day as the bearers of the Story of God With Us in the community of faith, we, too, will listen for how God is speaking to us individually and to the church that we are together, as we move toward the future into which God beckons us.

During the sermon, people were asked to commemorate one or two particular people (“saints”) in their life for whom they are thankful to God by writing their name in a paper. Afterward, all people read in unison a prayer of remembrance, which emphasized the way those who have passed away inspired the living. These words then conclude the prayer, “So grant to us in this life never to forget those who have gone before, so that in the life to come we may share their blessedness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”²²⁰

The ELCA and PC USA demonstrate quite similar teaching and practice related to saints and the All Saints’ Day, especially related to the role of the saints as exemplary figures for today’s faithful people and in emphasizing the connection within the communion of saints through remembering the departed people. The difference is that the ELCA has a special calendar of saintly figures to commemorate daily in addition to the lesser festivals while the PC USA does not. The liturgical calendar of PC USA does not even celebrate particular biblical figures or events, except for a few occasions related to Christ events. Looking at the contemporary developments in some Protestant churches, I conclude that the Protestant Reformers’ teaching related to the theology of saints remains essential to the Protestant tradition until today, but, at the same time, the Protestant churches continue to reconnect with the broader Christian tradition on the issue of saints.²²¹

²²⁰ First Presbyterian Church Borger, Texas, “All Saints Day Celebration.”

²²¹ An example of that attempt is the Lutheran and Roman Catholic theological dialogue in the United States of America from 1983 to 1990 that discussed the topic “The One Mediator, the Saints, and

C. Contemporary Theological Approaches to Theology of Saints

1. *A Worldly Saint: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and His Thoughts on Sainthood*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) is an influential Protestant theologian who inspires many not only through his writings but also his life and death. Some Catholics think of him as a saintly figure and want him to be canonized for his resistance against the Nazi regime that cost him his life.²²² Not only that, but Bonhoeffer is also commemorated in a somewhat similar fashion as other Christian saints in contemporary Germany. His life is perceived and reconstructed in hagiographical terms. There are various expressions of a “cult” of Bonhoeffer in Germany, such as pilgrimage, dramatization, and commemoration.²²³

In this section, I will briefly describe Bonhoeffer’s thoughts related to sainthood and the notion of the community of saints. Although he is more well-known for other topics, he wrote his first book on the subject of the community of saints, and the notion of saint and sanctification also appear in his later works.

Bonhoeffer, in his *Sanctorum Communio*, explores the relationship between theological anthropology and ecclesiology.²²⁴ Similar to what Protestant Reformers have taught, the true nature of the church is the community of saints founded in Christ. One of the problems Bonhoeffer wants to address in the book is how the modern view of human

Mary.” See H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992).

²²² Martin E. Marty, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 144.

²²³ See Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, especially chapter 6 and 7.

²²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Dogmatic Inquiry into the Sociology of the Church* (London: Collins, 1963).

nature, i.e., in an atomist fashion, contradicts the Christian understanding of human beings as interconnected and bounded in the community.²²⁵ An individual cannot exist by himself or herself in a solitary way, but, instead, “the individual exists only through the ‘other.’”²²⁶ For Bonhoeffer, this principle mirrors the relationship between God and humanity. “The Christian person arises solely from the absolute distinction between God and man; only from the experience of the barrier does the self-knowledge of the moral person arise,” Bonhoeffer declares.²²⁷ When the person is aware of the barrier, she begins to have a responsibility toward another human. The concept of church is grounded upon the theological notion that humans and God enter an “I-Thou” relationship. God firstly revealed God’s “I” through God’s love so that God “...does not confront him as Thou, but ‘enters into’ him as I.”²²⁸ The church is a community of persons who encounter God in such a way and recognize one another in an “I-Thou” relationship.

In his later work, *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer further affirms that this relationship means that one must refrain from any attempt of domination and let the other person keep his or her independence from the other.²²⁹ In other words, one must encounter another person as he or she is in Christ’s eyes. For Bonhoeffer, this is why the genuine encounter can only happen through Christ’s mediation because love “recognizes the true image of the other person which he has received from Jesus Christ; the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all men.”²³⁰ The church, or the communion of saints, is

²²⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 26.

²²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 32.

²²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 31.

²²⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 37.

²²⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 35-36.

²³⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 36.

a community through Christ and in Christ. Christ became the Mediator and reconciled God and human beings. Through Christ, Christians are no longer veiled by their ego and, thus, can know and embrace another person.²³¹

The church is a community based on a love relationship, but, at the same time, it is also a community of sinners because its members are both saints and sinners. Bonhoeffer defines sin as an opposition to God that is rooted in human free will. However, he does not look for sin in sexuality like in traditional Christian discourse, but views it as “spirituality bound up in sociality.”²³² Just like God is love, the foundation of a human relationship is a community of love that was destroyed by sin and, as a result, the human replaces the movement of love with “egocentric movement.”²³³ The structural sin of humanity as a whole is bound to “Adam” as “a collective person, which can be superseded only by the collective person, ‘Christ existing as the church.’”²³⁴ The church as a locus where new humankind and Christ belong together is also where the Spirit operates.²³⁵ Therefore, Bonhoeffer announces that the²³⁶

[c]ommunion of God exists only through Christ, but Christ is present only in his church, hence there is communion with God only in the church. This fact destroys every individualistic conception of the church. The individual and the church are related in the following way: the Holy Spirit operates solely in the church as the communion of saints; thus each man [sic!] who is apprehended by the Spirit must already be a part of that communion.

²³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 23.

²³² Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 81.

²³³ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 81.

²³⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 84-85.

²³⁵ Bonhoeffer wrote, “The Holy Spirit is solely in the church and the church is solely in the Spirit.” Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 105.

²³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 116.

One of the manifestations of loving action between members of the community of saints is the prayer of intercession. Here, Bonhoeffer interprets the intercession of the saints as a prayer that “potentially draws the one for whom it is intended into the church; the ancient intercession ‘for all men’ necessarily does this too. If there is no possibility of making the other man [sic!] a member of the church, the intercession has no object; it is ungodly. Its limit...is that of God’s love.”²³⁷ There are two aspects of intercession, namely as human conduct and as divine will. As human conduct, the person to whom prayer is intended is drawn into relations with the person who prays and God. The persons who pray “really enter into the other man [sic!], into his guilt and his distress....afflicted by his sins and his infirmity.”²³⁸ The face of the other, used to be alienable, is transformed through intercession into that of a brother or sister, a fellow “forgiven sinner.”²³⁹ From God’s point of view, intercession is a means to bring the whole church towards God’s purpose. Hence, when a person intercedes for another in Jesus’ name, “the whole church is praying with him.”²⁴⁰ In this matter, Bonhoeffer formulates the intercessory prayer of the communion of saints differently from traditional Catholic teaching or even from Luther’s. Bonhoeffer’s understanding is articulated in a modern context and is informed by modern philosophy and theology.

Another manifestation of the loving action of the community of saints is the mutual granting of forgiveness of sins in God’s name. He believes that this is an exclusive practice

²³⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 132. See also Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 86.

²³⁸ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 133.

²³⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 86.

²⁴⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 134.

within the communion of saints, which is instituted by God's love.²⁴¹ Bonhoeffer further asserts that a member²⁴²

relieves the other's conscience of its guilt and lays it upon himself, but this he can do only by laying it in turn upon Christ...The church is thus able to bear the guilt that none of its members can....This being so it must be a spiritual reality extending beyond the sum of all individuals. Not the sum of all the individuals, but the church as a totality is in Christ

Here, he conveys the church as a communion of saints and sinners. Bonhoeffer rejects Hegel's theory of spirit based on this notion because the "absolute Spirit does not simply enter into the subjective spirits and gather them in the objective spirit; but the Christian church is the church of the Word, that is, of faith."²⁴³ The nature of Christians as sanctified beings is only a preliminary sign of the last things because they are still embarking a journey by faith, seeing only their sins but believing in their sanctity.²⁴⁴ Christ's presence in the church becomes meaningful in this sense because the communion of saints is united as the Body of Christ by Christ himself.²⁴⁵

Bonhoeffer's most influential book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, continues his early work on *sanctorum communio*. Because of her nature as a community of saints and sinners, there is always a danger lurking. He identifies the danger as cheap grace, which replaces the costly grace of God in Jesus Christ. He boldly declares at length that²⁴⁶

[c]heap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian "conception" of God.... In such a Church the world finds a

²⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 134-135.

²⁴² Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 135.

²⁴³ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 146.

²⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 146.

²⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 147-148.

²⁴⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 45-46.

cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God. Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner.

Bonhoeffer wants Christians as the community of saints to be aware of this danger by pointing toward the true nature of grace that, albeit given freely, has the priceless cost of Jesus' life and blood.²⁴⁷ It is through his redemption that the sinners received forgiveness and entered a new life as the justified holy people of God. The saints must live the costly grace to be true disciples of Christ.

Bonhoeffer states that there is another gift besides the justification of sinners, namely sanctification. Sanctification cannot be separated from justification but is not entirely identical. Bonhoeffer explains that,²⁴⁸

Justification is the means whereby we appropriate the saving act of God in the past, and sanctification the promise of God's activity in the present and future. Justification secured our entrance into fellowship and communion with Christ through the unique and final event of his death, and sanctification keeps us in that fellowship in Christ.... Justification enables the believer to break away from his sinful past, sanctification enables him to abide in Christ, to persevere in faith and to grow in love.

The notion of sanctification is central to Bonhoeffer's understanding of the saints. There is a threefold significance regarding sanctification. First of all, the saints who undergo sanctification will maintain a clear separation from the world. Second, the saints must walk in a way that represents God's holiness in the world. Third, their sanctification will be hidden until the end of the day when Jesus comes again.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 48.

²⁴⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 312.

²⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 314.

The opposite of holiness is sin. Bonhoeffer insists that sanctification “means its separation from all that is unholy, from sin; and the method by which it is accomplished is by God’s sealing the Church and thus making it his own possession, his habitation on earth, the place from which judgment and reconciliation go forth into all the world.”²⁵⁰ At the same time, he boldly talks about sanctification as a political aspect of the church precisely because despite the separation between the church and the world “the Word of God must go forth from the Church into all the world, proclaiming that the earth is the Lord’s and all that therein is.”²⁵¹ Sanctification is not a purely personal matter. Instead, it urges the saints to partake in the struggle in the world until the end of time for establishing “the sanctuary of God on earth,” i.e., the visible church.²⁵² This command is the first significance of sanctification. The second one is the saints’ responsibility to live a life that is worthy of their calling. They are no longer under the dominion of the flesh. Thus, they must refrain from the work of the flesh, such as “fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, factions, divisions, heresies, envyings, drunkenness, revellings, and such like (Gal. 5:19),” and produce the fruit of the Spirit.²⁵³

The third significance of sanctification, i.e., hidden sanctification. It is perhaps the most relevant theme to the topic of my dissertation. The fruit of the Spirit is a gift of God and not a human work. Therefore, the saints can only recognize God’s power that strengthens them but “are unconscious of the fruit they bear.”²⁵⁴ God uses the struggle and

²⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 313.

²⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 314. See also Psalms 24:1.

²⁵² Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 315.

²⁵³ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 316-317.

²⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 320.

pain of the saints, including their weakness and sin, to advance their holiness.²⁵⁵ Each saint must focus not on seeing his or her fruit but believing that the fruit is there.²⁵⁶ Even if the fruit becomes visible to the world in large scale and the world admit that Christians love one another, Bonhoeffer advises the saints to “take special care to keep their eyes on him [God] alone, to ignore any good they may have achieved themselves, and to pray fervently for forgiveness.”²⁵⁷ The saints should refrain from any self-boasting and feel satisfied enough in their journey of sanctification. The ultimate purpose of sanctification is related to the end days where Jesus Christ will test each person. Sanctification is a preparation.²⁵⁸ The fruit of each saint’s good work is veiled until the end of time, but Bonhoeffer encourages them not only to always aware of their human condition but also to live a joyful life in God and trust God’s grace.²⁵⁹

In a letter written in May 1944 from the Nazi prison, Bonhoeffer repeats the necessity of a saint to partake in worldliness, even if she needs to suffer as a consequence. That is the way to participate in the suffering of God. There is no need to develop a particularly religious life or asceticism, except being as she is in the world as a human being.²⁶⁰ In another letter dated July 1944, Bonhoeffer clarifies what he meant by worldliness, “I don’t mean the shallow this-worldliness of the enlightened, of the busy, the comfortable or the lascivious. It’s something much more profound than that, something in

²⁵⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 321.

²⁵⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 322.

²⁵⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 323.

²⁵⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 330-331.

²⁵⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 335.

²⁶⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 166.

which the knowledge of death and resurrection is ever present.”²⁶¹ He also mentioned how he met a young French pastor thirteen years before and had a conversation about the true goal of human life. The French pastor said he would like to be a saint, and Bonhoeffer replied that he would prefer “faith.”²⁶² Martin Marty describes Bonhoeffer’s answer as driven by the latter’s preference to live entirely in the world.²⁶³ Furthermore, in a different letter, Bonhoeffer mentions faith as an indispensable element for one’s membership in the communion of saints. He defines the communion of saints as “a fellowship transcending the bounds of time and space.”²⁶⁴ A saint in Bonhoeffer’s mind is a person who engages entirely with the worldliness as an ongoing process of sanctification precisely because of having faith in Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer’s concept of the saint is thus that of a worldly saint.

2. Saints as Embodiment of Ultimate Reality: Paul Tillich and His Notion of Saintliness and Sanctification

Paul Tillich (1886-1965) is another influential Protestant theologian whose books are still widely read. His main theological works are the three volumes of *Systematic Theology*, which were written from 1951 to 1963. In the first volume that focuses on God and revelation, Tillich touches on the topic of saint and sainthood. He defines saints as “persons who are transparent for the ground of being which is revealed through them and who are able to enter a revelatory constellation as mediums.”²⁶⁵ The Ground of Being is a

²⁶¹ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 168.

²⁶² Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 168.

²⁶³ Marty, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison*, 144.

²⁶⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 59.

²⁶⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 121. I will refer to Tillich’s *Systematic Theology* in this dissertation as *ST*.

central concept in Tillich's theological construct as a term that refers to God.²⁶⁶ It means that sainthood is not about personal perfection, but about an openness to God's revelation.²⁶⁷ As a result, a saint can function as "sign-event" for other human beings. He claims that this is the reason why the Catholic Church demands miracles from every saint. Since Protestantism does not differentiate between the saint and ordinary Christians, Tillich also states that a Christian can become a medium for God's revelation for others through his or her faith and love. In this sense, any believer could become a saint.²⁶⁸

Furthermore, Tillich refuses any identification of holiness with moral perfection.²⁶⁹ Following the Protestant tradition, he maintains that a saint is a sinner at the same time. Thus, it is imperative to understand Tillich's particular understanding of sanctification. Nels F.S. Ferré suggests that the notion of the Christian church and sainthood seem unelaborated in Tillich's theology.²⁷⁰ This observation is quite accurate for the first two volumes of Tillich's *Systematic Theology*. At the end of *Systematic Theology* Volume II, Tillich touches briefly upon the idea of sanctification as a salvific act by the New Being, or Christ, that transforms a human being.²⁷¹ He defines sanctification as a process for a person to be accepted into the community of those "who are grasped by the power of the

²⁶⁶ In one of his dialogues, Tillich explains that what he meant by Ground of Being is the classical scholastic term of *esse ipsum* or being itself. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, uses the term to refer to God. See Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 46.

²⁶⁷ Tillich says the term saint has been misunderstood and distorted so the meaning is equal to religious and moral perfection. That is the reason behind Protestantism's removal of sainthood from theology and practice. See Tillich, *ST I*, 121.

²⁶⁸ Tillich, *ST I*, 122.

²⁶⁹ Tillich, *ST I*, 216-217.

²⁷⁰ Nels F.S. Ferré, "Tillich's View of the Church," in *The Theology of Paul Tillich*, eds. Charles William Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 264.

²⁷¹ Paul Tillich utilizes new terms to call the Trinity: Ground of Being for the Father, the New Being for Christ, and the Spiritual Presence for the Spirit.

New Being.”²⁷² The power transforms not only the personal realm but also the communal, and not only the church but also the world. The key figure in this process of sanctification is the Spirit.²⁷³

There is a paradoxical nature of the concept of the saint, according to Tillich. In the New Testament, the term is used indiscriminately for all members of the church, including those whose attitudes did not reflect holiness.²⁷⁴ Later on, the church shifted the meaning of saintliness toward moral perfection and lost the original paradoxical nature of the term. This is the reason behind Protestantism’s rejection of the concept of a saint.²⁷⁵ Saints are justified sinners, and identifying a saint with perfection will diminish the paradox of justification.²⁷⁶ Tillich claims that Protestantism does not recognize saints but is open to sanctification. As a result, Protestantism can accept “representations of the impact of the Spiritual Presence [the Holy Spirit] on man [sic!].”²⁷⁷ These representations are no more holy than other members of the church or Spiritual Community, but they function as symbols of sanctification. Thus, Tillich redefines the saints as “examples of the embodiment of the Spirit in bearers of a personal self and as such are of tremendous importance for the life of the churches.”²⁷⁸ They live in the paradox of justification as saints and sinners who face the everyday life of both religious and secular realms and live with

²⁷² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 179. After this, I will refer to this book as *ST II*.

²⁷³ Tillich, *ST II*, 180.

²⁷⁴ The saints in the New Testament era are not saints because they are good, but because their belongingness to the church of Christ. See Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 207.

²⁷⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 237. After this, I will refer to this book as *ST III*.

²⁷⁶ This is the first reason of Protestant rejection to the concept of saint. The second reason is related to the fact that saints have become objects of cults. The third one is due to a dualistic valuation of asceticism. Tillich, *ST III*, 237-238.

²⁷⁷ Tillich, *ST III*, 238.

²⁷⁸ Tillich, *ST III*, 238.

all their weaknesses, not perfection.²⁷⁹ The life of the representation correlates to human's foundational nature as a finite being who has infinite distance from God.²⁸⁰

How does sanctification work then? Tillich says that the Spiritual Presence grasps and orients a person's life to the direction that brings him or her toward the ultimate. It does not mean that the Spirit controls the person. Instead, the Spirit dwells within her as her ultimate and functions as the criterion of choice.²⁸¹ It means that the person's will is not diminished.²⁸² As a result, a saint "knows the way between impoverishing asceticism and disrupting libertinism."²⁸³ Tillich redefines the Christian concept of sanctification in an existential language that fits his time. Modern humans must make choices in their life despite their feeling of estrangement and alienation. The Spiritual Presence helps humans to recognize their actualities from the array of creative potentialities. The Spiritual Presence does not cancel the options but creates an acceptance of the human and human limitation as a finite creature, and provides a new impulse to the potentialities which failed to be actualized.²⁸⁴

The goal of sanctification is to bring humans to a new life that overcomes the ambiguities of life and cultivates their creative possibilities. Tillich identifies four principles as criteria for a life under the Spiritual Presence. The first is increasing awareness

²⁷⁹ Tillich wrote, "Even the saint remains a sinner and needs forgiveness and even the sinner is a saint in so far as he stand under divine forgiveness." Tillich, *ST III*, 408. It means that a saint is not good in himself or herself. His position is similar to the Protestant Reformers' teaching of imputed grace. See Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 145.

²⁸⁰ Tillich, *ST III*, 239.

²⁸¹ Tillich, *ST III*, 270.

²⁸² In the process of sanctification, human spirit remains what it is, but undergoes a change because of the divine Spirit. Tillich explains that "...the Spiritual Presence creates an ecstasy in both of them which drives the spirit of man beyond itself without destroying its essential, i.e., rational, structure." Tillich, *ST III*, 112.

²⁸³ Tillich, *ST III*, 270.

²⁸⁴ Tillich, *ST III*, 270-271.

where a human being “becomes increasingly aware of his actual situation and the forces struggling around him and his humanity but also becomes aware of the answers to the questions implied in this situation.”²⁸⁵ Second is the principle of increasing freedom, which, first of all, is free from the law. He defines it as the human capacity to choose while informed by the Spiritual Presence and to decide the right action.²⁸⁶ The next principle is the increase of relatedness in which the wall of seclusion is demolished. This principle is a condition of a human who realizes one cannot exist alone and without relations. Tillich stresses that sanctification “conquers loneliness by providing for solitude and communion in interdependence.”²⁸⁷ The fourth principle is self-transcendence. It is the commanding one without which the other three principles are unable to develop. It means that sanctification is impossible “without a continuous transcendence of oneself in the direction of the ultimate—in other words, without participation in the holy.”²⁸⁸ This principle manifests in the devotional life of both religious and secular life as the Spiritual Presence transcends both. From these four principles, one can appreciate Tillich’s emphasis on the process instead of the goal. Sanctification will never achieve a state of perfection.²⁸⁹ That is the reason why a saint is never a superior being but a manifest signpost or symbol of the Ground of Being.

Tillich’s theology focuses on how modern people can understand Christianity. That is the reason he coined new terms to explain various Christian concepts. One of the most famous words is God and religion as the ultimate concern. According to him, humans

²⁸⁵ Tillich, *ST III*, 231.

²⁸⁶ Tillich, *ST III*, 232.

²⁸⁷ Tillich, *ST III*, 234.

²⁸⁸ Tillich, *ST III*, 235.

²⁸⁹ Tillich, *ST III*, 237.

have fundamental anxiety that is incurable by a psychiatrist, primarily because psychiatry deals with the finite issue while this fundamental anxiety is rooted beyond the finite. Tillich identifies the problem as coming “from our separation as finite beings from what is infinite or unconditional.”²⁹⁰ In other words, the fundamental anxiety is a product of human separation from God as the Ground of Being. Only love can cure this problem by integrating human beings into communion with God and lead them into a meaningful life.²⁹¹ The next question that is relevant to the objective of this dissertation is this: does Tillich recognize saintliness as an inclusive category which non-Christians can attain? Tillich seems to define the fundamental anxiety and the necessity of ultimate concern as universal human conditions.

In a seminar held at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1963, he clarifies that ultimate concern is not exclusive to Christians. Preferably, people of other faiths have a similar concern as well. The criterion to discern the ultimate concern is “the word ‘ultimacy’; and ultimacy means nothing finite. Nothing which by its very nature is finite can rightly become a matter of ultimate concern.”²⁹² The embodiment of ultimate realities always occurs in finite realities, such as Jesus and the Buddha. Through these figures, other people might find the ultimate.²⁹³ Moreover, Tillich also speaks of mystical experience, which, just as faith itself, he considers universally valid.²⁹⁴ In *ST III*, Tillich differentiates faith in formal and material terms. The former is valid universally for all religions and

²⁹⁰ Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 3.

²⁹¹ Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 3.

²⁹² Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 22.

²⁹³ Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 28.

²⁹⁴ Tillich mentions contemplative prayer and sacred silence in Protestant liturgies as two examples of Protestant mysticism, while Zen Buddhism is an example of Eastern mysticism. Tillich, *ST III*, 242-243.

cultures. Here faith is understood as an ultimate concern that every human being has, although there are faiths with “unworthy contents.”²⁹⁵ Materially, faith is inseparable from the Spiritual Presence and the New Being as manifest in Jesus Christ. It is particularly Christian yet saturated with universal exertion because “Christianity claims that this particular definition of faith expresses the fulfillment toward which all forms of faith are driven.”²⁹⁶ Thus, Tillich claims that faith as the state being grasped by the Spiritual Presence that led a human being towards the unambiguous life is universally accessible.

To conclude, Tillich’s concept of a saint is pretty much in line with that of the Protestant tradition, including Bonhoeffer’s. He defines saintliness, not as moral perfection but as a representative or symbol of the ultimate. A saint is not good in himself or herself but empowered by the New Being and Spiritual Presence through the sense of ultimate concern. Saints are not superior and above other human beings.²⁹⁷ They act as a medium for other people to encounter the divine because of the saints’ transparency to the Ground of Being. Their lives are in a constant state of sanctification toward the actualization of human potentialities, not toward perfection. What differentiates Tillich from Bonhoeffer is that Tillich is more explicit in applying his conception of a saint to people of other religions, or even those without beliefs.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Tillich, *ST III*, 130. Tillich said further that those faiths “...invest in something preliminary, finite, and conditioned with the dignity of the ultimate, infinite, and unconditional.” Tillich, *ST III*, 131.

²⁹⁶ Tillich, *ST III*, 131.

²⁹⁷ Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 207.

²⁹⁸ Tillich mentions secular religions and quasi-religions, such as humanism, too. See Tillich, *Ultimate Concern*, 34-39.

PART II

SAINTS AND SAINTHOOD IN ISLAM

CHAPTER 3

FRIENDS OF GOD AND SAINTHOOD IN ISLAM: AN INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I visited the tomb of Sunan Kudus, which is located in Kudus, a small city in Central Java. Sunan Kudus is one of the Nine Saints of Java (in the Indonesian language: *Wali Songo*), paradigmatic figures who were responsible for the Islamization of Java in the past.²⁹⁹ The architecture of the complex of the tomb is striking as it looks half-Muslim and half-Hindu. The big mosque in the front-part seems like a regular mosque, but the minaret next to it resembles a Hindu type of architecture. The tomb of Sunan Kudus is encircled by many other graves, thus requiring a walk to reach it. Many people were present at that time, most likely because it was during the month of Ramadhan. As soon as I arrived at the tomb of Sunan Kudus, I saw the people sitting around it and reciting words of prayer and praise in Arabic (*salawāt*). It was a mixed congregation: men, women, youths, even kids. Some people were sitting separately and chanted in solitude.

After that, my friend took me to the tomb of another saint (*walī*; pl. *awliyā'*), not too far away from the tomb of Sunan Kudus. No one else was there when we arrived. The tomb was small and almost unidentifiable from the outside. My friend went inside to pray.

²⁹⁹ For a study of the practice of pilgrimage to the tombs of the Nine Saints of Java, see James J. Fox, "Ziarah Visits to the Tombs of the Wali: The Founders of Islam on Java," in *Islam in the Indonesian Social Context*, ed. M.C. Ricklefs (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1991). For a study on the connection between the wider global Sufi tradition in early Indonesian Islam, including the tradition of the Nine Saints of Java, see Martin van Bruinessen, "Najmuddin al-Kubra, Jumadil Kubra and Jamaluddin al-Akbar: Traces of Kubrawiyya Influence in Early Indonesian Islam," *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* Vol.150, No.2 (1994): 305-329.

He said that it is a tomb of a “local” *walī* while Sunan Kudus is a “national” *walī*. That is the reason why the latter gets more attention.³⁰⁰

I asked my friend about the purpose of praying at the tomb of a *walī*. He replied with a metaphor: a deceased *walī* is like a pond full of water. When people pray, it is similar to pouring more water into the pond, which causes water to overflow, benefitting people from the excessive water. The water symbolizes divine blessings (*barakā*), and a *walī* is perceived as their intermediary.

The existence of *walī* and veneration of their tombs is not restricted to Indonesian Islam. The tradition transcends the denominational borders within Islam as well as national boundaries. There are historically very recent Muslims such as Salafist and Wahhabi groups who oppose and disregard this veneration as superstition at best and idolatry at worst. Since not all Muslims today agree with the tradition of pilgrimage to tombs and shrines (*ziyāra*) and giving veneration to saints, it can be considered as a contested tradition. Despite controversy and tension that surrounds the practice, the fact remains that there are many Muslims around the world today who still follow the traditions of pilgrimage and veneration of saints faithfully. Important as it is, I will not delve upon that contestation in this chapter as it would deviate from the main focus of this dissertation.

A *walī* in the Sunni Muslim tradition and Sufism (*tasawwuf*) refers to a particular category of people among the believers. They are capable of conducting extraordinary deeds while living and after death. The term *walī* is most commonly translated into English

³⁰⁰ The pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to tombs and shrines of saints involves intricate rituals. For a study on Tembayat as one of the most popular shrines in Java, see Nelly van Doorn-Harder & Kees de Jong, “The Pilgrimage to Tembayat: Tradition and Revival in Indonesian Islam,” *The Muslim World* Vol. 91, No. 3/4 (2001): 325-353.

as “saint.” Despite being comparable to some extents, the two terms are not precisely the same. In the next section, I will delineate some terminological issues concerning the conceptual discourse within the Islamic tradition. Afterward, I will present three approaches to the topic of *walī Allāh* (pl. *awliyā’ Allāh*): phenomenological, textual, and theological. These approaches are essential because each contributes a unique perspective for understanding what the concept of Friends of God (*Awliyā Allāh*) and sainthood (*walāya*) means from a theological perspective.

A. Clarification of the Key Terms Related to Sainthood

Walī, like other Arabic words, has more than one meaning. In the Indonesian language the term describes a mayor of a city (Id. *wali kota*), a person in charge of and having authority over a student in a school (Id. *wali murid*), and someone representing and having authority over an orphan until she or he becomes an adult (Id. *wali anak*). In these cases, none of them is related to “friendship,” but instead to “authority.” Moreover, it seems that all of them are unrelated to “holiness.” Thus, one may wonder why many Western scholars translate the word *walī* and *awliyā* as saint and saints? Is it not a mistranslation which could bring misunderstanding? This problem is related to the etymological problem of the word *walī*, which I will try to elaborate in this section.

In Arabic, the root word for *walī* and *awliyā*, *w-l-y*, connotes “proximity” (“to be near,” “to be close”).³⁰¹ Michel Chodkiewicz explains that the root *w-l-y* generates two further meanings: “to be a friend” and “to direct, to govern, to take in charge.”³⁰² Again,

³⁰¹ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (London: Macdonald & Evans LTD, 1974), 1099.

³⁰² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 21.

from the etymological perspective, the Arabic root word seems disconnected to “holy” or “holiness.” The English term “saint” corresponds to the Greek *hagios* and the Latin *sanctus*, which is most likely influenced by the Christian usage of the term. The proper equivalent in Arabic for “saint” or “sanctity” is the root *q-d-s* (similar to Hebrew *qādōsh*), which the Christian Arabic utilizes to refer to the saints.³⁰³ Another possible word in Arabic is *h-r-m* whose meanings are ambivalent because the word *harām* corresponds to both “forbidden, unlawful” and “sacred, sacred object, sacred possession.”³⁰⁴ For instance, some animals are *harām* for Muslims to consume. Here the meaning of the word is “unlawful or prohibited.” However, the word could also be used for “sacred” as in the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina (*al-Harāmayn*) or the sacred mosque (*al-Masjid al-Harām*). Frederick Denny rightly mentions that the Arabic words for “holy” or “sacred” refer mostly to non-human realities or beings because the Quran “never speaks of the holiness of persons, be they human, *jinnī*, or angelic.”³⁰⁵ At this point, because of the ambiguity related to the Arabic term for holy and holiness, one must translate the word *walī* by “saint” with some awareness that its meaning is only partially conveyed and that there are some differences between the two words.

To clarify further the term *walī*, we need to elaborate on the Islamic notion of “sainthood.” *Walī* relates to two Arabic word *walāya* and *wilāya*. Vincent Cornell notes that both terms in the Islamic discourse are related in meaning, but each has its meaning.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 21.

³⁰⁴ Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 171.

³⁰⁵ Frederick M. Denny, “‘God’s Friends’: The Sanctity of Persons in Islam,” in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions*, eds. Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 69.

³⁰⁶ Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xvii.

From a strictly linguistic point of view, the latter word, *wilāya*, is utilized to demonstrate a *function*, while the former, *walāya*, exhibits a *state of being*.³⁰⁷ Therefore, *wilāya*, in a political and administrative context, expresses a function, so a *wālī* (with a long ā) refers to the person who holds authority over a region. *Walāya*, on the other hand, is more appropriate to explain the word *walī Allāh* because it relates to the nature of that person as someone who is “close” with God or a “friend” of God.³⁰⁸

Unfortunately, as observed by Cornell, linguistic observation alone is inadequate to establish a strict boundary between the two words. “When the word *walī* is used in the Qur’an, it does not necessarily mean ‘friend.’ More often, it carries the power-laden connotations of ‘manager,’ ‘guardian,’ ‘protector,’ or ‘intercessor’—concepts that are more in the semantic domain of *wilāya* than *walāya*.”³⁰⁹ Furthermore, Chodkiewicz adds that when the root w-l-y appears in the vocalized form in the manuscript of Sufi texts, the two words are used interchangeably.³¹⁰ The reason is perhaps that, in the common believers’ perception, the power of a *walī* is perceived to be more immediate and important rather than the nature of the person.³¹¹ Thus, the differences between *walāya* and *wilāya* remain, but the two words should not be taken as totally separated.³¹² Cornell explains this point when he says that “when all is said and done, *walāya* and *wilāya* are best seen as semantic fraternal twins that coexist symbiotically, like yin and yang. Each relies on the

³⁰⁷ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 22.

³⁰⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 22.

³⁰⁹ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, xviii.

³¹⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 22.

³¹¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 22.

³¹² Similarly, the word *amiticia* in a late Roman period is used for both “friendship” and “protection” or “power” in relation to a patron saint. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 22.

other for its meaning.”³¹³ When a *walī Allāh* is considered to have a close relationship with God, it means that he or she partakes in God’s power and authority as an intermediary. As an intermediary, a *walī Allāh* is perceived as a patron by people too.³¹⁴

Even though one should not assume the two words as totally different, I still favor the term *walāya* in discussing the role of a *walī Allāh* as it indicates the state of being of the person which derives from his or her proximity with God. When talking about *walāya* and *walī*, the English translation “sainthood” and “saint” will be employed with an awareness of their inability to convey the full meaning of the Arabic concept.³¹⁵

Another argument comes from phenomenology, where the similarity between *Awliyā Allāh* and Christian saints is evident. As Cornell put it, “If a *walī Allāh* looks like a saint, acts like a saint, and speaks like a saint, why not call him a saint?”³¹⁶ The next section will explore the notion of *walī Allāh* from a phenomenological point of view to strengthen this argument even further.

B. Signs of *Awliyā Allāh*: A Phenomenological Approach to Muslim Saints

In Java, there is a widespread belief that only a *walī* could recognize the state of another *walī* (*la yā’rifu al-walī illā bi-al-walī*).³¹⁷ Al-Hujwīrī, in his famous *The Revelation of the Veiled* (*Kashf al-Mahjūb*), mentions a similar principle.³¹⁸ Despite the secrecy related

³¹³ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, xix.

³¹⁴ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, xix-xx.

³¹⁵ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, xx.

³¹⁶ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, xxix.

³¹⁷ Arif Zamhari, *Rituals of Islamic Spirituality: A Study of Majlis Dhikr Groups in East Java* (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2010), 68.

³¹⁸ He quotes a divine saying (*al-hadīth al-qudsī*) in which God said: “My friends (saints) are under My cloak: save Me, none knoweth them except My friends.” ‘Alī ibn ‘Uthmān al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-*

to the state of a *walī*, many Muslim societies share the practice of venerating their saints. People know in peculiar ways if a specific person is a *walī*. How could that be possible? The answer ostensibly is because people around the *walī* have experienced and witnessed the tangible manifestations of God's power through him or her.³¹⁹ Thus, one of the most striking qualities of Muslim Saints is their charismatic deeds as performative "acts of grace" (*karāmāt*). In Sufi literature, *karāmāt* does not involve evidentiary miracles (*mu'jiza*), because only prophets could perform *mu'jiza*, while *karāmāt* is reserved strictly to the saints.³²⁰ Although both *karāmāt* and *mu'jiza* are virtually similar to miraculous deeds, this distinction displays the difference between the rank of prophets, which is superior and ends with Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet, and the saints.

Before I elaborate on the signs of *walī*, which perhaps bears similarities with Christian saints, it is necessary to discuss some existing approaches and explain the approach that I take here. There is elaborate research done by Western scholars on the theme of saints in Muslim societies. However, some approaches are reductionistic and relativistic because they undermine Islam as a tradition and the theological impulse of the phenomena of saints and sainthood.

Mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufiism, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Printed for the trustees of the "E. J.W. Gibb Memorial" and published by Messrs. Luzac and Co, 1970), 63.

³¹⁹ Bagus Laksana wrote an excellent research on the theme of saints and veneration of saints among Muslim and Catholic communities in Java. See Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices*. For another study of a pilgrimage to a tomb of Muslim saint in West Java, see Tommy Christomy, *Signs of the Wali: Narratives at the Sacred Sites in Pamijahan, West Java* (Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press, 2008).

³²⁰ For instance, al-Hujwīrī discusses the relationship between *karāmāt* and *mu'jiza* which corresponds to the state of a *walī* as inferior than a prophet. See al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-Mahjūb*, 218-24. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī (d. 672/1274) in his book *The Fundamental of Belief (Qawā'id al-'aqā'id)* says that the miraculous deeds of a saint that break the natural order is reserved for the *Awliyā' Allāh*. See Erik S. Ohlander, "'Abd Allāh ibn As'ad al-Yāfi'ī's Defense of Saintly Marvels," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 55.

1. *Reductionist and Relativistic Approaches to Sainthood*

One classic example of research on the role of *walī* in Muslim society is Michael Gilsenan's chapter on a local sheik in a North Lebanon village.³²¹ Gilsenan utilizes sociological and anthropological analyses to approach the phenomena of sheiks and their inner knowledge. He starts with the question of how persons with secret knowledge could prove their religious claim to the broader society.³²² He finds that a sheikh's authority is well-connected with sexuality, pure/impure conditions, and the context of an honor/shame society.³²³ A sheikh can demonstrate power by knowing other people's behaviors and claiming religious authority from God. On the other hand, the community also has certain ways to discern the authenticity of a sheikh: the community will not accept a mere claim without soundproof. Gilsenan tells the story of a foreign sheikh who suffered humiliation because he failed to demonstrate an ability to know the bad behaviors of a notorious person in the community.³²⁴ In this case, the story illustrates how a saint's miraculous deeds are closely related to the perception of the local community.

I consider Gilsenan's thesis on a sheikh's authority from a sociological point of view is inadequate to explain the phenomena of veneration toward saints and sheiks. In Muslim communities, the power and authority of a *walī* will not cease even after his or her death. They are still functioning as an intermediary between God and humans, so people are still affected by the spiritual power of a deceased *walī*. This function explains the phenomenon of pilgrimage to the tombs of saints. Hence, modern categories such as

³²¹ Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Arab World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990).

³²² Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam*, 117.

³²³ Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam*, 118.

³²⁴ Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam*, 133-139.

sexuality, rural-urban society or im/pure cannot explain these phenomena thoroughly. In many Muslim societies, there are tombs of local, national, and transnational/universal saints. Despite its success in explaining the phenomenon of “local” saints, Gilsenan’s sociological analysis is insufficient to elucidate the more significant phenomena of sainthood that transcend local borders.

Another classic figure in the study of Muslim societies is Clifford Geertz. Geertz conducted comparative anthropological research of two Muslim personalities from Indonesia and Morocco, i.e., Sunan Kalidjaga from Indonesia and Sidi Lyusi from Morocco. The former is a sixteenth-century Javanese prince who is renowned as one of the *Wali Songo* (The Nine Saints) for his role in the Islamization of Java. The latter is a half-Berber, half-Arab religious scholar who is well-regarded as a Moroccan saint.³²⁵ Geertz wants to prove that the notion of the “mystical” should not be seen as a universal category that transcends all experiences by describing each person’s hagiography and analyzing them. Instead, each experience from a particular context should be treated as religiously unique and worthy for serious consideration.³²⁶ Here, he promotes a relativistic approach to the notion of saints.

Related to the account of Sunan Kalidjaga, Geertz identifies that at the heart of Kalijaga’s enlightenment moment is not Islam but “a self-produced inner state.” This conclusion draws heavily from Geertz’s social analysis, in which Islam does not necessarily play any significant role except as an outer, unimportant layer.³²⁷ By arguing

³²⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 25.

³²⁶ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 24.

³²⁷ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 29.

this way, he relegates the importance of the Islamic tradition and establishes that the undergirding core of “Islam” in Indonesia is not Islam but the local culture.³²⁸

For now, the point I need to make is that orthodox Islamic consciousness....arose as a counter-tradition in Indonesia, a dissident point of view. The major religious style at the center of the society was (and somewhat reworked, still is) the theater state, exemplary center sort of outlook that generations of salaried Kalidjagas preserved by clothing it, thinly, in Arabian robes. Sunni Islam did not, today still does not, represent the spiritual mainstream in Indonesia.

Hence, Geertz recognizes Javanese Islam as syncretistic, where the core is Javanese culture and the outer layer is Islam.³²⁹ He believes that “orthodox” Sunni Islam has been rooted only in some places in Sumatra (e.g., Aceh) and Celebes (Sulawesi) island.³³⁰

In the end, Geertz projects Islam in Morroco and Indonesia as two different entities, exclusive to one another. The similarities in Islamic terms such as “mysticism” or “faith” do not constitute any notion of sameness in essence. He characterizes the differences between them as follows:³³¹

On the Indonesian side, inwardness, imperturbability, patience, poise, sensibility, aestheticism, elitism, and an almost obsessive self-effacement, the radical dissolution of individuality; on the Morrocan side, activism, fervor, impetuosity, nerve, toughness, moralism, populism, and an almost obsessive self-assertion, the radical intensification of individuality.

³²⁸ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 42.

³²⁹ Geertz’s position here is in line with his other monumental work on Javanese Islam. He conducted a research in one town called Modjokuto in Central Java. His main thesis is that, regardless of its plurality, Javanese society is constituted by three main cultural types: *abangan*, *santri*, and *priayi*. Each type occupies one of the three main social-structures: the village, the market, and the government bureaucracy. Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1960).

³³⁰ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 42.

³³¹ Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 54.

There is no connection at all between the two contexts apart from their radical differences.³³² By stating that “Islam” is perceptible only in a particular context and unrelated with “Islam” in other localities, Geertz demonstrates a relativistic approach to Islam. In the case of Javanese Islam, he concludes, Islam only permeates the outer layers and is not situated as the core of the culture.

2. Approaching Sainthood as a Tradition in Islam

Pnina Werbner has contested the conclusion made by Geertz in her comparison of Sunan Kalijaga from Indonesia and Sidi Lyusi from Morocco. She agrees with Geertz that both local cultural milieus have shaped Islam in very different ways, yet it does not mean that the two have no similarity at all in their common underlying structure.³³³

She argues that there is a common message in the narratives of the two saint-figures that propagates two essential dimensions of Sufi Islam: the inner *jihād* and the outer *jihād*. Inner *jihad* means to struggle with their desires and appetites, while, externally, it implies a battle with infidels and non-believers.³³⁴ These two dimensions work together as a key to connect the two different narratives. Both suggest that the heroes abdicate their desires or carnal self (*nafs*) and, as a result, obtain divine knowledge. This understanding is inner *jihād*. On the other hand, both figures represent outer *jihād* through their struggle in overcoming worldly political authority: converting the worldly ruler to Islam in the story of Sunan Kalijaga and winning over the evil sultan in the story of Sidi Lyusi. Werbner

³³² Geertz, *Islam Observed*, 55.

³³³ Pnina Werbner, “Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia: Towards a Comparative Analysis,” in *Dimensions of Locality: Muslim Saints, Their Place and Space*, eds. Georg Stauth and Samuli Schielke (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), 29.

³³⁴ Werbner, “Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia,” 30-31.

proposes that the interpretation of the external *jihād* of these stories is related to the way spiritual power is always superior to temporal power.³³⁵ She claims that a similar interpretation can be found in other Sufi stories, so as to imply that there is a unitary symbolic structure linking them.³³⁶ Thus, contrary to Geertz, Werbner is arguing for the principles of Sufi Islam that “transcend cultural and geographical boundary.”³³⁷

Although her critique of Geertz is convincing and useful for constructing a better approach toward Muslim societies, I have to disagree with her method as narrowing down all differentiation into one common experience as being too simplistic. Muslim societies are always ambiguous because, on the one hand, they try to partake in and relate to what they regard as “orthodoxy,” while, on the other hand, maintaining their own unique and distinctive features.³³⁸ Here is where Mark R. Woodward makes a notable contribution through his research on Islam in Java.

Woodward opens his *Islam in Java* by telling how he traveled for the first time to Java intending to continue Geertz’s village studies; this is where Geertz firmly believed the core of Javanese Islam to be more Hindu and Buddhist rather than Islamic. Woodward was trained as an Indologist and intended to “trace the origins of Javanese court and popular religion to specific Indian prototypes.”³³⁹ However, his expectation faded after several attempts to scrutinize traditional Javanese mysticism from that lens. He then studied Islamic rituals and teaching. Contrary to his first assumption, he concluded that the rituals

³³⁵ Werbner, “Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia,” 30-31.

³³⁶ Werbner, “Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia,” 32.

³³⁷ Werbner, “Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia,” 32.

³³⁸ Shahab Ahmed’s *What is Islam* is an excellent research on this issue. See Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

³³⁹ Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 2.

and mystical systems he had observed so far were all rooted in Islamic tradition.³⁴⁰ Here, Woodward claimed that the core of popular Islam is, without doubt, Islam, despite their resemblance to Hindu-Buddhist elements.

The problem with Geertz's approach is, first of all, that he conducted his research in a single Javanese community, so he was not exposed to the discourse of religious debate in Java nor to ways in which Sufism has profoundly influenced Javanese religious thought.³⁴¹ Second, Geertz failed to appreciate the Islamic character of Java because of his negligence "of the extensive literature on Middle Eastern and South Asian Sufism and popular devotionalism."³⁴² In other words, it is precisely the lack of deep understanding of the Islamic tradition that led Geertz to his reductionist and relativistic conclusion on Islam in Java. Thirdly, Geertz assumed that the ultimate sources of belief are social action and social behavior.³⁴³ Thus, he followed a Durkheimian premise that the root of religion is social, so he gave very little, if any, attention to the Islamic tradition.³⁴⁴

Woodward suggests another way to approach Islam in Java, i.e., by observing the historical link between Arabia and the Middle East, South Asian, and Javanese Sufism, tracing "an unbroken chain of symbolic interpretation" from Mecca and Medina to Javanese villages.³⁴⁵ Here he underlines the importance of approaching Islam in Java from the perspective of the Islamic tradition as a means to capture the phenomena holistically. The Islamic tradition may then be regarded as a constant struggle of Muslim people to

³⁴⁰ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 2-3.

³⁴¹ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 245.

³⁴² Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 245.

³⁴³ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 246.

³⁴⁴ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 246-247.

³⁴⁵ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 245.

connect with and apply the teaching of Prophet Muhammad concerning human submission to the will of *Allāh* on intellectual, social, and spiritual levels.³⁴⁶ By this definition, tradition is a continual human discourse and cannot be limited only to a single “orthodoxy.” Therefore, Woodward argues that Islam in Java has its unique features that allow it to connect to the broader Islamic tradition, and that locates Islam at its very core. At the same time, Javanese Islam creatively incorporates local elements, including those derived from Hindu and Buddhist elements.³⁴⁷ Therefore, Javanese Islam is unique. It is neither a replica of Middle Eastern Islam nor Javanese culture in the disguise of Islam.³⁴⁸

Another scholar who has underlined the importance of locating Islam as a tradition in approaching Muslim societies is Talal Asad. He points out the bias that pervasively permeates the methodology of Western academia during the time of Geertz, i.e., the notion that Europe is the true locus of Christianity and the Middle East is the true locus of Islam.³⁴⁹ This assumption has led scholars to denote Islam in the Middle East as the standard for “orthodoxy” and to demean local forms of Muslim societies outside the area. It is the reason why Geertz quickly disregarded Islam in Java as not-so-true Islam.³⁵⁰

Talal Asad’s second critique of Geertz addresses the latter’s approach in presenting Islam as a dramaturgical, where Muslims become mere objects of observation that neither speak nor think but only behave. For example, if the label “Islam” is taken from Geertz’s

³⁴⁶ Woodward, *Islam in Java*, 241.

³⁴⁷ Woodward has done another research on the intersection between Islam and Javanese culture. Mark R. Woodward, *Java, Indonesia and Islam* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011).

³⁴⁸ Woodward, *Java, Indonesia and Islam*, 242.

³⁴⁹ Talal Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” *Qui Parle* Vol. 17, No. 2 (2009): 4.

³⁵⁰ Besides Geertz, Asad also criticizes Ernest Gellner’s methodology in studying Islam in Morocco. See Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

presentation, no significant element will be missing.³⁵¹ In contrast to Geertz, Asad recommends the method of “discursive tradition” as a better method in approaching Muslim societies. Asad formulates that “If one wants to write an anthropology of Islam one should begin, as Muslims do, from the concept of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artifacts, customs, and morals. *It is a tradition.*”³⁵² I share Asad’s concern that one must perceive Islam first and foremost as a tradition to understand the phenomenology of Muslim saints and Muslim societies holistically.

How does Asad define tradition? Does it mean a researcher must agree with any claim from self-claimed Muslims who talk about Islam? Asad views tradition as a discourse and not as something that is given and static. Tradition is never monolithic. Instead, it is always heterogeneous and continuously full of contestation and negotiation.³⁵³ At length, Asad explains,³⁵⁴

A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a *past* (when the practice is instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a *future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a *present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the *Islamic* past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present.

³⁵¹ Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 11-12.

³⁵² Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 20. Italics mine.

³⁵³ Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 23.

³⁵⁴ Asad, “The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam,” 20.

Hence, tradition is not a simple repetition of what has been decided in the past. Discursive tradition is a key for creative endeavors of Muslims to orient themselves toward what each perceives as the correct form of Islam, which includes narratives of the past but also present experiences and future expectations.

3. *Miraculous Deeds as the Signs of a Walī: the Case of Abdurrahman Wahid*

After emphasizing the importance of taking account of Islam as a tradition in approaching Muslim saints, this sub-section will focus on a narrative of one Indonesian saint-figure. As mentioned before, one of the most striking qualities of a *walī* is the acts of grace (*karāmāt*) that manifest in miraculous deeds.³⁵⁵ In Java, the *karāmāt* establish a person as a *walī*. One can easily find the *karāmāt* related to Muslim saints in their hagiographies.³⁵⁶ Carl Ernst says that hagiography is “one of the forms by which ideas of sainthood have been disseminated in Muslim societies.”³⁵⁷ Cornell, in his research on hagiographies of Muslim saints in Morocco, classifies the miraculous deeds of the saints into two categories. The first category is epistemological miracles, such as mind-reading, insight, and visionary guidance, while the second is “power miracles” such as subduing wild animals, food miracles, finding treasure, traversing great distances, healing,

³⁵⁵ Al-Yāfi’ī lists ten types of miraculous deeds of saints, starting from raising the dead, splitting and drying the sea, transmutation of matter, instantaneous travel, to healing. See Ohlander, “‘Abd Allāh ibn As’ad al-Yāfi’ī’s Defense of Saintly Marvels,” 56-59.

³⁵⁶ The Sufis has developed the written tradition on the life of prominent Sufi Masters as early as the tenth century. Some of the famous hagiographies have been translated in English, such as Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār’s *Memorial of God’s Friends* (Persian: *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā*). Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār, *Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār’s Memorial of God’s Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, trans. Paul Losensky (New York: Paulist Press, 2009).

³⁵⁷ Carl Ernst, *Sufism: An Essential Introduction to the Philosophy and Practice of the Mystical tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambala, 1997), 63.

controlling spirits (*jinn*), and finding water.³⁵⁸ These miraculous deeds can be found in other narratives regarding Muslim saints from different cultures and time periods, such as the case of Abdurrahman Wahid below.

Abdurrahman Wahid, a.k.a Gus Dur,³⁵⁹ (b. 1940 - d. 2009) was a charismatic figure from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)³⁶⁰ and former President of Indonesia (in office 1999 – 2001). He is mostly known for his leadership in NU, as a great Muslim thinker,³⁶¹ and as a consistent democrat, who was involved in a movement that strongly opposed President Soeharto's authoritarian regime. Many non-Muslims remember Gus Dur for his commitment to democracy and human rights and his relentless dedication to protecting minority groups. Moreover, for many Muslims, Gus Dur is known as *wali*, not only after his death but also during lifetime. His tomb, located in Pesantren Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java, has become a pilgrimage site for many people, which reflects people's recognition of Gus Dur as a *walī Allāh*.

³⁵⁸ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 116. According to an early hagiography, Abū Bakr, the second Caliph and Prophet Muhammad's companion, possessed an ability of clairvoyance. See John Renard, "Abū Bakr in Tradition and Early Hagiography," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 21.

³⁵⁹ "Gus" is a Javanese Muslim informal title that refers to sons of a *Kyai/Ulama*. Gus Dur's grandfather, Kyai Hasyim Asyari, was the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama and his father, Wahid Hasyim, was a prominent Muslim leader who was active in the National movement for the independence of Indonesia.

³⁶⁰ Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is a mass civil organization of traditional Sunni Muslims in Indonesia. It was founded in 1926 as a reaction to the modernist Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah. NU claims to have more than 50 million members although the exact number is very hard to estimate because NU functions more like a cultural identity.

³⁶¹ His great influence has made him and Nurcholis Madjid, a prominent figure from Muhammadiyah, shapes of the contemporary Islamic thought in Indonesia. See Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholis Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual Ulama: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought," in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 8, No. 3 (1997): 323-350.

Among dozens of stories and testimonies about Gus Dur that are available on the NU's official website, most are within the category of epistemological miracles.³⁶² For instance, there are stories on how Gus Dur possessed an ability to read other people's minds and foresee the future, including political events.³⁶³ Some testimonies narrate how Gus Dur had already known beforehand that he would become a president.³⁶⁴ This action can be considered miraculous because, at that time of political turmoil after the fall of President Suharto, Gus Dur was not a favorite candidate for the presidential seat, not to mention the fact that he was almost blind and could not walk anymore. Another story tells how Gus Dur told his presidential adjutant, General Sutarmanto, that the latter would become the head of the National Police in the future. This prediction was fulfilled several years later.³⁶⁵

Gus Dur is also depicted to have had an ability to communicate with deceased saints. Some people testify that Gus Dur often received invisible guests in the middle of the night, including Sunan Ampel, another notable figure of the *Wali Songo*.³⁶⁶ There are

³⁶² The Nahdlatul Ulama's official website (<http://www.nu.or.id/>) has a series of article on the topic "Gus Dur Wali."

³⁶³ For example there is one *santri* who need money to return to his Islamic school. He wanted to test Gus Dur's "ability" so he visited him without disclosing his need. Unexpectedly, Gus Dur gave him some amount of money enough to buy a train ticket. NU Online, "Santri yang Menguji Kewalian Gus Dur," May 7, 2012, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/37787/santri-yang-menguji-kewalian-gus-dur>, accessed on July 4, 2018. Another story told by former Secretary General of NU mentions how Gus Dur read his doubtfulness when Gus Dur said he will become a president. NU Online, "Saat Sekjen PBNU Dibaca Pikirannya oleh Gus Dur," February 13, 2012, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/36335/saat-sekjen-pbnu-dibaca-pikirannya-oleh-gus-dur>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

³⁶⁴ NU Online, "Kesaksian Non Muslim Soal Kewalian Gus Dur," April 10, 2012, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/37394/kesaksian-non-muslim-soal-kewalian-gus-dur>, accessed on July 4, 2018; NU Online, "Ryaas Rasyid: Gus Dur Sudah Tahu Bakal Jadi Presiden," January 3, 2012, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/35622/ryaas-rasyid-gus-dur-sudah-tahu-bakal-jadi-presiden>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

³⁶⁵ NU Online, "Gus Dur Sudah Ramalkan, Mantan Ajudannya, Sutarmanto Jadi Kapolri," November 5, 2013, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/48010/gus-dur-sudah-ramalkan-mantan-ajudannya-sutarmanto-jadi-kapolri>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

³⁶⁶ NU Online, "Tamunya Rahasia Gus Dur pada Tengah Malam," March 3, 2011, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/27109/tamunya-rahasia-gus-dur-pada-tengah-malam>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

also several stories on Gus Dur's power to identify other *awliyā' Allāh*, even when they tried to hide their status.³⁶⁷ For instance, when Gus Dur was in Egypt, he greeted a random person who was sitting in a mosque and asked the person to pray for him. Immediately, the man got upset and left while saying, "What is my sin, O Lord, that you disclosed my rank to this man?" Said Aqil Siradj, the current chairman of the NU, who accompanied Gus Dur at that time, thus inferred that the man was a *walī* who was trying to hide his presence, but failed because Gus Dur's spiritual rank was higher.

Regarding the second category of "power miracle," there are stories of Gus Dur's ability to transcend time and space, which enabled him to be present in more than one place at the same time.³⁶⁸ In another story, his driver testified that there was an occasion when he drove Gus Dur from Bandung to Jakarta in only one hour, while supposedly, the journey should take more than three hours.³⁶⁹ There are other stories of the intermediary role of Gus Dur that brought God's blessing (*barakā*) to people. Some people believe that under Gus Dur's leadership, the NU had gone through significant economic development and improved the livelihoods of many.³⁷⁰ In another account, two people believed that their

Sunan Ampel is one of the *Wali Songo*. See the story of Sunan Ampel in Anna M. Gade, "Sunan Ampel of the Javanese Wali Songo," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation*, ed. John Renard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 341-358.

³⁶⁷ NU Online, "Wali yang Lari dari Hadapan Gus Dur," April 3, 2011, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/27537/wali-yang-lari-dari-hadapan-gus-dur>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

³⁶⁸ NU Online, "Gus Dur Bisa Me-Raga Sukma Dirinya," March 8, 2011, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/27178/gus-dur-bisa-me-raga-sukma-dirinya>, accessed on July 4, 2018; NU Online, "Dimana Gus Dur yang Asli?" April 5, 2011, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/27577/dimana-gus-dur-yang-asli>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

³⁶⁹ NU Online, "Kesaksian Sopir Pribadi soal Kesaktian Gus Dur," January 4, 2013, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/41578/kesaksian-sopir-pribadi-soal-kesaktian-gus-dur>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

³⁷⁰ NU Online, "Gus Dur Mengangkat Ekonomi Warga NU," April 27, 2011, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/27906/gus-dur-mengangkat-ekonomi-warga-nu>, accessed on July 4, 2018.

houses were spared, while the rest of the neighborhood was blazed in flame because they had pictures of Gus Dur and Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī on their walls.³⁷¹

Apart from the miraculous deeds, the inner state of a saint is crucial. Miraculous deeds are often perceived as temptations from God, so a saint does not always have to perform miracles.³⁷² Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) in his *Epistle (Risāla)* wrote that the *karāmāt* “is an outward indication of the sincerity of inward spiritual states.”³⁷³ Therefore, it is necessary to explore the Islamic tradition on the spiritual states of a *walī*. It is here also that the difference between Christian and Muslim saints become apparent, despite some similarities in phenomenological appearances.

C. Friends of God in the Quran and *Hadīth*: A Textual Approach

The root *w-l-y* appears in the Quran many times in different forms. The words *walī* and *awliyā’* occur with various meanings, both positive and negative.³⁷⁴ Related to the topic of *awliyā’ Allāh*, the most famous verse of the Quran is this: “Verily, the Friends of God have no fear nor sorrow” (10:62). Depending on the commentators, this verse (*ayāt*) is interpreted differently. In a general sense, *awliyā’ Allāh* could refer to general believers whose piety brought them close to God.³⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the verse has been interpreted to

³⁷¹ NU Online, “Pasang Gambar Gus Dur Rumah Selamat dari Kebakaran Hebat,” October 4, 2013, <http://www.nu.or.id/post/read/48397/pasang-gambar-gus-dur-rumah-selamat-dari-kebakaran-hebat> accessed on July 4, 2018. The founder of the Qadiriyya order, al-Jīlānī is widely known as one of the greatest Muslim saints with intercessory power. In one story, a ship of traders was in danger of sinking but they are saved by a hand that lifted the ship after they invoked al-Jīlānī. Yahya Michot, *Islamic Piety Images from the Maghreb to India* (Hartford: Hartford Seminary Library, 2016), 71-72.

³⁷² Ernst, *Sufism*, 68.

³⁷³ Ohlander, “‘Abd Allāh ibn As‘ad al-Yāfi‘ī’s Defense of Saintly Marvels,” 55.

³⁷⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saint*, 23.

³⁷⁵ Ali Ünal, *The Qur‘an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (Somerset, NJ: The Light, 2006), 436.

signify “a unique group of individuals who, because they have conquered their egos, are in perpetual proximity to God and totally consumed by Him.”³⁷⁶ Commentators who opt for the latter mode of reading are usually the Sufis. They have a different hermeneutical approach to the Quran that goes beyond what is written, namely the inner meaning of the text.³⁷⁷

Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/986), one of early Sufi Masters, wrote a famous Quran commentary.³⁷⁸ According to him, every verse of the Quran has four senses:³⁷⁹

an outward (*zāhir*) and an inward sense (*bātin*), a limit (*hadd*) and a point of transcendency (*maṭla*). The outward sense is the recitation and the inward sense is the understanding (*fahm*) of the verse; the limit defines what is lawful and unlawful, and the point of transcendency is the heart’s place of elevation (*ishrāf*) [from which it beholds] the intended meaning as an understanding from God.

While the deeper meanings are only available to a few chosen, the outward sense is available for all believers. Regarding the verse (10:62), al-Tustarī starts with asserting the special status of the Friends of God (*awliyā’ Allāh*) because whenever the believers are seeing them, they are reminded of God.³⁸⁰ He continues with an explanation of various

³⁷⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 558.

³⁷⁷ For an introduction to this topic, see Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur’an in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2008), chapter 4.

³⁷⁸ Al-Tustarī’s Quran commentary has been translated into English. Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur’ān*, trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011). Gerhard Böwering wrote an excellent study on al-Tustarī. See Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl Al-Tustarī (D. 283/896)* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

³⁷⁹ Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler, translators’ introduction to *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur’ān* by Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), xxvii.

³⁸⁰ He quoted the famous *hadīth*, “When they are seen, God is remembered,” and applied it to the *awliyā’*. Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī*, 89. See also Imam Muhammad Bin Yazeed Ibn Majah Al-Qazwini, *English Translation on Sunān Ibn Majah*, Vol. 5, trans. Nasiruddin Al-Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 296.

ranks within the Friends of God (*siddīq*, *abdāl*, and *awtād*) and some of their outward signs.³⁸¹

Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī began to write a commentary of the Quran in the year 520/1126.³⁸² In an interpretation of the verse (10:62), he describes *awliyā' Allāh* as those who, “dive for the pearl of wisdom in the oceans of knowledge, who are the sun of desire and the resting place of the covenant of good fortune in the heaven of the innate disposition, who are accepted by the Divine Presence and the oyster shell of the secrets of Lordhood, who are the title-page of the Shariah and the proof of the Haqiqah.”³⁸³ Here, he points toward the state of being of a *walī* as the bearer of divine knowledge and as the sign of God’s presence. Following the Quranic text (10:62), Maybudī suggests that the saints “have no fear nor sorrow” in this life and the next. He states, “In this world he is adorned with service and reverence; in the afterworld he reaches blessing and vision; in this world he has recognition and love, in the afterworld caresses and contemplation. In this world he sees limpidness and loyalty, in the afterworld he reaches encounter and approval.”³⁸⁴ This interpretation is widely accepted among the Sufis. It is also similar to an interpretation in *The Study Quran*, which states that the saints have no fear nor sorrow because they “constantly behold God’s beauty...and [are] continually bathed in the splendor of His

³⁸¹ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī*, 89-90. Carl Ernst says that, from a very early period, the tradition regarding the invisible hierarchy of within the *awliyā' Allāh* has existed with different variations. The pole (*qutb*), the chiefs (*nuqaba'*), the good (*akhyār*), and the savior (*ghawth*) are some other terms related to the hierarchy. Ernst, *Sufism*, 30-31.

³⁸² William Chittick, translator’s introduction to *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious* by Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2015), ix. For a study of al-Maybudī’s hermeneutical method see Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur’an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

³⁸³ Rashīd al-Dīn al-Maybudī, *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious*: Kashf al-Asrār wa ‘Uddat al-Abrār, trans. William C. Chittick (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2015), 243.

³⁸⁴ Al-Maybudī, *The Unveiling of the Mysteries and the Provision of the Pious*, 244.

Majesty.” In this life, they experience ecstasy as they contemplate God, while in the next they will encounter God’s face through vision and blessings.³⁸⁵

After the Quran, the second most important source for designating *awliyā Allāh* is the prophetic saying (*hadīth*; pl. *ahādīth*). As demonstrated above, al-Tustarī utilizes a *hadīth* to formulate his thought of a *walī Allāh*. There are several prophetic sayings regarding the state of the Muslim saints that have great significance in the Islamic tradition. Most of them appear in the form of a special category within prophetic sayings called the divine sayings (*al-hadīth al-qudsī*). Unlike the prophetic sayings that record the Prophet Muhammad’s activities and sayings, *hadīth qudsī* records God’s actions and sayings.³⁸⁶ The reason why they did not become part of the Quran is that the wording did not come directly from God but from the Prophet Muhammad; only their meaning is from God.³⁸⁷ Muslims believe that while the Quran was directly dictated word for word from God to Prophet Muhammad through Angel Gabriel, the divine sayings came during the Prophet’s ascension to heaven (*Mi’rāj*), in his dreams, or through divine inspiration (*ilhām*).³⁸⁸

Al-Tustarī quotes a famous *hadīth* about the saints in his interpretation of verse 10:62, “When they are seen, God is remembered.” This *hadīth* indicates the state of being of a *walī* as a symbol of God. Another famous divine saying, called the “*hadīth* of envy,” underlines the special status of a *walī*, whose proximity to God makes even prophets and

³⁸⁵ Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 558.

³⁸⁶ For a study on the divine sayings, see William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: a Reconsideration of the Sources, With Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Hadīth Qudsī* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977).

³⁸⁷ Juan Eduardo Campo, *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 279; Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad’s Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 62.

³⁸⁸ James Robson, “Hadīth Ḳudsī,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 3 New Edition, eds. Bernard Lewis, et. al. (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 28.

martyrs envious of him or her: “Those who love one another in My Majesty shall have a raised dais (*manābir*) of light which will be the envy of prophets and martyrs.”³⁸⁹ Al-Tirmidhī, the famous compiler of *ahādith*, commenting on that particular *hadīth*, states that even though the saints receive God’s approval, their spiritual rank is not necessarily superior to the prophets and martyrs.³⁹⁰

Another divine saying that confirms the special place of a *walī* states that “Whoever demeans one of My Saints has declared war on Me.”³⁹¹ In another *hadīth*, a similar line is combined with the famous *hadīth* of supererogatory works (*nawafil*):³⁹²

Whoever treats a friend of Mine as an enemy, on him I declare war. My servant draws near to Me by nothing dearer to Me than that which I have established as a duty for him. And My servant does not cease to approach Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me [for something], I give it to him. If he seeks refuge with Me, I place him under My protection. In nothing do I hesitate so much as I hesitate [to take] the soul of a believer. He has a horror of death, and I have a horror of harming him.

This *hadīth* specifies how one who loves God will not be satisfied with the required religious duties and, thus, perform supererogatory prayers to come closer to God.³⁹³ Love is what drives the person, and, in return, God loves him or her too; love unites them. The physical description is an allusion to the state of being of a *walī* as divine transparency

³⁸⁹ Wording is as translated in Muhyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Divine Sayings: 101 Hadīth Qudsī Mishkāt al-anwār*, trans., Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2004), 32.

³⁹⁰ Imām Hāfiz Abu ‘Eisa Mohammad Ibn ‘Eisa At-Tirmidhi, *English translation of Jāmi’ At-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 4, trans. Abu Khalil (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 407-408.

³⁹¹ Wording is as translated in Ibn ‘Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 57.

³⁹² Wording is as translated in Ibn ‘Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 70. See also Muhammed Ibn Ismaiel Al-Bukhārī, *English Translation of Sahīh Bukhārī*, Vol. 8, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 275-276.

³⁹³ Ernst, *Sufism*, 51.

through which other people see God; the *walī* serves as a mediator between God and human beings. It is also a depiction of the annihilation of the saint's ego as a result of unity with God.

Another essential characteristic of a *walī* mentioned in the *hadīth* concerns secrecy or hiddenness of the status from the eyes of people:³⁹⁴

God, ever mighty and majestic is He, says: "Among My Friends, the one to be envied most, in My eyes, is the believer who has but little means and whose fortune is prayer, who worships his Lord in the best of modes, obeying Him in secret and in public. *He is unnoticed among men; they do not point him out with their fingers.* His livelihood is just sufficient, and he accepts that with patience." Then the Prophet snapped his fingers and said: "His death is hastened, his mourners few, his estate of little worth."

This divine saying can be interpreted as an imperative for humility. As someone who has nullified his or her ego, the saint does not need to impress people with piety and service, nor does she need an extravagant and glamorous life.

These references are far from exhaustive. As one studies various Sufi texts, there will be more Quranic and *ahādīth* verses quoted and interpreted concerning the saints and sainthood. This section serves as a ground from which one can identify how Sufis' elaboration of the concept of *awliyā' Allāh* is rooted in the Islamic tradition, where the Quran and *ahādīth* play an indispensable role.

D. Formulation of Sainthood in the Early Period of Sufism: A Theological Approach³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ Italics mine; wording is as translated in Ibn 'Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 9. See also At-Tirmidhī, *English translation of Jāmi' At-Tirmidhī*, 375.

³⁹⁵ For a study on the early period of Sufism, see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

The next chapter will deal with the theological approach to sainthood from Ibn ‘Arabī’s point of view. Thus, in the present section, I limit the discussion into two Sufi authors who have written on the issue of saint and sainthood in the earlier period: Al-Junayd (d. 910 CE) and Hakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 869 CE).³⁹⁶ Because there is no space to elaborate each authors’ thought in a great length, the focus will be given to these three questions: (1) is it possible for someone to acquire the status of sainthood, or is it by divine election? (2) What is the relationship between saints and prophets? (3) What is the primary role of saints?

1. Al-Junayd: Saints as Models for Believers

Abu al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910) is one of the early Sufi masters in Baghdad.³⁹⁷ He did not use *walāya* as a term but wrote about *awliyā’ Allāh*. Regarding the first question on the way to obtain the status of sainthood, al-Junayd denies any human involvement. He declares, “Know that you cannot reach God through yourself, but that you reach Him through Him.”³⁹⁸ Ahmet T. Karamustafa takes this quotation as an affirmation that, for al-Junayd, the status of the Friends of God is bestowed by God upon the elect.³⁹⁹ A *walī* is conscious of his or her status and can identify other people with the same state. What is

³⁹⁶ Chodkiewicz wrote an excellent introduction for the discourse of *walāya* among authors in the early period of Islam. See Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapter 2.

³⁹⁷ ‘Attār recorded al-Junayd’s life and sayings in his book. See ‘Attār, *Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār’s Memorial of God’s Friends*, 326-366.

³⁹⁸ Wording is from A.H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd: A Study of a Third/Ninth Century Mystic* (London: The Trustees of the “E.J. Gibb Memorial” and published by Luzac & Company Ltd., 1976), 175.

³⁹⁹ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “*Walāya* According to al-Junayd,” in *Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought*, ed. Todd Lawson (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 66.

hidden from the public is their collective identity as a group of special individuals.⁴⁰⁰ Different from the other conceptions regarding sainthood, which recognize hierarchy within the rank of saints based on the individual's spiritual stage, al-Junayd seems to perceive all saints on an equal level.⁴⁰¹

For the second question related to the relationship between prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and sainthood (*walāya*), al-Junayd does not elucidate the difference between the two. The reason is perhaps that he was never in a situation where he needed to justify his position. Another possible reason is that the answer is too obvious: saints are not prophets. Karamustafa proposes that al-Junayd's position is "close to collapsing *nubuwwa* and *walāya* into a single phenomenon, at least from the perspective of the question on human knowledge of God."⁴⁰²

Last, regarding the function of a *walī*, al-Junayd utters "when he [the Friend of God] has reached the zenith of spiritual achievement vouchsafed by God, he becomes a pattern for his fellow men."⁴⁰³ The Friends of God are an exemplar for the believers. They function as God's instrument to guide people and as an intermediary of God's mercy and blessings.⁴⁰⁴ Al-Junayd proclaims, "They are those who guide in the crises of religion, and theirs is the light which leads in the darkness of ignorance, the brilliance of their knowledge shines through darkness. God has made them the symbol of His mercy for His creatures, and a blessing for whom He chooses."⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁰ Karamustafa, "*Walāya* According to al-Junayd," 66.

⁴⁰¹ Karamustafa, "*Walāya* According to al-Junayd," 66-67.

⁴⁰² Karamustafa, "*Walāya* According to al-Junayd," 67.

⁴⁰³ Wording from A.H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, 172.

⁴⁰⁴ Karamustafa, "*Walāya* According to al-Junayd," 69.

⁴⁰⁵ Wording from A.H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, 143.

2. Hakīm al-Tirmidhī: Sainthood and the Seal of the Saints

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muhammad b. ‘Alī al-Tirmidhī (d. 298/910) wrote an important text on the discourse of *walāya* entitled *The Life of the Friends of God (Sīrat al-awliyā’)*.⁴⁰⁶ The author is widely known for his epithet of Hakīm (*Sage*) as Hakīm al-Tirmidhī. Al-Hujwīrī contends that al-Tirmidhī introduced the term *walāya* into the discourse of Sufism for the first time in the ninth century.⁴⁰⁷ Al-Hujwīrī enunciates *walāya* as the principle and foundation of Sufism, and all Sufi Masters had admitted the reality even though each might use different terms for *walāya*.⁴⁰⁸ Chodkiewicz observes that even though some of al-Tirmidhī’s contemporaries, such as al-Tustarī and Abū Sa‘īd al-Kharrāz, have elaborated the concept of *walāya* to some extent, it was al-Tirmidhī who wrote a more extended theological exposition of it. That is the reason why Ibn ‘Arabī, when he explains the concept of *walāya*, relies on al-Tirmidhī.⁴⁰⁹

Sīrat al-Awliyā’ begins with a set of questions related to the state of *Awliyā’ Allāh*. One of the opening questions posed to al-Tirmidhī involves the suggestion that a *walī* cannot be aware of his or her status, so whoever claims the status is not a true *walī*.⁴¹⁰ Al-Tirmidhī disputes that claim and proposes two different kinds of *awliyā’ Allāh*, i.e., *awliyā’*

⁴⁰⁶ Bernd Radtke and John O’Kane have published a translation of this particular work, along with al-Tirmidhī’s autobiography in English. All al-Tirmidhī’s texts quoted in this section are coming from this translation. Muhammad ibn ‘Alī al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi*, trans. and eds. John O’Kane, and Bernd Radtke (St John’s Studio: Curzon Press, 1996).

⁴⁰⁷ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 27.

⁴⁰⁸ Al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-Mahjūb*, 210. He wrote a section about the followers of Hakīm al-Tirmidhī whom he called the *Hakīmiyya*, see 210-246.

⁴⁰⁹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 27.

⁴¹⁰ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 38.

haqq Allāh and *awliyā Allāh*.⁴¹¹ The first term is uniquely employed by al-Tirmidhī as it never appears elsewhere.⁴¹² The literal translation of it is the “Friends of the Right of God.” Al-Tirmidhī describes it as someone who is faithful to God and follows the religious instructions carefully outwardly. However, concerning the interior, his carnal soul (*nafs*) is filled with lusts so that fear and anxiety overcome him or her.⁴¹³ Although the person makes a further effort to cleanse his or her *nafs* from lusts, the ultimate purpose of meeting God is to receive a reward.⁴¹⁴

In contrast to the first category, the *Awliyā’ Allāh* are those “who are sincere before God in their rejection so that they may meet Him tomorrow in a state of pure servitude and that their eyes may delight in beholding Him. For the latter [*awliyā’ Allāh*] God opens the path unto Himself, while He leaves the other [*Awliyā’ haqq Allāh*] in their striving and demands of them sincerity on the day they meet Him.”⁴¹⁵ As a result, a *walī Allāh* will “be able to reject lusts, until he becomes clever on the path and skillful in journeying to God.”⁴¹⁶ Chodkiewicz notices that the first term is characterized with “observance” (*‘ibāda*) while the latter is with “servitude” (*‘ubūdiyya*). This understanding, for al-Tirmidhī and later for Ibn ‘Arabī, connotes an ontological status: “*‘Ibāda*, which is situated on the level of action, does not totally exclude the illusion of autonomy; *‘ubūdiyya*, which has reference to being, does away with this illusion once and for all.”⁴¹⁷ The difference between those two is God’s

⁴¹¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 43.

⁴¹² Bernd Radtke, “The Concept of *Wilāya* in Early Sufism,” in *Classical Persian Sufism: from Its Origins to Rumi*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1993), 488.

⁴¹³ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 44, 47.

⁴¹⁴ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 49.

⁴¹⁵ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 49.

⁴¹⁶ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 50.

⁴¹⁷ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 29.

own will. Thus, the status as *awliyā' Allāh* is not acquirable but only attainable through the divine appointment.

Because of his view of *walāya*, including his claim as the one who occupies the office of the seal of the saints (*khatm al-awliyā'*) that put himself above all the other saints, al-Tirmidhī was accused of being a *mutanabbī* or assuming to have the dignity of the prophets. As a result, he was denounced and put on public trials.⁴¹⁸ The seal of the saints is the summit of all spiritual ranks among the Friends of God, comparable to Prophet Muhammad, who is the seal of the prophets (*khatm al-nabiyyīn*), among other prophets. Al-Tirmidhī elucidates the seal of the prophets this way:⁴¹⁹

God gathered the whole of prophethood together in Muhammad. He made his heart into a vessel for perfected prophethood and put a seal upon it. This informs you that when it comes to a book with a seal and a vessel with a seal, no one has the means to diminish it or to increase it beyond what is in it. As for the other prophets, their hearts were not provided with a seal. Thus, it is not sure that the carnal soul did not find access to what they contained.

The seal of the saints holds a high recognition before God as the first among the saints and receives special place and privileges.⁴²⁰ Al-Tirmidhī declares that the seal of the saints is a servant “whose position is before God in the realm of sovereignty (*mulk al-mulk*), and he converses there with God in the most magnificent assembly (*al-majlis al-a'azām*). And....the other Friends of God are behind him and below him, one rank after the other,

⁴¹⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 27. See also Bernd Radtke and John O’Kane, introduction to *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism: Two Works by Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi*, trans. and eds. John O’Kane, and Bernd Radtke (St John’s Studio: Curzon Press, 1996), 10.

⁴¹⁹ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 106.

⁴²⁰ Hakīm al-Tirmidhī imposes a test for anyone who claims the title of *khatm al-awliyā'*. The test consists of one hundred and fifty questions. Ibn ‘Arabī became the first person who answered all those questions triumphantly. See Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 72-86.

while the stations (*manāzil*) of the prophets are similarly ordered in front of him.”⁴²¹ Here, it is clear that the saints, including the seal of the saints, are ranked below the prophets.

Last, the role of *awliyā’ Allāh*, according to al-Tirmidhī, is not merely to be an example for the believers, as suggested by al-Junayd. The saints continue the role of leadership after the death of Prophet Muhammad.⁴²² The leadership is not primarily about visible sovereignty like the caliph, but more of the spiritual realm, which for the Sufi is closer to the true reality. Al-Tirmidhi states,⁴²³

Then when God took His prophet [Muhammad] unto Him, He caused forty strictly truthful men (*siddīqūn*) to emerge in His community. Through them the earth exists, and they are the people of His house and His family. Whenever one of them dies, another follows after him and occupies his position, and so it will continue until their number is exhausted and the time comes for the world to end.

The Seal of the Saints inhabits the highest position among the forty, and this person will be God’s proof (*hujjat Allāh*) on the Day of Judgement.⁴²⁴ This is a forerunner of the more complex system built by later authors on the hierarchy within the saints, including Ibn ‘Arabī’s. The role of the saints here thus exceeds being exemplary figures and more of spiritual leadership that encompasses both visible and invisible realms in this life and the afterlife.

⁴²¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 110.

⁴²² Radtke, “The Concept of *Wilāya* in Early Sufism,” 492.

⁴²³ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 109.

⁴²⁴ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 109.

CHAPTER 4

FRIENDS OF GOD AND SAINTHOOD ACCORDING TO IBN ‘ARABĪ

One day I had a conversation with a Muslim graduate student from Indonesia who told me that in the small Indonesian village where he grew up, there was someone believed by people to be a saint. However, that person did not fit in the typical local description of a Muslim saint (*walī Allāh*) because he was not a religious leader nor someone with extraordinary knowledge about the religion. Despite being a humble farmer and living an ordinary life like other villagers, people considered him as a living *walī* who lived in secrecy. The villagers always invited him to important village events, such as weddings, and the event would not begin without his presence. This story demonstrates the aspect of secrecy or hiddenness as one of the distinctive features of a *walī* in Islam.⁴²⁵

As explained in chapter three, there are some phenomenological similarities between the Muslim veneration of saints/friends of God (pl. *Awliyā Allāh*) and the Christian veneration of saints, such as the pilgrimage to the tomb of saints, the intermediary power of saints, and the capability to conduct charismatic acts. However, each religious tradition has its theological approach to sainthood that is rooted in the particularity of each tradition. This chapter focuses on the theological understanding of the Islamic concepts of saints and sainthood (*walāya*) according to the 12th/13th century mystical theologian and

⁴²⁵ Besides secrecy, the story illustrates two other equally important points. Firstly, sainthood is deeply embedded in local life of custom of Muslim communities. Secondly, notions of *walī* are not transmitted “from above” and formally, but can differ greatly and adapt readily to local circumstances.

philosopher Ibn ‘Arabī.⁴²⁶ The goal is to provide a more robust understanding of Muslim saints that will be elaborated in the later chapters to enrich the Christian understanding of saints through employing the comparative theology method.

Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Arabī al-Hātimī al-Tā’ī (1165-1240 CE) or widely known as Ibn ‘Arabī is arguably the most famous Sufī writer after Al-Ghazālī.⁴²⁷ His intellectual and spiritual legacy, passed down through his numerous writings, has earned him the title of “The Greatest Master” (*Shaykh al-Akbār*) and “The Revivifier of Religion” (*Muhyi al-Dīn*).⁴²⁸ As I pointed out in the third chapter, he was not the first to introduce or develop the concept of *walāya*.⁴²⁹ Rather, Ibn ‘Arabī lived during an era in which both the practice and theological discourse of sainthood flourished.⁴³⁰ His main contribution to the development of the concept of *walāya* is through

⁴²⁶ For the best available source in English for the topic related to Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *walāya*, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*.

⁴²⁷ For a comprehensive biography of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Claude Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. Peter Kingsley (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993). For the most accessible introduction to Ibn ‘Arabī’s life and thoughts in English, see Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999).

⁴²⁸ In his comprehensive study of 850 works attributed to Ibn ‘Arabī, Osman Yahia suggests that 700 are authentic and over 400 are still existing. The length of these works varies from short treatises to full-sized books. Among his works, the most well-known and influential are *The Meccan Revelations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*) and *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusūs al-Hikam*). William C. Chittick, *Ibn Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 7. For an Arabic text of *Fusūs al-Hikam*, see Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fusūs al-Hikam*, ed. A. A. Afifi, Beirut 1946. Full digital text is available in Noor Digital Library. For an Arabic text of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, see Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, 4 volumes, Cairo, 1329. This *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* is the famous third edition of Būlāq (1329/1911) that has become the standard Cairo edition. For full digital text, see Noor Digital Library. For a study of Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophical system in *Fusūs al-Hikam*, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism & Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concept* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁴²⁹ See chapter 3 section D.

⁴³⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī wrote his spiritual experience through meeting and learning with various Sufī masters and saints in two treatises, *The Spirit of Holiness in the Counselling of the Soul* (*Rūḥ al-quḍs fī munāsahat al-naḥs*) and *The Precious Pearl concerned with the Mention of Those from whom I have derived Benefit in the Way of the Hereafter* (*al-Durrat al-fākhiraḥ fī dhikr man intafa’ tu bihi fī tariq al-ākhirah*). R.W.J. Austin translates the former and part of the latter in his book, *Sufis of Andalusia*. See Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Sufis of*

systematizing and synthesizing the existing theological discourse of his time, including clarifying numerous terms related to Sufism. This does not mean that Ibn ‘Arabī did not contribute original and new ideas to the Muslim discourse on sainthood. For instance, he is the one who elaborates, almost exhaustively, the concept of the Seal of the Saint (*khatm al-awliyā’*), which initially was coined by Hakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 910 CE).⁴³¹ Being the originator of the term, al-Tirmidhī posed one hundred and fifty mysteriously challenging spiritual questions for anyone who wanted to claim the title. Ibn ‘Arabī was the only one who managed to answer all questions successfully, thus passing down a substantial legacy from his time until today.⁴³² Without a doubt, Ibn Arabī’s teachings about *walāya* become the most influential Muslim theological treatment of the concept.

Since it is impossible to describe all of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought on the *walī* and *walāya* in this chapter, I will focus on some outstanding features that are of particular relevance for my project. Before that, we need to clarify several of his key concepts to understand Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *walāya* better.

A. Clarification of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Key Concepts

1. Oneness of Being

Andalusia: the Rūḥ Al-Quds and Al-Durat Al-Fākhīrah of Ibn ‘Arabī, trans. and intro. Ralph William Julius Austin (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁴³¹ See a brief explanation of al-Tirmidhī’s concept of the “Seal of the Saints” in chapter 3 section D.2. For further study, see Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*.

⁴³² See Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 72-86. Ibn ‘Arabī answered Tirmidhī’s questions in chapter 73 of the *Meccan Revelations* (*Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*). See James W. Morris, introduction to *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1: Selected Texts of al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya Presentations and Translations from the Arabic*, by Ibn Al ‘Arabi, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2005), 18.

Scholars of Ibn ‘Arabī agree that the concept of the oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*) is the key to understand his whole system of thought.⁴³³ Even though Ibn ‘Arabī never used the term in his work, it is without a doubt the pivotal idea on which his other thoughts are built, and the central concept that has been passed down and developed further by his later interpreters.⁴³⁴ This concept is also highly contested within Islamic tradition by the various critics of Sufism in general and Ibn ‘Arabī in particular.⁴³⁵ It is not possible to elaborate on this concept exhaustively, but I will delineate some aspects that directly relate to the discussion of saints and sainthood.

In the *Epistle of the Light (Risālāt al-Anwār)*, the Shaykh states, “Certainly there is nothing in existence except God Most High, His attributes, and His actions. Everything is He, and of Him and from Him and to Him.”⁴³⁶ Oneness of being is a philosophical and theological explanation of the divine-human relationship from which, for Ibn ‘Arabī, one can explain the nature of the creation as derived from the Creator. God (*Allāh*) is the

⁴³³ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Fusus Al-Ḥikam: An Annotated Translation of “The Bezels of Wisdom,”* (London: Routledge, 2015), 6. Peter Coates, *Ibn ‘Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2011), 3.

⁴³⁴ The term *wahdat al-wujūd* was used for the first time by Sa’īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī (d. c. 700/1300), a disciple of Sadr al-Dīn Qūnawī who is a well-known disciple of Ibn ‘Arabī. See Morris, introduction to *The Meccan Revelations, Volume 1*, 128-129.

⁴³⁵ For general reception of and criticism toward Sufism, see Frederick de Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds., *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). Ibn Taymiyya, a famous medievalist Hanbalī jurist and Sunni theologian, is perhaps the most fervent critics of Sufism’s popular practices and thoughts despite being part of a Sufi group himself. For Ibn Taymiyya’s position on Sufism, see Th. E. Homerin, “Ibn Taimīya’s Al-Ṣūfiyyah Wa-Al-Fuqarā’,” *Arabica*, Vol.32 (1985): 219-244; for Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism of the concept of sainthood, see Diego R. Sarrio, “Spiritual Anti-Elitism: Ibn Taymiyya’s Doctrine of Sainthood (*Walāya*),” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2011): 275-291; for Ibn Taymiyya’s affiliation with the Qādiriya Order, see George Makdisi, “Ibn Taimīya: A Ṣūfi of the Qādiriya Order,” *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, Vol. 1 (1973): 118-129.

⁴³⁶ Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power: A Sufi Manual on Retreat*, trans. Rabia Terri Harris (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1989), 25.

Necessary Being (*Wajīb al-Wujūd*) that makes everything other than God exist.⁴³⁷ Therefore created beings derive their existence from God and not from themselves. Ibn ‘Arabī says in *The Meccan Revelations (Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya)* that “there is no existence through itself but God. Hence the entities of the possible things receive the Being of God through their realities, since there is no other Being.”⁴³⁸ To support this view, the Shaykh cites the Quranic verse, “There is nothing like Him” (Q. 42:11) and states that, among various interpretations of this verse, the highest among them is, “There is nothing in existence that resembles God or is a likeness of God, since Being/existence is nothing but God Himself” (*‘ayn al-haqq*).⁴³⁹ However, for those who demand more explanation on the relations between God and created beings, he utilizes these analogies:⁴⁴⁰

look upon the quality of being wood in a timber, a chair, an inkwell, a pulpit, and a coffin; or upon such things as rectangularity of shape, for example, in everything that is a rectangle, like a room, a coffin, and a sheet of paper. Rectangularity and woodness lie within the realities of every one of these things. It is the same way with colors—[e.g.,] the whiteness of cloth, pearls, paper, flour, and fat. The whiteness understood from the cloth, without being characterized as being a piece of whiteness within the cloth—but rather, as the reality of whiteness—becomes manifest in the cloth just as it becomes manifest in paper. The same holds true for knowledge, power, will, hearing, and sight, and for each and every thing.

⁴³⁷ Ibn Al ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1: Presentations and Translations from the Arabic*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2005), 136.

⁴³⁸ Ibn Al ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 137.

⁴³⁹ Ibn Al ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 164. In *The Bezels of Wisdom (Fusūs al-Hikam)*, chapter Hūd, Ibn ‘Arabī justifies his interpretation of the same Quranic verse, “If we take the verse ‘There is none like Him’ as denying similarity, we have realized the true sense and the intended meaning, that He is essentially all things. Created things are limited....Thus, He is limited by the limitation of every limited thing, each limitation being a limitation of the Reality. He permeates through all beings called created and originated, and were it not the case, [relative] existence would not have any meaning.” Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R.W.J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 135.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibn Al ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 33.

The last part of his explanation is in line with the mainstream belief of Muslims, especially with the Ash'arite school, that there is no power except through God (*lā hawla walā quwwata illā billāh*). The Ash'arite school's idea of "acquisition" (*kasb*) teaches that God creates human actions, both good and evil, and those actions are "acquired" by humans.⁴⁴¹ Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936 CE/324 H), the founder of this school, developed this idea to counter the Mu'tazilites' teaching that human creates his or her actions, and not God.⁴⁴² Despite agreeing with the created nature of human actions, Ibn 'Arabī's assesses that the Ash'arites discovered only part of the truth because they did not understand that the created beings are essentially not God, but, at the same time, cannot be other than God.⁴⁴³ This principle governs the relationship between God and creation. Ibn 'Arabī's popular expression for the relationship is "He/not He" (*Hūwa/lā Hūwa*). William C. Chittick explains that, for the Shaykh, "the world [i.e., all creation] always remains in an ambiguous situation, halfway between Being and nothingness."⁴⁴⁴ For instance, when being asked about the root of all existence, Ibn 'Arabī answers, "If you say that it is the

⁴⁴¹ Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936 CE/324 H), was an influential thinker in the formation of Sunni Islamic theology (*kalām*). For his concept of "acquisition," see Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl Ash'arī, *The Theology of Al-Ash'arī: The Arabic Texts of Al-Ash'arī's Kitāb Al-Luma' and Risālat Istiḥsān Al-Khawḍ Fī 'ilm Al-Kalām*, trans. Richard J. McCarthy, S.J. (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 53-62.

⁴⁴² By affirming human's responsibility of his or her own action, the Mu'tazilites (flourished between the 8th and 10th century CE) wants to highlight God's justice and maintains rational approach to the issue. Yet, this approach demeans the importance of the Divine Command as understood by the Islamic tradition. The Mu'tazilites was regarded as "unorthodox" by other Sunni theological schools. However, some modern Muslim thinkers draw insights from their rationalist approach. For more elaboration on the Mu'tazilites teachings and their modern counterparts, see Richard C. Martin, Mark R. Woodward, and Dwi S. Atmaja, eds., *Defenders of Reasons in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003).

⁴⁴³ Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 154. For more discussion on Ibn 'Arabī's criticism to the Ash'arites' idea of *kasb*, see Steffen A. J. Stelzer, "Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed., Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 170-172.

⁴⁴⁴ William C. Chittick, introduction to chapter 73 of *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 42.

world, you have spoken the truth; and if [you say] that it is not the world, you have spoken the truth. [If you say] that it is God or it is not God, you have spoken the truth.”⁴⁴⁵

Therefore, in itself, every creature, including the cosmos, has no being except the given existence from God, which brings them into a special relationship with God. The Shaykh, following the Quran, describes creation not as a one-time event but a continuous and simultaneous effort of the Creator, in which God manifests God’s existence to sustain the world. The concept of the creative “Breath of All-Merciful” (*Nafas al-Rahmān*) plays an important role here, as he explains at length:⁴⁴⁶

Through the Breath the whole world is breathed (*mutanaffas*), the Breath making it manifest. The Breath is non-manifest (*batīn*) in God and manifest (*zāhir*) in creation. So the nonmanifest of God is the manifest of creation, and the nonmanifest of creation is the manifest of God. Through the combined totality engendered existence is realized, and in abandoning this totality one says “God” and “creation.” So God belongs to Sheer Being and creation to sheer possibility. These two affairs continue to display their properties in the world forever. Hence creation is renewed at every breath, in this world and the next. The Breath of the All-Merciful is forever turning its attentiveness, and nature is forever undergoing generation as the forms of this Breath, so that the Divine Command may never be rendered ineffectual, since ineffectuality (*ta’tīl*) is impossible. So forms are temporally originated and become manifest in accordance with their preparedness to receive the Breath.

Therefore, God is the existence manifested in the created beings, which function as the loci of manifestation. As possible things, creatures need God, the Necessary Being, to exist. The relation between them can be comparable to “the relation of knowledge and power to the knowledgeable and powerful.”⁴⁴⁷ At the end of chapter 130 and the beginning of

⁴⁴⁵ Ibn Al ‘Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 33.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibn Al ‘Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 54.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibn Al ‘Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 136.

chapter 131 of *The Meccan Revelations*, the Shaykh utilizes two important concepts of “locus of manifestation” (*mazhar*) and “entity” (*‘ayn*) to explain the process of creation. Chittick summarizes Ibn ‘Arabī’s two concepts by stating that the creation “which appears within the world by means of God’s Self-manifestation (*zuhūr*) or theophany (*tajallī*) is God Himself—Being—but colored by the locus within which He appears. The locus, in turn, is determined by the immutable entity (*‘ayn thābita*), i.e., God’s Knowledge of how Being will become manifest in that particular situation.”⁴⁴⁸

Furthermore, Ibn ‘Arabī often quotes a well-known Divine Saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) to explain this relationship: [God says] “I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known; therefore I created the creation (*al-khalq*) in order to be known.”⁴⁴⁹ As God is the only Being, or the Real (*al-Haqq*), the creation is possible because of God’s primordial Self-consciousness to be in a relationship, so God creates; in this process, God is the knower and known.⁴⁵⁰ In another passage, he interprets another famous *ḥadīth*, “God is beautiful and God loves beauty,” in a similar way with the polarization of “knower-known,” but here he further asserts that⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ William C. Chittick, introduction to chapters 130 and 131 of *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 128.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibn ‘Arabī often quote this *ḥadīth* throughout his works, for example see William C. Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 180. The Shaykh admits in *The Meccan Revelations* that this particular *ḥadīth* “is sound on the basis of unveiling (*kashf*), but not established by way of transmission (*naql*).” Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt, appendix to *Divine Sayings: 101 Ḥadīth Qudsī Mishkāt Al-Anwār*, by Muhyiddīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, 99 fn. 21.

⁴⁵⁰ R.W.J. Austin, introduction to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, by Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, trans. R.W.J. Austin (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 27. In one of the passages in *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn ‘Arabī states that God “is Being Itself, the Essence of Being, He is the Preserver of all by His Essence, nor does this preservation weary Him. In preserving all things, He is preserving His Form, lest aught assume a form other than His Form, which is not possible. He is the observer in the observer and the observed in the observed.” Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 135.

⁴⁵¹ Ibn Al ‘ Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 47-48.

[God] described Himself as loving beauty, and He loves the world, so there is no thing more beautiful than the world. And He is beautiful, while beauty is intrinsically lovable; hence all the world loves God....So the love of the different parts of the world for each other derives from God's love for Himself. This is because love is an attribute of the existent thing (*al-mawjūd*), and there is nothing in existence except God....Hence there is no lover and no beloved except God, so there is nothing in existence except the Divine Presence (*al-hadrat al-ilāhiyya*), which is His Essence, His Attributes, and His Acts.

At this point, it is clear that Ibn 'Arabī perceives the cosmos and all of the created beings in it as God's theophany or God's Self-Disclosure (*tajallī*).⁴⁵² Furthermore, he connects this theophany to the Divine Names, as God's revelation is none other than God's Names. Here, the Shaykh demonstrates his unique mode of interpretation concerning the Divine Names, which shapes his idea of *walāya*, as we will explore in the next section. In one of his poems in *The Meccan Revelations*, he writes, "So our entities are His Names, they are nothing other, for in His own Self He decrees and differentiates affairs."⁴⁵³ Created beings are "signs" (*ayāt*) of God because they "become manifest by displaying God's names and attributes."⁴⁵⁴ The actualization of those Divine Names defines the degrees of the creatures. At this point, we need to discuss another foundational theme in Ibn 'Arabī's thought, i.e., human being (*insān*).

2. *The Human and the Perfect Human*

⁴⁵² Ibn Al 'Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 224. For further study of the theme of God's Self-Disclosure see William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁴⁵³ Ibn Al 'Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 58

⁴⁵⁴ Chittick, *Ibn Arabi*, 29.

The human being plays an essential role among other creations because it is only in the human (“Adam”) that God bestows all of the Divine Names.⁴⁵⁵ Humans are capable of knowing and cultivating all the Names, unlike other creatures who receive the Divine Names partially. The Divine Names subsist as a possibility because not everyone can achieve that higher, comprehensive state. Ibn ‘Arabī calls the one who can do that the “Perfect Human” (*al-insān al-kāmil*).⁴⁵⁶

In the Islamic tradition, the human being (“Adam”) is the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of God and attains a high place, even higher than the angels. The Quranic story of the first human being and the first prophet, Adam, supports the tradition, and Ibn ‘Arabī offers a fascinating commentary to the story in his first chapter of *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusūs al-Hikam*). He states,⁴⁵⁷

The (entity) mentioned above is called a human being and the vicegerent (of God). As for his humanness, it derives from his comprehensive structure and his comprising of all the realities, (because) the human being (*insān*) relates to the Real (*al-Haqq*—God) as the pupil (*insān al-‘ayn*) relates to the eye, and through the pupil seeing (*nazar*, *basar*) occurs. Hence, he is called *insān* (meaning human being and pupil), because through him the Real looks (*nazara*) at His creation and has mercy (*rahima*) on them. This human being is both created in time and is eternal, coming into being and living forever. He is both the separating and unifying principle (literally: word—*kalima*).

The Shaykh thus underlines the indispensable role of a human being without whom the world could not exist. He compares the relationship between the world and human beings

⁴⁵⁵ This idea is based on a *hadīth* “God created Adam in God’s image.” Imām Abul Hussain Muslim bin al-Hajjaj, *English Translation of Sahīh Muslim*, Vol. 6, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab, ed. Huda Khattab (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 476.

⁴⁵⁶ Chittick, *Ibn Arabi*, 12-13. The Arabic term used here (*insān*) does not have a gender connotation and, thus, it signifies that the path to perfection is open for all human being regardless of gender.

⁴⁵⁷ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Fusus Al-Hikam*, 18.

to the relation between the bezel of the seal ring to the seal ring. Ibn 'Arabī elucidates, “The human being is the tool....and the sign by which the King seals His treasure. Because of (this function) God calls him the vicegerent, for through him God preserves His creation, as the seal ring preserves the treasures....So long as the Perfect Human Being remains, the world will not cease to exist.”⁴⁵⁸

In the Quranic passage related to the creation of Adam, God commands all angels to prostrate before Adam, which signifies the superiority of the latter over the former. Adam was superior because God has taught him all the Names or divine qualities (Q. 2: 31). The angels who do not share such quality regarding the names prostrated before Adam, except for Satan (*Iblīs*) (Q. 2:34). Satan thought he was superior by nature because he came from fire while Adam was from clay. Upon this well-known Quranic story, Ibn 'Arabī explains that Adam embodied all of the Divine Names and, is thus was more comprehensive in his awareness of the divine Realities than the angels.⁴⁵⁹ In embodying the Divine Names, Adam and human beings assume two forms, one derived from the cosmos and one from God (the divine Spirit-Breath), while Satan is only part of the cosmos.⁴⁶⁰ Regarding the two forms of the human being, Ibn 'Arabī explains that⁴⁶¹

His [*human's*] outer form He [*God*] composed of the cosmic realities and forms, while his inner form He [*God*] composed to match His [*God's*] Own form. Thus He [*God*] says in the Sacred Tradition [*hadīth*], “I am his hearing and his sight,” and not, “I am his eye and his ear,” in order to show the

⁴⁵⁸ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 18.

⁴⁵⁹ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 19.

⁴⁶⁰ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 23-24; Austin summarizes that Ibn 'Arabī views the angels as “particularizations of divine power... who...nevertheless had no share in the physical and formal actuality of cosmic creation. Thus, they are purely spiritual beings, quite unlike...Adamic being who alone, of all creation, shares in the Self-consciousness of the Reality. Similarly, the animal creation...lies outside the uniquely synthetic experience of the human state.” R.W.J. Austin, introductory note to chapter 1 of *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 49.

⁴⁶¹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 56. I add some words in the bracket with italics to clarify.

distinction between the two forms [the imperceptible and the perceptible]. Likewise He [*God*] is [implicit] in every cosmic being according as the essential reality [manifested] in that being requires it, providing it is understood that no other being enjoys the Synthesis [of divine realities] possessed by the Regent [*human*]. It is only by virtue of this Synthesis that he is superior [to all other beings].

However, in another passage, the Shaykh clarifies his view regarding the superior position of Adam over the angels. The fact that Adam taught the angels about the Names does not mean that the human's level (*martaba*) is "better (*khayr*) than the angels, but it does mean that his plane [of existence] (*nash'a*) is better (*akmal*) than theirs."⁴⁶² The intermediary nature of humanity as a link or medium between the two poles of God and the cosmos makes Ibn 'Arabī identify humans as the isthmus connecting God and creation (*barzakh*).⁴⁶³ Humans' disposition differs from other creatures because they are created in God's image, which becomes the reason for their intermediary state.

Even though human beings embody and potentially know all of the Divine Names, the Shaykh reminds his readers that in most people those Names "remain as virtualities, or some Names are actualized to a certain degree but not others."⁴⁶⁴ Those who can attain the

⁴⁶² Ibn Al 'Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 44.

⁴⁶³ Austin, introduction to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 34. Ibn 'Arabī's view of human as *barzakh* represents his creative and rich interpretation of the Quranic phrase "the two seas" as appeared in Q 55:19-20 ("He [God] let forth the two seas that meet together, between them a barrier they do not overpass" Arberry translation) and Q 18:60 ("And when Moses said to his page, 'I will not give up until I reach the meeting of the two seas, though I go on for many years' Arberry translation). For a brief explanation of *barzakh* see Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 14, 117-118.

⁴⁶⁴ William C. Chittick, introduction to chapter 73 of *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 41. See also William C. Chittick, *Imaginal World: Ibn Al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 20-23. According to James W. Morris, there are several pathways for the realization of *walāya* and actualization of those Names, including through personal suffering and difficulty that help one to cultivating the quality of Compassion (*rahman*). I will elaborate some of them in the following chapters. James W. Morris, "Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*: Challenges of Realization and Communication" (paper presented at the "Abode of the Message," on the occasion of the 85th 'urs commemoration of Hazrat Inayat Khan, February 3, 2013).

perfection in actualizing all the Divine Names are the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*).

The Perfect Human possesses primordial quality as intended by God and plays an essential role in sustaining the world. The Shaykh asserts,⁴⁶⁵

since he [Perfect Human] is the locus of theophany (*majlā*) for the Divine Names, it is correct to say that he [Perfect Human] is for this writing like a crown, since he [Perfect Human] is the noblest adornment through which it is adorned. Through the “crowning” the effects of a king’s commands become manifest in the kingdom; in the same way, through the Perfect Man the Divine Judgment (*al-hukm al-ilāhī*) concerning reward and punishment in the world becomes manifest. Through him the order (*al-nizām* [i.e., of the universe]) is established and overthrown; in him God decrees, determines, and judges.

The Perfect Human, for Ibn ‘Arabī, is the state of the saints and relates to the awareness of the Oneness of Being as the guiding principle. Michel Chodkiewicz infers that the saint is the one who is “no longer duped by the illusion of the phenomenal world, but perceive the Oneness of Being in the multiplicity of beings.”⁴⁶⁶ Relating the discussion to the well-known *hadīth*, “whoever knows their self know their Lord,” (*man ‘arafa nafsahu faqad ‘arafa rabbuhu*), Ibn ‘Arabī emphasizes the special relationship between God and human beings. The human being is created in God’s form and is infused with God’s Names so, the Shaykh asserts, “God knows you from Himself and He tells you that you will not know him except from yourself.”⁴⁶⁷ This understanding becomes the reason Ibn Arabi compares Adam with a mirror because it is through the human that God sees Godself, which corresponds to the whole idea of the Oneness of Being and God as the knower and the known. The mirror of this image is not our contemporary mirror, which

⁴⁶⁵ Ibn Al ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations Volume I*, 44. I add some words in the bracket with italics to clarify.

⁴⁶⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 163.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibn Al ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations Volume I*, 179.

reflects our images in almost perfect form, but rather, the metal mirror of his time that required to be polished repeatedly.⁴⁶⁸ If the mirror is not clear, it will not reflect perfectly the reality. Similarly, a human being needs to attain a certain level of spiritual realization to reflect God's image at its best.

The saints or Perfect Humans manage to “see”—or more accurately to recognize how personally, and fully appreciated, all aspects of spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifa*)—the whole reality because they have attained that level and can perceive God as the Real. Unlike them, most humans see God through their obscure vision so that what they see is “god created in their belief.” This is the last concept we need to discuss before continuing with the topic of sainthood.

3. *The “God Created in Beliefs”*

The concept of the “god created in beliefs” becomes one of the most controversial teachings of Ibn 'Arabī as it fails to conform easily with the traditional belief of Islam. He elucidates the concept most clearly in the chapter of Hūd and Shu'ayb from *The Bezels of Wisdom*.⁴⁶⁹ At the beginning of the chapter, he says:⁴⁷⁰

Verily, my Lord acts according to a straight path” (Q. 11:56). Every moving creature walks according to God's Straight Path. Those (who walk according to the Straight Path) are not the object of God's anger in this respect, nor do they go astray. Just as going astray is accidental, so is the

⁴⁶⁸ R.W.J. Austin, introductory note to chapter 1 of *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 48.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, the Wisdom of Hūd (chapter 10) and Shu'aib (chapter 12). Hūd is an ancient Arabian prophet mentioned in the Quran that has no parallel in the Hebrew Scripture, while Shu'aib is a Midianite prophet who resembles Jethro, Moses' father in law (Q. 7:85, 11:84; see also Exodus 3:1). See Muḥammad Ibn-'Abdallāh al-Kisā'ī, *Tales of the Prophets (Qisas Al-Anbiyā')*, trans. Wheeler M Thackston (Chicago, IL: Kazi Publ., 1997), 109-117, 204-208; Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), 63-73, 146-156.

⁴⁷⁰ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 74.

divine wrath, and (all things) go back to God's Mercy which encompasses everything and precedes (His Wrath). All things other than God are creatures, because they possess a spirit....Each thing moves according to God's Straight Path, which serves as a path only by walking according to it (literally: on it).

In this passage, the Shaykh comments on the Quranic statement regarding the Straight Path, which traditionally is interpreted as the religion of Islam, using a well-known *hadīth* regarding God's mercy that has precedence over God's wrath.⁴⁷¹

Afterward, Ibn 'Arabī divides humans into two groups: those who travel a way they know, and this is their Straight Path, and those who go on a direction that they do not know, which is also their Straight Path.⁴⁷² The people of the first group are the spiritual "Knower" (*arīf*), who understands that God is the only Being and the Source from which the existence of all created beings comes. In contrast, people of the second group are ignorant of the essence of reality and bound by the limits of their conscious personal belief (*i'tiqād*) and conceptions of God. Ibn 'Arabī underlines this fact by saying,⁴⁷³

Whoever knows that the Real is the essence of the way, truly knows reality, for in Him [God] you walk and travel, because there is no known object but He. He is both the essence of existence and the walker and the traveler. There is no knower but He....the Real (*al-Haqq*) has many relations and various aspects.

⁴⁷¹ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 74. The Shaykh utilizes a Divine Saying (*hadīth qudsī*) that says "My Mercy has precedence over My Anger." See Muhammed Ibn Ismail Al-Bukhārī, *English Translation of Sahīh Bukhārī*, Vol. 4, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), 265. Based on the hadīth, he maintains the view that hell (the Fire in the Islamic tradition) is not eternal and eventually will cease because of God's mercy. See Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 210-211.

⁴⁷² Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 132. See also Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 76.

⁴⁷³ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 76.

However, God purposefully conceals the reality through otherness (*ghayra*) even though God “is identical to you (*wa-huwa anta*).”⁴⁷⁴ People who are not knowledgeable say that a hearing belongs to the person who hears, while the Gnostics, who possess higher spiritual rank, know that in reality, “hearing is the Essence of the Real and so are other faculties and organs.”⁴⁷⁵

In the last part of the chapter of Hūd, the Shaykh demonstrates the implication of the Oneness of Being for the reality of the multiplicity of religions. According to him,⁴⁷⁶

most men have, perforce, an individual concept [belief] of their Lord, which they ascribe to Him and in which they seek Him. So long as the Reality is presented to them according to it they recognize Him and affirm Him, whereas if presented in any other form, they deny Him, flee from Him and treat Him improperly, while at the same time imagining that they are acting toward Him fittingly. *One who believes,⁴⁷⁷ believes only in a deity he has created in himself, since a deity in “beliefs” is a [mental] construction.* They see [in what they believe] only themselves [as relative beings] and their own constructions within themselves.

Here, Ibn ‘Arabī comments on a long *hadīth* on the vision of God wherein the hereafter, God will appear to the “believers” in a form that is unrecognizable by them, and they will reject God due to lack of knowledge or true faith. Then, God will assume a form known to them, and they will recognize God as their Lord.⁴⁷⁸ For him, this *hadīth* shows how people

⁴⁷⁴ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Fusus Al-Hikam*, 77.

⁴⁷⁵ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Fusus Al-Hikam*, 77.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 137. Italics mine.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī here is using the ordinary Arabic word for conceptual, psychological “belief” (whether conscious or implicit). This is totally different from the Quranic expression for “faith” (*īmān*), which is unfortunately and misleadingly translated as “belief” in many superficial English Quran translations.

⁴⁷⁸ The hadith can be found in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *The Niche of Lights (Mishkāt al-Anwār)* (hadith 26). It says, “And there remains that community with its unbelievers amongst them. God, ever blessed and exalted is He, appears to them in a form different to that form of His which they recognise, and says: “I am your Lord!”

“We take refuge in God from you”, they reply. “This is where we shall be until our Lord, ever mighty and majestic is He, comes to us. And when our Lord comes to us, we will know Him.”

create their ideas about God, which is not accurate or incomplete because they lack spiritual understanding (*ma'rifa*) regarding the principle of the Oneness of Being. However, inasmuch as it signifies limited awareness, that path is not totally astray from worshipping God because God “is too All-embracing and Great to be confined within one creed rather than another, for He has said, ‘Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God,’ without mentioning any particular direction.”⁴⁷⁹

In the chapter of the *Fusūs* on Aaron, the Shaykh mentions how the action of Aaron, who failed to restrain his people from worshipping the calf, “is a wisdom from God made manifest in the created world so that He might be worshiped in every form.”⁴⁸⁰ The Quranic phrase “the lofty in degrees” (Q. 40:15) refers to the various degrees of the One Being so that the act of worshipping a calf is still part of worshipping God, even if it is not the highest degree.⁴⁸¹ This concept connects to the consciousness of the worshiper in realizing the level of the Self-manifestation of God.⁴⁸² The one who can recognize the reality of this situation is the Knower who sees the reality as not ever separated from God’s Being.

The concept of the “gods created in beliefs” is not meant to undermine the particularity of religious traditions, especially Islam, nor does Ibn ‘Arabī promote relativism. In a response letter to Seljuq ruler Kay Kaus of Konya in 1212, who asked the

God, ever blessed and exalted is He, then comes to them in that form of His which they recognise, and says: “I am your Lord!”

“You are our Lord indeed!”, they call out. They follow Him, and the path is laid down.” Ibn ‘Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 27. A slightly different version of the hadith is included in the *Sahīh Bukhārī*. See Al-Bukhārī, *English Translation of Sahīh Bukhārī*, Vol. 8, 306.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 137. The phrase “Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God” came from a verse in Q 2:115.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 246.

⁴⁸¹ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 246.

⁴⁸² Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 247.

Shaykh about the proper treatment of his Christian subjects in his territory, Ibn 'Arabī advised him to impose the Islamic law upon them that restricts their public worship.⁴⁸³ Contrary to the assumption that mystical thinking tends to undermine mainstream religiosity, Ibn 'Arabī's letter demonstrates how he respects the particularity of Islam as a religious tradition and its laws.⁴⁸⁴ On the other hand, one must remember that he wrote his works for those who embark on their journey to know God and not for ordinary people. In a passage from another work, *The Epistle of Lights (Risālat al-Anwār)*, the Shaykh advises the seekers not to give up too early on the journey:⁴⁸⁵

Certainly, there is nothing in existence except God Most High, His attributes, and His actions. Everything is He, and of Him and from Him and to Him....However, His appearance in His light is so intense that it overpowers our perceptions, so that we call His manifestation a veil. Be sure that you articulate what you intend. Let your covenant at your entry into retreat be that there is nothing like unto God. And to each form that appears to you in retreat and says "I am God," say: "Far exalted be God above that! You are through God." Remember the form of what you saw. Turn your attention from it and occupy yourself with dhikr [remembrance of God] continually.

Ibn 'Arabī explains that the implication of both the Oneness of Being and the "gods created in beliefs" is not to attain knowledge. Instead, primarily, it is to assist the people on their spiritual journey to not be too easily satisfied with their encounter with God's forms and to invite them to deepen their relationship with God.

He is aware of the spiritual danger entailed in such knowledge and, thus, he continually establishes the state of pure servanthood as the ultimate goal of the seeker.

⁴⁸³ Austin, introduction to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 10.

⁴⁸⁴ For further study of the place of Sharia in Ibn 'Arabī's thought see Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn Arabi, the Book, and the Law* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993).

⁴⁸⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, 25-26.

Austin points toward the primacy of servanthood by citing some lines from Ibn ‘Arabī’s two poems from *The Bezels of Wisdom*, “In the first he [Ibn ‘Arabī] utters what appears to be pure heresy in the line, ‘I worship Him and He worships me,’ while in the second he warns against the delusion of spiritual inflation with the words, “Be the servant of the Lord, not the lord of the servant.”⁴⁸⁶ In the end, the goal of the journey to God is not to have a share of God’s power. Instead, it is to be utterly a servant to the Lord. This aspect and the goal of service and servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*) is particularly evident in Ibn ‘Arabī’s treatment of sainthood and the saints.

B. The Realm of the *Walāya*

1. The relationship of Sainthood with Prophethood and Messengerhood

One of the most controversial topics in Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts has surrounded his configuration of the relationship between *walāya*, prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and messengerhood (*risalā*). Some Muslims accused Ibn ‘Arabī of elevating his status as equal to, or even above, the prophets because of his claiming to be the Seal of the Muhamadan Saints. To claim to be a prophet after Muhammad would be a heinous crime that equates blasphemy in Islam. It is only after studying the complexity of his thought carefully that one finds that accusation off the mark. Before explaining Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts on the relation between sainthood, prophethood, and messengerhood, I will briefly describe the two latter concepts.

⁴⁸⁶ Austin, introduction to *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 20. The first poem can be found in Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 95, and the second one in Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 103.

God creates human beings with an exceptional capacity to connect with their Creator. The Quran illustrates that capacity through a moment when the primordial covenant was formed before the creation. The verse states, “And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ they said, ‘Yea, we bear witness’—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, ‘Truly of this we were heedless” (7:172).⁴⁸⁷ Originally, all humans know and recognize God, but they are forgetful. Therefore, throughout history, God takes the initiative to approach humans and remind them of their primordial relationship by sending many messengers (pl. *rusul*; sing. *rasūl*) and prophets (pl. *anbiyā’*; sing. *nabī*) to all human communities.⁴⁸⁸ The Quran mentions only twenty-five or twenty-six prophets by name, while according to a famous prophetic saying (*hadīth*) the number of prophets sent by God is 124,000.⁴⁸⁹ Eventually, later Islamic tradition concluded that God had sent prophets to all human communities without exception, from Adam, the first human being as well as the first prophet, until the time of Muhammad, who is the last of the prophets, and most of those prophets are unnamed in the Quran. The traditional belief on the end of prophecy in Muhammad is based on the Quranic passage in which he is called the Seal of the Prophets (*Khātm al-Anbiyā’*). Obviously, as

⁴⁸⁷ Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 466.

⁴⁸⁸ In general it is understood that the messenger also have the qualities of the prophets as well.

⁴⁸⁹ There is no single consensus about the exact number of prophets named in the Quran. Ibn ‘Arabī lists twenty-seven prophets in *The Bezels of Wisdom* and includes Luqmān, who is not mentioned explicitly as a prophet in the Quran, and Seth (Shīth), who is mentioned as a prophet in the hadith. For the tales of the prophets mentioned in the Quran see al-Kisā’ī, *Tales of the Prophets*. For further study of the prophets in the Quran, see Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*. On the other hand, some Quran commentators include Mary, the mother of Jesus, into the list of the prophets mentioned in the Quran on the basis that she received revelations from Angel Gabriel (*Jibrīl*). Mary is described in the Quran as “a special, chosen, and purified by God,” (*istafā*) a quality understood to be limited to the prophets. Nonetheless, many Sunni Muslims believe that the Quran lists only male prophets.

described in the Quran and the Bible, many of the prophets were not successful in bringing people back to God. Instead, they were rejected by their communities. God's insistence on reminding humankind of their primordial covenant and reconnecting with them demonstrates God's merciful nature.

The "messenger" refers to a particular category among the prophets. If all prophets proclaim the oneness of God (*tauḥīd*) to various human communities, the messengers also brought with them a book and a divine teaching/revelation (*sharī'a*) specific to their people (*umma*). For instance, Moses (*Mūsā*) brought with him the Torah and divine dispensation that regulated his community, then Jesus (ʿĪsā) came and brought the Gospel (*Injīl*). Therefore, what Muhammad brought with him, i.e., the Quran and divine teaching, is—in the understanding of most later Muslim interpretation—the ultimate revelation that fulfills all previous revelations and divine teachings, because of his role as the last prophet and messenger. In short, all messengers are prophets, but not all prophets are messengers. It means that the messengers occupy a special rank beyond that of the prophets. Among the messengers, the most famous among them are Adam, Noah (*Nūh*), Abraham (*Ibrāhīm*), Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, who are often assumed to be what the Quran terms "the possessors of will" (*ūlū al-ʿazm*) among the messengers.

Ibn ʿArabī begins with the traditional Muslim understanding of prophethood and messengerhood, but relates sainthood or *walāya* in a dynamic way to the other two concepts. It is expressed in his response to Tirmidhī's twenty-first and twenty-second questions regarding *walāya*: (21) Where are the stations of God's messengers with the relation to the stations of the prophets? (22) Where are the stations of the prophets with

relation to the stations of the Friends of God?⁴⁹⁰ He differentiates prophethood into two categories, “general prophethood” (*nubuwwa ‘āmma*) or “absolute prophethood” (*nubuwwa mutlaqa*) and “legislative prophethood” (*nubuwwat al-tashrī*).⁴⁹¹ The second type of prophethood is what is commonly identified as messengerhood. On the other hand, Ibn ‘Arabī equates *walāya* with “general prophethood,” and he asserts that it remains even after the “legislative prophethood” has ended with Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁹² *Walāya* does not entail legislative authority, and in this sense it is different from “legislative prophethood.” Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Arabī states that *walāya* “is an all-inclusive and universal function that never comes to an end, dedicated as it is to the universal communication [of divine Truth]. As for the legislative function of prophethood and messengerhood, it came to an end in Muhammad.”⁴⁹³ Here *walāya* is distinguished from prophethood and messengerhood because the latter categories have an end, while *walāya* remains until the end of time.⁴⁹⁴ The reason for this arrangement lies in Ibn ‘Arabī’s interpretation of the divine Names. He explains that,⁴⁹⁵

The specific names “prophet” and “messenger” do not apply to God, because the servant does not want to share a name with his Lord. Hence, God is not called by “prophet” or “messenger,” but is named “Friend” (*al-Walī*) and described by that name, hence He said: “God is the friend (*walī*) of the believers” (Quran 2:257) and “He is the Friend, the Praiseworthy” (Quran 42:28). This name (*walī*) never ends and is applied to God’s servants in this world and the world to come.

⁴⁹⁰ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 73.

⁴⁹¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 114.

⁴⁹² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 51.

⁴⁹³ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 168. I slightly adjust the translation of key terms.

⁴⁹⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 50.

⁴⁹⁵ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-‘Arabi’s Fusus Al-Hikam*, 101.

Among God's Most Beautiful Names derived from the Quran, "prophet" and "messenger" are not included in the list, but "the Friend" (*walī*) is included. For the Shaykh, this shows the all-encompassing nature of *walāya*, which underlies and supports the function of "legislative prophethood" and messengerhood. Therefore, as rightly summarized by Chodkiewicz, in Ibn 'Arabī's scheme, "every *rasūl* is a *nabī* and every *nabī* is a *walī*."⁴⁹⁶ This principle is the key to decipher Ibn 'Arabī's conception of sainthood that is often misunderstood as placing the *walāya* superior to the other two concepts. To clarify his position, the Shaykh states,⁴⁹⁷

If you hear one of the people of God saying or transmitting to you (the notion) that sainthood is higher than prophecy, he adds nothing to what we have said. Or if he says that the saint is above the prophet and the messenger, he means by this (the qualities) of one person, that is, the Messenger (Muhammad) as a saint, is more complete than that of a prophet messenger. This does not mean that the saint who follows the Prophet is higher than the Prophet, for the follower never attains the rank of the one he follows in the way in which he follows him, because if he had attained his rank, he would not have been his follower. So understand (this)! The (position) of the messenger and the lawgiving prophet derives from sainthood (*walāya*) and [divine] knowledge.

The above paragraph conveys a Friend of God as a follower of Messengers and, thus, his or her status is not superior to Messengers. But because a messenger is a saint (*walī*) at the same time, his status as a saint is higher in the sense that *walāya* is still ongoing, while prophethood and messengerhood have ended. Hence, the saints who are not prophets could not attain a higher status than the prophets and messengers.

⁴⁹⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 55.

⁴⁹⁷ Abrahamov, *Ibn Al-'Arabi's Fusus Al-Hikam*, 101.

From this brief elaboration, it is clear that the idea of sainthood as an “inheritance” of prophethood is crucial to Ibn ‘Arabī, as I will demonstrate in the following section. For now, it is enough to witness how *walāya* “is in some way dependent on *nubuwwa*, and in short represents a mode of participation in it.”⁴⁹⁸ The sphere of *walāya* is higher in its scope than the spheres of *nubuwwa* and *risalā*, because sainthood is connected from one of God’s Divine Names, *Al-Walī*.

2. *The Universality of Walāya*

After knowing that *walāya*, as a divine attribute, encompasses everything and is universal, one may wonder if such a principle may also be applicable to non-Islamic religious traditions and their adherents.

In *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) chapter 152, Ibn ‘Arabī interprets the Quranic verse “God is the Friend (*walī*) of those who believe” (2:257) in a general sense not only limited to monotheistic believers (*muwahhidūn*).⁴⁹⁹ Ibn ‘Arabī concludes, “the *walāya* of Allāh extends to the *mushrik*, or polytheist, and that the latter’s faith, no matter what its immediate object may be—a stone, an idol, a star—in fact has no object but God.”⁵⁰⁰ As long as a person worships or has faith in something, he or she is worshipping God without knowing it. This controversial position is integrally related to the Shaykh’s teaching of the oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*), as described in the previous section.

⁴⁹⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 52.

⁴⁹⁹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 56.

⁵⁰⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 56.

In another interpretation of the Quranic verse regarding the primordial covenant between God and humans (7:172), Ibn 'Arabī reiterates his position by stating that the question, “Am I not your Lord?” (*alastu birabbikum*) suggests that God is referring to this lordship (*rubūbiyya*) and not to God’s unicity.⁵⁰¹ Since Adam’s descendants in that verse answer affirmatively, then it works universally for all human beings, whether they are polytheists or believers. Even though the former might add other lords to the Lord, for Ibn 'Arabī, they will always acknowledge God as the Lord.⁵⁰² This fact stems from the universality of God’s *walāya* in Ibn 'Arabī’s system.

In chapter 153 of the *Futūhāt*, Ibn 'Arabī differentiates between “general sainthood” (*walāya 'āmma*) and “limited sainthood” (*walāya khāssa*). The first category encompasses all created beings in that each creature, whether conscious or not, is part of the hierarchy of being. On the other hand, the second category consists “in the capacity of the saints to receive, according to the circumstances, the authority and power of one of the divine Names, and to reflect Justice or Mercy or Majesty or Beauty, according to what is required by the state of things at any given moment.”⁵⁰³ By distinguishing these two categories, Ibn 'Arabī does not necessarily restrict non-Muslims to the first category of *walāya*, while the second category is attainable only for Muslims. He wants to demonstrate that *walāya* is truly the universal and all-inclusive sphere which connects the created beings with the Creator, and that the cosmos has an order in which the saints are playing an indispensable role.

⁵⁰¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 56.

⁵⁰² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 56.

⁵⁰³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 57.

C. The Saints as the “Heirs” of the Prophets

The saints are the heirs or inheritors of the Prophets and Messengers, similar to how sainthood links to prophethood and messengerhood. It means, for Ibn ‘Arabī, that a saint inherits one or more gifts similar to the prophets. For instance, he mentions in a passage in the *Futūhāt* about Abū Ya‘zā, one of his teachers, who was a ‘Moses-like’ type of saint (*Mūsawī al-wirth*) and bore a similar miraculous sign like Moses, i.e., no one could look at his face without losing sight. Abū Ya‘zā would then rub the person who lost his sight from seeing his face with his garment that he wore and God would give back the sight.⁵⁰⁴ Chodkiewicz comments on this fact, saying that the relationship “between the saint and the prophet who is his model is not a vague ‘patronage’ but may rather be compared to the transmission of a genetic inheritance. It confers a precise and visible character on the behavior, virtues and graces of the *walī*.”⁵⁰⁵

In chapter 36 of the *Futūhāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī discusses the ‘Christ-like’ type of saints who are the heirs of Jesus (*‘Īsā*).⁵⁰⁶ The expression ‘Christ-like’ (*‘Īsawī*) in the Quran is used to the disciples of Jesus.⁵⁰⁷ However, for the Shaykh, the term is not confined only to the twelve disciples of Jesus who lived during the time of Jesus, because some of those ‘Christ-like’ saints were considered to exist during the time of Muhammad and even during the time of Ibn ‘Arabī. One striking example of the term is the story of Zurayb ibn Barthalmā. Zurayb is an invisible person who resided in a certain area and had been commanded by Jesus, as the latter’s representative, to remain in that area until the end of

⁵⁰⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 74. In the Biblical account of Exodus 34:29-35, Moses was said to have a radiant face after he came down from Sinai and that condition made him put a veil on his head.

⁵⁰⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 75.

⁵⁰⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 75.

⁵⁰⁷ Q. 3:52, 5:12, etc. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 75.

time when Jesus would come again. Zurayb, in Ibn 'Arabī's account, responded to the call to prayer sounded by Nadla ibn Mu'āwiya and testified that Muhammad is the Messenger of God, which is the same religion with what is brought by Jesus. After appearing to Nadla, Zurayb sent his greeting to Caliph 'Umar (584-644 CE) and disclosed some signs of the Day of Judgement. When 'Umar heard about Zurayb, he remembered the saying of Prophet Muhammad, who had mentioned that a representative of Jesus dwells in the mountains on the edge of Iraq. After that, Zurayb was nowhere to be found and continued his devotion to God in solitude.⁵⁰⁸

In his commentary on the story of Zurayb, Ibn 'Arabī states that this person, and all other people like him, who are the heirs and representatives (*awsiyā*) of the past prophets, are considered to be the saints of the Muhammadan community, even if Prophet Muhammad's revelation reaches them only indirectly through Khaḍir.⁵⁰⁹ Those people possess two inheritances and know two modes of spiritual experience (*dhawq*).⁵¹⁰ The existence of people from a pre-Islamic past, who were instructed by God and not through the ordinary means of calling, demonstrates a resolution to the two paradoxical beliefs, i.e., the Quranic affirmation that the Prophet is "sent to all humans" (Q. 7:158) and the fact that not all humans have heard his message.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 78.

⁵⁰⁹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 78. Khaḍir is a mystical figure who is believed in the popular piety and Sufi circles to be an immortal guide for those who are walking in the path, much like Elijah in Judaism. In the Quran, Khaḍir appears (though unnamed) in the story with Moses in Q. 18:60-82. For more information on Khaḍir, see A.J. Wensick, "Al-Khaḍir" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition*, Vol. 4, eds. E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 902-905. Ibn Arabi also mentions the existence of the companions of Jonah of whom the Shaykh saw the tracks of one of them on the edge of the sea. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 77.

⁵¹⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 76.

⁵¹¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 79.

Afterward, in the same chapter, Ibn ‘Arabī designates some of the signs that signify the ‘Christ-like’ type of saints. To begin with, those saints are endowed with signs analogous to Jesus’ miracles, such as the ability to walk on water but not the ability to fly through the air because the latter is an ability inherited by the ‘Muhammad-type’ of saints, which mirrors Muhammad’s nocturnal ascension (*isrā mi’rāj*).⁵¹² Next, the ‘Christ-like’ type of saint has unique spiritual energy (*himma*), which functions on humans and on things, which is similar to the power of Jesus in the Quran to heal and to revive the dead.⁵¹³ Last, this type of saint demonstrates compassion and gentleness to all created beings.⁵¹⁴ According to the Shaykh, Husayn ibn Mansūr al-Hallāj, one of the most famous Sufis, was one of this ‘Christ-like’ type of saints.⁵¹⁵

At this point, we need to understand that a saint might inherit spiritual gifts from more than one prophet. It means that a saint might be a ‘Christ-like’ type of saint but also a ‘Muhammad-like’ type of saint. Abū al-‘Abbās al-‘Uryabī, one of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachers, was ‘Christ-like’ at the end of his life, while Ibn ‘Arabī himself was ‘Christ-like’ in the beginning, then ‘Moses-like,’ then ‘Hūd-like,’ then inheriting from other prophets, until finally he became a ‘Muhammad-like’ type of saint.⁵¹⁶ It is important to note that, according to the Shaykh, the Muhammadan *walāya* represents the most complete or most

⁵¹² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 79-80.

⁵¹³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 80.

⁵¹⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 80.

⁵¹⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 81. Al-Hallāj was a prominent Sufi who publicly claim the union between human soul and God by saying “I am the Truth” (*Ana al-Haqq*; *al-Haqq* is one the Names of God in the Quran). He later became a martyr for his view. For further study of this figure, see Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 4 volumes, Abridged Edition, trans. and ed., Herbert Mason (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). According to al-Hallāj’s passion narrative, similar to Jesus, he utters forgiveness to those who kill him. Herbert W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, Curzon Sufi Series (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), 30-31.

⁵¹⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 77.

comprehensive signs that encompass the other types. He illustrates this fact with a story of Prophet Muhammad bearing the third sign of 'Christ-like' type of saints, i.e., always seeing the best in all things. In that story, the Prophet and his companions pass by a decaying carcass. While his companions said 'How it stinks!', Muhammad said, "How white are its teeth!"⁵¹⁷ The difference between these types is, as Chodkiewicz notes,⁵¹⁸

in the case of the Muhammad-type of saint, the universal compassion that results from this perception of the positive quality of created beings, of the beauty or perfection which is inherent in them, is not made nakedly manifest as in the case of the Christ-like saint. God is compassion; but He is also Rigor, and the latter aspect may at times veil the former in the behavior of the Prophet of Islam or of his heirs.

The special relationship with pre-Islamic prophets is the reason why some Sufis explicitly call on the name of Jesus and Moses, which potentially makes other people suspicious of them or at least puzzled.⁵¹⁹ Chodkiewicz provides an example of 'Ubaydallāh Ahrār, one of the most venerated teachers in the Naqshbandiyya *tarīqa*, who explicitly says that he is an *'Īsawī* or a 'Christ-like' saint who inherits some signs similar to Jesus.⁵²⁰

The saints who inherit from the pre-Islamic prophets might be attractive for the followers of different religious traditions. Shaykh Ahmad al-'Alawī, an Algerian Muslim saint who died in 1934, attracted several of his European visitors because his face looked like Christ. He had some European disciples, and his Sufi order (*tarīqa*) introduced Sufism into France and other Western countries.⁵²¹ In the same regard, the fascination toward al-

⁵¹⁷ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 80.

⁵¹⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 80.

⁵¹⁹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 81.

⁵²⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 82 fn. 20.

⁵²¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 83. For a study on various Sufi orders, see J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Hallāj by the Christian world, which helped introduce the more in-depth study of Sufism in the West, becomes understandable because he was a ‘Christ-like’ type of saint. The concept of inheritance (*wirātha*) related to *walāya* might also be useful to understand the case of another Sufi, Ibn Hūd, who lived in the thirteenth century and in whose house the Jews of Damascus gathered around to study Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*. Chodkiewicz, in his analysis of Ibn Hūd’s case, states that the reason could be found in the fact of him being a ‘Moses-like’ or ‘Abraham-like’ type of saint.⁵²² I would add to these examples the case of Abdurrahman Wahid, whom I mentioned in the chapter three, who might be a ‘Christ-like’ type of saint, besides his being a ‘Muhammad-like’ type of saint. The reason is that his compassion and relentless work for the rights of the minorities in Indonesia have made him popular among the Indonesian Christians.⁵²³

Even though only a limited number of prophets are mentioned by name in the Quran, there are many more prophets (a well-known *hadīth* states 124.000 prophets) who have been sent from Adam through Muhammad, the last prophet. Consequently, even though Ibn ‘Arabī only mentions twenty-seven prophets in his *Bezels of Wisdom*, that does not mean the structure of *walāya* is only limited to that number.⁵²⁴ Instead, one can interpret the twenty-seven as the main prophetic types that represent “synthetically the sum of all the forms of *nubuwwa*, and hence of *walāya*, manifested by each prophet individually out of the one hundred and twenty-four thousand.”⁵²⁵ The central idea of the book is that “the Muhammadan community, in the person of its saints and at any given moment in its history,

⁵²² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 83.

⁵²³ See chapter 3 section B.3.

⁵²⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 84.

⁵²⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 86.

simultaneously recapitulates the ‘wisdoms’ contained in the successive prophetic revelations which have taken place since the start of the human cycle, and the modes of spiritual realization which correspond to them.”⁵²⁶

To conclude, what is essential from the idea of inheritance of the prophets related to the saints and sainthood in Ibn ‘Arabī’s scheme is that the saints of the Muhammadan community are not at all exclusive and superior to others in the sense of somehow superseding them. Rather, the ‘Muhammadan-type’ of saint encompasses other types without undermining or erasing their importance and distinctive qualities. The idea of inheritance demonstrates the special relationship between sainthood, prophethood and messengerhood, and this is one of the key aspects to understanding the idea of *walāya* according to Ibn ‘Arabī. Another critical aspect is the idea of the universal ‘Muhammadan reality’ (*Haqīqa Muhammadiyya*), which I will discuss in the next chapter.

D. The “Hiddenness” of Saints

The idea of secrecy or hiddenness of saints from being recognized by people has its roots in *ahādīth* (sing. *hadīth*). One popular *hadīth* related to that theme, which I have mentioned in the previous chapter, states:⁵²⁷

God, ever mighty and majestic is He, says: “Among My Friends, the one to be envied most, in My eyes, is the believer who has but little means and whose fortune is prayer, who worships his Lord in the best of modes, obeying Him in secret and in public. *He is unnoticed among men; they do not point him out with their fingers.* His livelihood is just sufficient, and he accepts that with patience.” Then the Prophet snapped his fingers and said: “His death is hastened, his mourners few, his estate of little worth.”

⁵²⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 86.

⁵²⁷ Italics mine. Ibn ‘Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 9. See also At-Tirmidhi, *English translation of Jāmi’ At-Tirmidhī*, Vol. 4, 375.

Chodkiewicz cites one *hadīth* that exemplifies the point of the hiddenness of a saint.⁵²⁸

Abū Hurayra recounts: “I went in one day to the Prophet. He said to me: ‘In a moment a man will come towards me through that door; he is one of the seven men by means of whom God protects the inhabitants of the earth.’ And behold, an Ethiopian (*habashī*) came through that door. He was bald and his nose had been cut off. On his head he carried a pitcher of water. Allāh’s messenger said, ‘This is he.’ Now this man, explains Abū Hurayra, was the servant of al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba, and it was he who washed down and swept out the mosque.”

The reason for the hiddenness of the person in the *hadīth* is his lowly status as an Arab Muslim’s slave. He does the menial job, and his appearance does not signify anything special. Nonetheless, that man acquires a high spiritual rank as one of the seven *abdāl*.⁵²⁹

The Sufis hold a belief in a group of people who are blessed with a high spiritual position by God, the “Council of the Saints” (*diwān al-awliyā’*), and one of its main features is the hiddenness of the higher ranking saints.⁵³⁰ Their spiritual status and brilliance are concealed from the eyes of ordinary people. Chodkiewicz argues that hiddenness is an essential feature of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching of *walāya*, and it relates to popular stories from Sufi literature. One of those stories that characterize the aspect of hiddenness recounts the experience of Shaykh Abū ‘l-Hasan al-Baghdādī.⁵³¹ One day he followed his teacher, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir, in secrecy. His teacher walked alone toward a door, and when he entered the door, miraculously, he was in a country that al-Baghdādī did not know. His teacher entered a room, and six people, who were there, greeted him.

⁵²⁸ Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī lī’ l-fatāwī*, Cairo 1959, 28 cited in Chodkiewicz, 90.

⁵²⁹ The seven *abdāl*, according to the hadith mentioned above, are the ones “by means of whom God will protect the inhabitants of the earth.” It is one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the saints according to the Shaykh.

⁵³⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 90.

⁵³¹ The story is quoted at length in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 90-91.

Al-Baghdādī stood behind a pillar and witnessed a remarkable scene of an event when one of the *abdāl* passed away and was immediately replaced by a new person. The interesting point is that the new *badal* (sing.; pl. *abdāl*) was a Christian from Constantinople who said the two *shahādas* only at that moment under the guidance of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir.⁵³² It is astounding here that the one appointed by God to be one of the *abdāl*, one of the highest ranks in the hierarchy of the saints, is not even an ordinary Muslim, but a Christian who might not know anything about Islam. This story conveys the paradox of divine election, as rightly pointed out by Chodkiewicz and the hidden aspect of a saint that renders them invisible to the people’s gaze.⁵³³

Ibn ‘Arabī mentions several examples of the invisible aspect of the saints. For instance, the Shaykh tells the story of him meeting ‘Abdallah Ibn Ja’dun, who was one of the “Supports” (*awtād*) of his time.⁵³⁴ The Supports (*awtād*) is one of the Four Pillars in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system of sainthood. Ibn Ja’dun made a living as a henna siever and looked ordinary to other people. Ibn ‘Arabī describes, “When he was absent he wasn’t missed and when he was present no-one sought his advice; when he arrived in a place he was accorded no welcome and in conversation he was passed over and ignored....he earned his living as a henna siever. He always appeared dishevelled and dusty, his eyes anointed with antimony because of the henna dust.”⁵³⁵ In another passage in the *Futūhāt*, the Shaykh states that the Pole (*qutb*) looks like an ordinary person despite occupying the highest spiritual degree in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system of sainthood: “The earth does not fall back

⁵³² Reciting the two *shahādas* makes someone officially become a Muslim.

⁵³³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 91.

⁵³⁴ I elaborate more of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s system of sainthood in chapter 6 section B1.

⁵³⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia*, 115-116.

before him, he does not walk through the air or on water, he does not feed himself by emancipating himself from secondary causes. He makes use of supernatural powers only at rare moments, when divinely commanded to do so.”⁵³⁶ People fail to recognize these saints because they do not visibly demonstrate their powers. Yet, God maintains the cosmos through their existence.

The *abdāl*, *awtād*, and *qutb* refer to the special categories in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system of saints of which they form the four pillars. If the types of saints discussed in the previous sections connect to a horizontal manifestation within the sphere of *walāya*, the arrangement of these special categories of saints reflects the vertical axis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s system of sainthood. Since my concern in this dissertation is to elaborate on the aspect of invisibility and hiddenness of the saints, I will not provide a further description of Ibn ‘Arabī’s unique system, through which God preserves the cosmos.⁵³⁷ What one needs to keep in mind is that those classifications are not exclusive. Just as one person might inherit more than one type of sainthood, one human could possess more than one category.⁵³⁸ To add more to these complexities, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions another special category apart from the four pillars that epitomizes the highest degree of *walāya*: the Solitaries (*afrād*).⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, II, 573-574 cited in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 96.

⁵³⁷ See chapter 6 on “The Four Pillars,” in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 89-102.

⁵³⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 106.

⁵³⁹ See chapter 6 section B1.

James W. Morris explains that the *afrād* are the rare individuals who truly exemplify the spiritual state of *ihsān*.⁵⁴⁰ In another passage of the *Futūhāt*, Ibn ‘Arabī comments that these people⁵⁴¹

are not known for their miracles or prodigies (*karamāt*), nor singled out for praise, nor are they pointed out for their “sound piety” (*salāh*), at least as that is commonly understood by most people, although there is nothing corrupt about them. They are the hidden ones, the innocent ones, (God’s) trustees in the world, concealed among the people.

They do not have disciples, although they spread knowledge to people.⁵⁴² Moreover, they are the ones who truly embody the *hadīth* of God’s friend that I quoted above. For the *afrād*, all of their experiences are theophany, and they always turn their face toward God; what characterizes them is their state of total servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*).⁵⁴³ This state of servanthood renders the spiritual superiority of the *afrād* invisible to the outside world and visible only to God.⁵⁴⁴ Chodkiewicz concludes regarding the *afrād* that “secrecy (*kitmān*) is one of their principles: they conceal what they are and what they know until such time as they are commanded [by God] to reveal it to the outside world.”⁵⁴⁵

At this point, it seems that the invisibility of saints connects with their spiritual status because only those within the higher categories of sainthood are concealed and

⁵⁴⁰ James W. Morris, *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn ‘Arabī’s Meccan Illuminations* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), 136. Ibn Arabī uses another term for *afrād*, i.e., *malāmiyya*, which literally means “those who draw blame upon themselves.” They inflict the “blame” upon themselves as they continually detect their imperfection. In Ibn Arabī’s system, *malāmiyya* refers to certain type of sainthood, while *afrād* is the highest degree of that particular type. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 109 fn. 11.

⁵⁴¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, ch. 23, trans., James W. Morris. See Morris, *The Reflective Heart*, 136.

⁵⁴² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 108.

⁵⁴³ Morris, *The Reflective Heart*, 136-137. Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 109.

⁵⁴⁴ Morris, *The Reflective Heart*, 366 fn. 84.

⁵⁴⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 112.

invisible to the gaze of the common people. Besides Ibn 'Arabī's distinction between "general sainthood" (*walāya 'amma*) and "limited sainthood" (*walāya khāssa*), he also distinguishes the saints based on their spiritual states (*ashāb al-ahwāl*) and spiritual stations (*ashāb al-maqāmāt*). These two categories denote spiritual ranks in which saints are moving to higher positions in their spiritual journey. Yet, the spiritual stations are higher than the spiritual states, so those who belong to the stations occupy higher ranks and are more perfect than the saints who are still within the spiritual states.⁵⁴⁶ The *walāya* of those who are governed by their spiritual states are visible to most people, but the *walāya* of those who master their spiritual stations is hidden from the people's eye exactly because of its brilliance; ordinary people's eyes could not afford to gaze directly into it, similar to human beings' inability to gaze upon God directly.⁵⁴⁷

To conclude this section, one could pose these questions, which relate to my whole project: how does one "become" a saint? Is there any restriction based on gender? Is it possible for non-Muslims to become a *walī* according to Ibn 'Arabī?

I will start with the last one. The answer to the question of whether non-Muslims could attain the rank of a *walī* cannot simply be an affirmation or negation. On the one hand, Ibn 'Arabī identifies *walāya* as a universal sphere encompassing everything that exists, including those who are not following the path of Islam as a historical religious tradition. Yet, on the other hand, *walāya* links to the whole system of prophethood and messengerhood in which the Muhammadan Reality (*Haqīqa Muhammadiyya*) plays a

⁵⁴⁶ Morris, introduction to *The Meccan Revelations, Volume 1*, 19-22.

⁵⁴⁷ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 57.

central role.⁵⁴⁸ The experience of Shaykh al-Baghdādī demonstrates these tensions because there is an unknown Christian who just converted formally to Islam and then was immediately appointed to one of the highest ranks of sainthood. Nonetheless, the key to shedding light on the discussion regarding the place of non-Muslims in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system is the concept of the hiddenness of a saint.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s differentiation of various levels of sainthood and his employing various terms related to saint and sainthood to the point of establishing a hierarchical relation among the saints complicate the system. In addition, there is his famous claim of the highest and the most prestigious title of the “Seal of the Muhammadan Saints,” which I did not elaborate in this chapter.⁵⁴⁹ This claim would seem to reserve the highest levels of sainthood only for individuals belonging to the Muslim community. However, one should not forget that one of the main principles of Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *walāya* is that all humans are on their path to God. The whole complex system of sainthood, both the ones built upon horizontal and vertical lines, illustrates that principle. God’s perpetual self-disclosure uniquely happens every instance, and one’s proximity with God is the fruit of one’s journey along a particular path.⁵⁵⁰ This principle explains the Quranic verse, “For each of you, We have appointed a path and a way” (Q. 5:48). There is also no gender restriction here. Even though the prophets mentioned in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Bezels of Wisdom* are

⁵⁴⁸ The concept of the Muhammadan Reality (*Haqīqa Muhammadiyya*) is comparable to the Logos in Christianity. Every prophet since Adam represents only partially the Muhammadan Reality and only Prophet Muhammad manifests it completely. Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of *walāya*, especially the notion of the “Seal of Muhammadan Saints,” corresponds to the Muhammadan Reality and its all-encompassing and universal nature. See chapter 7 fn. 839 & 845. For an elaboration of the idea of the Muhammadan Reality, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapter 4.

⁵⁴⁹ I will elaborate Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea of the Seal of Muhammadan Saints in chapter 7 section A2.

⁵⁵⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 147.

all male, he emphasizes that “each category [of *walāya*] that we speak of contains both men and women,” and that “[t]here is no spiritual quality belonging to men to which women do not have equal access.”⁵⁵¹ Ibn ‘Arabī himself wrote about his experience meeting some women in Andalusia who attained the rank of *walī*.⁵⁵²

This chapter briefly describes Ibn ‘Arabī’s theological formulation of the Islamic concepts of saints and sainthood (*walāya*). It is far from exhaustive, as I only explain a few key aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s vast elaboration of that theme. Yet, those aspects will become the material for doing comparative theology with the Christian understanding of saint and sainthood in the following chapters. Another purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that despite the similarities of the phenomena of saints in Islamic and Christian tradition, each tradition draws from their particular theological foundation and develops their unique understanding of saint and sainthood. Nevertheless, a comparison with Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of saint and sainthood, may still illuminate and enrich the Christian understanding of saints.

⁵⁵¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 97-98. The first quote is from Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, II, 26, while the second from Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, II, 35.

⁵⁵² Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia*, no. 54, 55, 64, 65. For more examples of female Sufi masters and figures, see Camille Adams Helminski, *Women of Sufism: A Hidden Treasure* (Boston: Shambala, 2003).

PART III

THREE THEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTS FOR AN INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY OF SAINTS

CHAPTER 5

SAINTS AS MANIFESTATIONS AND REVEALERS OF GOD'S SELF-COMMUNICATION

One of my favorite things to do whenever I visit a church is to look at its walls to see what kind of theological message it conveys to people. As a theologian, I find excitement in trying to interpret the message. Particularly, stained-glass windows with sacred images or images of holy figures captivate my attention the most. It is perhaps because, in Indonesia, Protestant churches do not have any icons or pictures of human faces on their walls and windows. I know that not everyone whose face displayed in a Protestant church is honored as a saint, but still, I believe there must be a reason and some message for their selection.

I visited Boston University's Marsh Chapel for Sunday worship several times. One time, I could not get any seat in the lower sanctuary, so I moved upstairs. Looking upon some beautiful stained-glass windows, I realized there are some icons images of holy figures that I could not identify. I recognized John the Baptist, Paul, and Peter, but I could not identify the other figures except one: Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). Afterward, I found out that those figures were of Horace Mann (1796-1859), a famous American educator, Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), a prominent African-American politician, and Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922), the renowned scientist who invented the first telephone. What was the point of including these figures among this church's sacred images together with biblical figures? What is the message that these images convey to

people? And how does it relate to our discussion on sainthood and saints? I will come back to answer these questions at the end of this chapter.

As the first step of my attempt to construct an inclusive theology of saints, I have described some contemporary approaches from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives in the first and second chapters. The following two chapters explored the concept of sainthood (or more broadly, *walāya*) in Islam, primarily as explained by Ibn ‘Arabī. After looking more closely at the idea of *walāya*, I realized that Christian discourses related to the theology of saints often overlook the broader, essential connection between God’s self-revelation and human beings. Christians today often think of revelation as something happening only in the past that ended with the closing of the canon or the end of the apostles’ age. It is as if God does not communicate Godself to creatures anymore. Obviously, that is not true. The Christian tradition always believes in God, who is continuously making a connection and welcoming the creation into a deeper relationship with God. Similar to how Ibn ‘Arabī understands *walāya* as universal divine self-disclosure, the universality of the self-communication of God should become the starting point. Therefore an inclusive Christian theology of saints should begin with God’s self-revelation in relation to human beings. As I will demonstrate in the following sections, here Karl Rahner’s theology of grace plays an instrumental role. His famous notion of “anonymous Christians” has paved the way for such an inclusive theology in contemporary theology, and I will attempt to utilize it in developing an inclusive theology of saints.

The first section elaborates on the universal aspect of God’s self-communication. It discusses Rahner’s theology of grace in relation to human beings as the recipients of God’s grace. I will point to the correlation between the idea of anonymous Christians and

sainthood because both are manifestations of God's self-communication. In the second section, I explore the particular aspect of God's self-communication, i.e., Jesus Christ. Rahner affirms that Jesus Christ is the only way for salvation, so Christ becomes constitutive for all of God's self-communication. For Rahner, however, the particularity of God's grace in Jesus does not reduce the universality of God's self-communication, but rather upholds and amplifies it. As a result, it is necessary to think of saints, including those who were historically non-Christian, as many mediations of one ultimate Mediator, Jesus Christ. Since non-Christian saints were often concealed from Christian eyes, I call them "hidden saints." Lastly, I explore some ways through which one can possibly recognize the hidden saints through experience. Rahner's notion of the mysticism of everyday life becomes the starting point. Afterward, I borrow James Morris's idea of the universal pathways of *walāya* to extend and categorize how human beings can cultivate God's grace. In the last part, I use Rahner's concept of saints as revealers of new modes of living.

A. The Universality of God's Self-Communication

Both Rahner and Ibn 'Arabī are speaking of God's revelation as God's self-communication and self-disclosure: the hidden, mysterious God who is ineffable and incomprehensible wants to relate with the creations, especially with human beings. God's self-communication becomes the ground for the whole of Ibn 'Arabī's system of thought, including the important concept of the oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*). What is revealed is God's own divine reality that constitutes the existence of creatures, so that all created beings derive their existence from God and not from themselves.

Consequently, creatures relate in unique ways with the Creator because they are the loci of God's theophany or divine self-disclosure (*tajallī*). Ibn 'Arabī differs from other theological schools in the Sunni tradition by firmly stating that created beings are essentially not God, but at the same time cannot be other than God.⁵⁵³ The paradox of this unique relationship is clearly expressed when he refers to created beings as “He/not He” (*Hūwa/lā Hūwa*). Rahner perhaps does not go so far in emphasizing the essence of created beings as not entirely separate from God. Still, he does underline the special relationship between God and the creations, especially human beings, because of God's self-communication. For him, God is the “ultimate unifying ground of all reality”⁵⁵⁴ because of the ever-present self-communication of God.

For Ibn 'Arabī, human beings play an essential role among other creations because humans are capable of knowing and cultivating all of the Divine Names, unlike other creatures who receive the Divine Names partially. Humans play the role of a mediator that connects God and creation. Obviously, not everyone can achieve that higher, comprehensive state. For some people, those Divine Names “remain as virtualities, or some Names are actualized to a certain degree but not others.”⁵⁵⁵ Those who can attain the perfection in actualizing all the Divine Names are the Perfect Human (*al-insān al-kāmil*). The Perfect Human possesses primordial quality as intended by God and plays a vital role in sustaining the world. The Perfect Human, for Ibn 'Arabī, is the state of the saints and

⁵⁵³ Most theological schools in Sunni tradition emphasize more strongly the strong distinction between God and God's creatures.

⁵⁵⁴ Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 132

⁵⁵⁵ William C. Chittick, introduction to chapter 73 of *The Meccan Revelations Volume 1*, 41. See also Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 20-23.

relates to the awareness of the Oneness of Being as the guiding principle. Ibn 'Arabī often emphasizes the special relationship between God and human beings by quoting the well-known *hadīth* “whoever knows their self, know their Lord” (*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbuhu*): it is when a person looks upon herself that she may know God. Human beings as the starting point when talking about God’s self-communication is a point shared by Rahner as well.

1. Grace as the Self-Communication of God

Rahner understands God’s revelation as God’s self-communication, which he identifies as grace. This divine communicative action is grace because its very purpose is to bring universal salvation to all. Rahner states, “Salvation is God communicating himself....since there is no salvation in the real order apart from God himself.”⁵⁵⁶ Thus it is clear that the communication of God is the revelation of God’s own being and “in this way it is a communication for the sake of knowing and possessing God in immediate vision and love.”⁵⁵⁷ The universal aspect of God’s self-communication plays an indispensable role in Rahner’s whole theological system because God’s grace permeates all creation and does exist outside the boundary of the church.

In this way of understanding grace, Rahner overturned the traditional Scholastic theology of grace that focused primarily on “created grace” over “uncreated grace.”⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, “History of the World and Salvation-History,” in *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, Vol. V, trans. Karl-H. Kruger (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1996), 102.

⁵⁵⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 117-118.

⁵⁵⁸ See Rahner’s elaboration on this issue in Karl Rahner, “Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. I, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 319-346.

“Created grace” refers to divine gifts that are not God, but are above human’s natural powers.⁵⁵⁹ “Actual grace,” as understood by Scholastic theology, would be an example of “created grace.” The significance of “created grace” may vary, depending on the response given by the human being who is the recipient of God’s gift.⁵⁶⁰ On the other hand, “uncreated grace” is not a divine gift, but God’s self as present in the recipient that initiates and enables divine-human relationship.⁵⁶¹ Rahner gives priority to the “uncreated grace,” which is God’s self-communication. By doing so, he challenged the traditional Scholastic theology of grace in four different ways. First, by emphasizing “uncreated grace” as primarily God’s self-communication, he perceives the transformation within a person who responds to the communication as a consequence, and this transformation is what is called “created grace.”⁵⁶² Next, Rahner challenges the traditional Scholastic view of grace as an extrinsic feature installed in a human being. The problem with this view lies in the assumption that God’s grace is not constitutive of human existence. If God’s gift is genuinely Godself, then it must be intrinsic and thus constitutive to the human condition.⁵⁶³ Third, in contrast to the Scholastic view that grace is scarce and limited to within Christianity, Rahner promotes the understanding of the abundant, universal grace of God.⁵⁶⁴ Finally, he maintains that human beings can consciously experience grace.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁵⁹ John P. Galvin, “The Invitation of Grace,” in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology*, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 66.

⁵⁶⁰ Galvin, “The Invitation of Grace,” 66-67.

⁵⁶¹ Declan Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith: A Theological Investigation of the Notion of Spirituality in Karl Rahner* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1998), 164-165.

⁵⁶² Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 165.

⁵⁶³ Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 166.

⁵⁶⁴ Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 168.

⁵⁶⁵ Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 169.

Christian theology always maintains that grace is given as “unmerited” and totally as a gift from God. The “unmerited” feature, for Rahner, means that grace is absolutely gratuitous as God’s free act based on love, given even before “any and every sinful rejection of God by a finite subject.”⁵⁶⁶ Here, grace is understood as *ontological* because it corresponds to human’s essential being.⁵⁶⁷ As a recipient of grace, human beings and their structures of consciousness have been changed so that God will always become their ultimate orientation as the horizon in which they are drawn.⁵⁶⁸ This intrinsic process within the human structure is the reason why Christian theology recognizes grace as “supernatural,” elevating human beings beyond themselves.⁵⁶⁹ Rahner uses the term transcendence to refer to this process and to demonstrate that a “human person is dynamic, a process, on the way toward a goal that is nothing less than the infinite itself. Even though it is immersed in the world, the individual is also aware of itself as transcending the world of its immediate experience.”⁵⁷⁰ Humans never experience “pure” nature because they always experience themselves as graced. That does not mean humans will always experience grace as grace reflexively as an object.⁵⁷¹ The human realization of grace

⁵⁶⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 123.

⁵⁶⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 117.

⁵⁶⁸ Rahner, “History of the World and Salvation-History,” 103.

⁵⁶⁹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 123.

⁵⁷⁰ Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 57. Rahner’s argument of human transcendence is rooted in his idea of human “pre-apprehension” (*vorgriff*) of infinite reality. This pre-apprehension is a knowledge that “is ‘pre-reflective,’ ‘preconceptual,’ ‘unthematic’—adjectives which indicate a constantly present awareness that is not directly grasped or conceptualized.” See Anne E. Carr, “Starting with the Human,” in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology*, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 21. See Rahner’s explanation of “pre-apprehension” of being in Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 33-35.

⁵⁷¹ Mary E. Hines, *The Transformation of Dogma: An Introduction to Karl Rahner on Doctrine* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 11.

through self-actualization is the reason why Rahner maintains that grace does come as an offer.⁵⁷²

Everyone is offered salvation, which means that everyone, in so far as he does not close himself to this offer by his own free and grave guilt, is offered divine grace—and is offered it again and again (even when he is guilty). Every man exists not only in an existential situation to which belongs the obligation of striving towards a supernatural goal of direct union with the absolute God in a direct vision, but he exists also in a situation which presents the genuine subjective possibility of reaching this goal by accepting God's self-communication in grace and in glory.

With their freedom, humans are capable of accepting or rejecting grace. When a person rejects the offer, it does not leave him “in a state of pure unimpaired nature, but would bring him into contradiction with himself even in the sphere of his own being.”⁵⁷³ Meanwhile, a human being has accepted the offer of God's self-communication whenever “he really accepts *himself completely*, for it already speaks *in* him. This acceptance can be present in an implicit form whereby a person undertakes and lives the duty of each day in the quiet sincerity of patience, in devotion to his material duties and the demands made upon him by the persons under his care.”⁵⁷⁴ Nevertheless, it is only through acceptance of that grace that humans might reach their highest self-actualization.⁵⁷⁵ What is essential related to our discussion in this chapter is not only that human transcendence applies to everyone without exception,⁵⁷⁶ but also the fact that humans can accept the offer and exercise, “even though as yet in a very unsystematic manner, what in a Christian sense can

⁵⁷² Rahner, “History of the World and Salvation-History,” 103.

⁵⁷³ Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” 393-394.

⁵⁷⁴ Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” 394. Italics from Rahner. See also Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 401.

⁵⁷⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 124.

⁵⁷⁶ Rahner makes it very explicit that God's self-communication is available for every human beings without exception. See Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 127.

certainly be called faith.”⁵⁷⁷ This understanding is the foundation of Rahner’s famous idea of “anonymous Christians.”

2. *Anonymous Christians*

God’s self-communication as grace in the world will always take tangible forms in history.⁵⁷⁸ In the process, human beings play a distinctive role precisely because of their intrinsic capability of transcendence that draws them toward the absolute mystery of God. In explaining the idea of anonymous Christians, Rahner delineates four different theses.

The first thesis states the particularity of Christianity as “the absolute religion, intended for all men, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right.”⁵⁷⁹ Religion, from Christianity’s vantage point, is God’s intention to build a relationship with humans by freely self-communicating God’s self, culminating in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ continues to be present in the world, and the church proclaims to be the manifestation of Christ’s presence.⁵⁸⁰ However, Rahner insists that Christianity does not always come in a historically tangible way for every human being and culture in chronological order.⁵⁸¹ Thus, at least in principle, one can question the “exact point in time [when] the absolute obligation of the Christian religion has in fact come into effect for every man and culture.”⁵⁸² It is not easy to answer

⁵⁷⁷ Rahner, “History of the World and Salvation-History,” 104. Rahner says, “when someone, in an absolute, selfless way goes against his or her own egoism in making an ultimate decision and chooses that which is good and true and just, then that person—whether he or she knows it or not—has affirmed the existence of God.” Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 127.

⁵⁷⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 87.

⁵⁷⁹ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 118.

⁵⁸⁰ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 118.

⁵⁸¹ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 119.

⁵⁸² Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 120.

this question, and Rahner left room for different possible answers. For him, the presence of the Christian church and its missionary activity does not necessarily signify Christianity in its true tangible form. The first thesis also implies implicitly another principle: i.e., that religion can exist only in a social form so that human being, “who is commanded to have a religion, is also commanded to seek and accept a social form of religion.”⁵⁸³

The second thesis affirms the validity of a non-Christian religion as containing not only the result of sin and harmful elements of human conduct but also salvific aspects of grace that elevate its status.⁵⁸⁴ A non-Christian religion could not be dismissed as merely a product of futile human attempts in seeking God. Instead, Christians may recognize it “as a lawful religion (although only in different degrees) without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it.”⁵⁸⁵ Since human beings are social and religious creatures at the same time, the human relationship with God must be established outside the private interior realm, i.e., through social institutions, including religions.⁵⁸⁶ The second thesis thus affirms two things. Firstly, it asserts that non-Christian religions contain elements of God’s grace; and secondly, non-Christian people can have a positive relationship with God through their social and religious realities.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸³ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 120.

⁵⁸⁴ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 76.

⁵⁸⁵ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 121. Rahner notes that he is not speaking from the perspective of a-posteriori history of religion but of a-priori dogmatic inquiry, i.e., how grace permeates not only human beings but also human institutions without negating the possibility of evil as the result of sin. Consequently, he cannot determine empirically what should or should not exist in the non-Christian religions. See Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 122.

⁵⁸⁶ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 128.

⁵⁸⁷ Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 131. Rahner takes seriously both the necessity of membership in Christianity for salvation and God’s universal salvific will for every human being as mentioned in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 2:4) so God must set concrete historical ways for all human being to cultivate the grace within them, i.e., through their social and religious surroundings. See Rahner, “Anonymous Christians,” 391.

If the first two theses are correct, then Christianity should not regard members of a non-Christian religion as mere non-Christians but as anonymous Christians.⁵⁸⁸ This is the third thesis. Rahner explains an anonymous Christian as someone who has experienced God's grace as "the *a-priori* horizon of all his spiritual acts [that] accompanies his consciousness subjectively, even though it is not known objectively."⁵⁸⁹ Such a person still needs to embark on a journey toward a more explicit Christian identity, and that is the reason Rahner does not belittle the importance of missionary activities of the Christian church. As a result, the proclamation of the Gospels should take different forms because the audiences are not non-Christians, but may at times be recognized as anonymous Christians.⁵⁹⁰

In the last thesis, Rahner affirms the need for missionary activity in the contemporary plural world. Yet, he reminds the church to not "regard herself today as the exclusive community of those who have a claim to salvation but rather as the historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church."⁵⁹¹ The church must not think of themselves as a community of those who have God's grace vis-

⁵⁸⁸ Rahner speaks not only about "anonymous Christians" but also "anonymous Christianity," which has drawn some criticism from other theologians. In a clarification of the latter term, he expresses that "Christianity" may have two meanings. Firstly, it is "not merely that of 'Christendom,' i.e. the sum total of Christians...but also the meaning of the 'being Christian' of an individual Christian." Karl Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'" in *Theological Investigations*, Volume XIV, trans. David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 281.

⁵⁸⁹ Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," 131.

⁵⁹⁰ Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," 132.

⁵⁹¹ Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," 133.

à-vis those who do not have it, but instead as a “communion of those who can explicitly confess what they *and* the others hope to be.”⁵⁹²

To conclude this part on Rahner’s notion of the anonymous Christian, it is beneficial to quote Rahner’s statement at length:⁵⁹³

The theory of the ‘anonymous Christian,’ therefore, states (though we do not insist upon the term ‘anonymous Christian’) that even outside the Christian body there are individuals—and they are to be found even in the ranks of atheists—who are justified by God’s grace and possess the Holy Spirit. The theory further states that the difference between this state of salvation and that of those who are Christians in an explicit sense is not such that these ‘pagans’ are acceptable in God’s sight even without any true faith (together with hope and love) as it were in virtue of a merely natural morality which they possess, whereas the Christians and only they achieve their justification through a faith in salvation. On the contrary the theory ascribes to these justified pagans also a real, albeit enexplicated [sic!] or, if we like to put it so, rudimentary faith.

3. *From Anonymous Christians to Saints*

After delineating Rahner’s argument of anonymous Christians, it is clear how the universality of the self-communication of God affects all human reality. Therefore, in a way, one can say that all human beings can obtain faith, no matter how rudimentary that faith is, and enter in a positive relationship with God precisely because of God’s grace as the self-communication of God. This grace encompasses not only oneself as an individual but also his or her inter-personal relationship through social and religious realms. At this point, one can question the implication of Rahner’s notion of anonymous Christians: since missionary activity of the church is still necessary, does an encounter with Christianity in

⁵⁹² Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 134. See also Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 103.

⁵⁹³ Rahner, “Observations on the Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’” 291.

history immediately cancel those supernatural salvific elements in non-Christian religions? What if the recipients of the missionary activity refuse the message and opt to remain in their current belief? In what way will recognize non-Christians as anonymous Christians help our attempt in recognizing non-Christian saints?

Regarding the first question, Rahner does not believe that an encounter with Christianity immediately cancels the grace elements in non-Christian religions. Instead, Christianity relates to non-Christian religions and not only with non-Christian individuals. Drawing from the Second Vatican Council documents, Rahner states that “the ultimate root of these religions is the quest for an answer to the unsolved riddle of human existence and in a certain perception and acknowledgment of that hidden power which is present in the course of the world and the events of human life.”⁵⁹⁴ At this point, he emphasizes the distinctiveness of Judaism and Islam by excluding these two religions from the term “non-Christian religions.” The reason is that “the Old Testament contains part of that divine revelation which Christianity regards as its own and Islam is related expressly at least to Christian revelation as a whole.”⁵⁹⁵ Therefore, proximity to Christianity seems to enable these two religious traditions to express more explicitly the supernatural elements of revelation.

Related to the second question, Rahner never addresses people who remain in their religions even after encountering Christianity as unfaithful. For him, one cannot resist the

⁵⁹⁴ Karl Rahner, “On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” in *Theological Investigations*, Volume XVIII, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 288. See also Vatican Council II document *Nostra Aetate* (1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html, accessed July 25, 2019.

⁵⁹⁵ Rahner, “On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” 288.

concrete encounter with Jesus Christ because such encounter is “precisely the concreteness of the ultimate relationship to God.”⁵⁹⁶ However, one can ask when such a concrete encounter has really occurred. Rahner does not equate encountering historical Christianity with encountering Jesus Christ, even though the first is the starting point for the latter. Another point on Rahner’s thought that strengthens my argument is his approach to atheists. Rahner states that possibly a Christian would not put his Christian principle into practice and, in that way, that person can lose God. On the other hand, an atheist, who denies God conceptually, might find God by protecting humankind and through self-giving action.⁵⁹⁷ Consequently, despite one’s refusal to become a Christian, God’s grace remains constitutive in their being and actively continues to invite them to respond positively to God.

As I have described in the first chapter, Rahner perceives saints as a tangible manifestation of God’s grace in history. Saints pave new ways of understanding God’s revelation in concrete history precisely through living their life as a positive response to God’s self-communication. Their lives open the possibility of how people of God should live, and they continue to unfold different modes of holiness. Here saints become part of inter-communicative mediations of God’s grace in the world. Rahner states that in human beings, a “transcendental, mental, and supernatural relationship to God is always mediated by categorial realities of his life.”⁵⁹⁸ Non-Christian religions could function as the mediations for cultivating revelation and for the actualization of faith.⁵⁹⁹ As a result,

⁵⁹⁶ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 102.

⁵⁹⁷ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 127, 135.

⁵⁹⁸ Rahner, “On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” 293-294.

⁵⁹⁹ Rahner, “On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” 293.

anonymous Christians can become manifestations of God's self-communication. It means that non-Christian people can become saints, even if they are most likely hidden from the eyes of Christians. Since Rahner believes that anonymous Christians could be found even among atheist people, then it is possible to find saints among atheist people as well.⁶⁰⁰ Therefore, related to the third question, even though Rahner does not postulate the possibility of recognizing saints among non-Christian people explicitly, I argue that he gives ample room for it. I will explore more about that topic in the next section.

B. The Particularity of God's Self-Communication

As elaborated in the previous section, the mutual emphasis in Ibn 'Arabī's and Rahner's theology is the universality of God's self-communication that deeply affects human existence. God reveals God's self and invites all humans to live in a positive relationship with God. Another striking comparative theme between the two figures relates to the particularity of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ for Rahner and the prophet Muhammad for Ibn 'Arabī.

Ibn 'Arabī underlines the inseparability of *walāya* and prophethood and messengerhood. Islam understands prophethood and messengerhood as the ultimate historical form of God's self-communication to a human being. The Islamic tradition believes that God has sent numerous prophets to humanity in order to remind them of their

⁶⁰⁰ Rahner confirms the existence of non-religious mediation, e.g., in the case of an atheist who is faithful to his conscience. Rahner, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," 294. Here, he follows a statement from the Second Vatican Council that the "only necessary condition which is recognized here [regarding atheists] is the necessity of faithfulness and obedience to the individual's own personal conscience. Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" 284. See also, Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," 397.

primordial relationship with God. The prophet Muhammad is the last (literally, the “seal”) of the prophets and messengers, and, after him, there will not be any other prophet or messenger. Ibn ‘Arabī confirms this fundamental belief, but he maintains the continuity of *walāya* as God’s universal self-communication, even after the historical event of the prophet Muhammad. *Walāya* is not superior to the other two categories but remains in a unique connection with them.

For Ibn ‘Arabī, the saints or Friends of God are the heirs or inheritors of the prophets and messengers, similar to how sainthood links to prophethood and messengerhood. As a result, a saint inherits one or more gifts identical to the prophets. Ibn ‘Arabī differentiates types of saints, such as ‘Moses-like’ or ‘Jesus-like.’ Each of these types may have similar miraculous signs to the spiritual reality of the prophet from whom he inherits. Chodkiewicz comments on this fact, saying that the relationship “between the saint and the prophet who is his model is not a vague ‘patronage’ but may rather be compared to the transmission of a genetic inheritance. It confers a precise and visible character on the behavior, virtues and graces of the *walī*.”⁶⁰¹ Nevertheless, a saint may inherit spiritual gifts from more than one prophet. It means that a saint might be a ‘Christ-like’ type of saint but also a ‘Muhammad-like’ type of saint.

Moreover, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, the Muhammadan *walāya* represents the most complete or most comprehensive signs that encompass the other types. Thus, what is essential from the idea of inheritance of the prophets related to the saints and sainthood in Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding is that the saints of the Muhammadan community are not at all exclusive and superior to others in the sense of somehow superseding them. Instead, the

⁶⁰¹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 75.

‘Muhammadan-type’ of saint encompasses other types without undermining or erasing their importance and distinctive qualities. From the summary above, it is clear now that the particularity of *walāya* in Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding does not jeopardize the universal side of it and *walāya* remains significant as God’s self-communication to humanity until the end of time.

From the previous section, it is evident that Rahner does not undermine the particularity of Christianity precisely because he positions Jesus Christ as the culmination of God’s grace. Christology is crucial in Rahner’s theology, and it is outside the scope of this chapter to explore Rahner’s understanding of Christ.⁶⁰² What is relevant to discuss in this section is whether the particularity of God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ will or will not diminish the importance of non-Christian religions and non-Christian people. I argue that the particularity of God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ preserves the significance of non-Christian faiths and people, and even perfects it.

1. The Role of Jesus Christ in God’s Universal Self-Communication

Rahner often emphasizes that the notion of anonymous Christians should not alter the importance of the Christian mission. What is significant from the knowledge of anonymous Christians is that it should transform the way Christians look upon their non-Christian neighbors: from people who are far from God because of their lack of access to

⁶⁰² For Rahner’s elaboration on the topic of Christology, see Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, chapter 6. For a brief summary of Rahner’s Christology, see J. Peter Schineller, “Discovering Jesus Christ: A History We Share,” in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology*, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 92-106; and Otto H. Hentz, “Anticipating Jesus Christ: An Account of Our Hope,” in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology*, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 107-119.

God's grace into the people to whom God has offered salvific grace. Therefore, the task of the Christian mission is to bring what is implicit and rudimentary into the more explicit and complete recognition of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Here, Jesus Christ becomes the particular aspect of God's self-communication, and anonymous Christians, who manage to cultivate God's grace in their lives, are connected to Jesus Christ, who plays a constitutive role for God's grace.⁶⁰³ This way, a person's self-actualization as a positive response to God's grace is united to Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God in the flesh.⁶⁰⁴ Therefore, in Rahner's understanding, grace and incarnation are two basic modes of God's self-communication:⁶⁰⁵

Bestowal of grace and incarnation as the two basic modes of God's self-communication can therefore be conceived as the most radical modes of man's spiritual being, beyond his powers to compel and yet precisely as such eminently fulfilling the transcendence of his being. The believer will then also grasp that this absolute eminence is not an optional adjunct to his reality; that it is not given to him as the juridical and external demand of God's will for him, but that this self-communication by God offered to all and fulfilled in the highest way in Christ rather constitutes the goal of all creation and—since God's word and will effect what they say—that, even before he freely takes up an attitude to it, it stamps and determines man's nature and lends it a character which we may call a 'supernatural existential.'

As a result, whenever a person accepts herself, she is "accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and guarantee of [her] own anonymous movement towards God by grace."⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰³ Rahner, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian,'" 282. See also Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 182.

⁶⁰⁴ Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," 392-393.

⁶⁰⁵ Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," 393.

⁶⁰⁶ Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," 394.

Corresponding to the notion of transcendence in human existence, Rahner calls his Christology a transcendental Christology. This concept “presupposes an understanding of the relationship of *mutual* conditioning and mediation in human existence between what is transcendently necessary and what is concretely and contingently historical.”⁶⁰⁷ The event of Jesus of Nazareth, in his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, signifies the culmination of God’s self-communication, which is unique in salvation history. Rahner declares God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ “occurred historically once and for all, occupies a definite and limited spatio-temporal position in history, and is nevertheless unsurpassable and for all subsequent time irrevocably valid, so that nothing that is really ‘new’ can ever again occur in the history of revelation.”⁶⁰⁸ The event of Jesus Christ enables human potentialities to come into their fullness. William Dych illustrates Rahner’s approach by stating,⁶⁰⁹

Just as the real potentialities of sound are not actual and known until a Beethoven creates his music, so too the real potentialities of human existence are not actual and known until they are actualized in a concrete, historical person. But once this truth is done and achieved and thereby known, in this event there is disclosed a new vision of all human existence, a new hope for everything human. For Christians this is what happened in the life of Jesus.

Implied in the illustration above, the actual human response to God’s offer of grace must be actualized in the concrete history so that, for Rahner, “humanity is indeed transcendence

⁶⁰⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 208. Italics from Rahner

⁶⁰⁸ Karl Rahner, “The Death of Jesus and the Closure of Revelation,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XVIII, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 133.

⁶⁰⁹ William V. Dych, “Theology in a New Key,” in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology*, ed. Leo J. O’Donovan (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 12.

and spirit, but only in and through the particularities of our individual and social world and our individual and collective history.”⁶¹⁰

Rahner admits that to answer the question of how Jesus Christ is present and operative in the faith of the non-Christian person is beyond the task of a systematic theologian. That task requires an a posteriori investigation of non-Christian religions from a historical point of view.⁶¹¹ Nevertheless, Christian theologians can affirmatively answer that “Christ is present and operative in non-Christian believers and hence in non-Christian religions in and through his *spirit*...And this is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son....and must be called at least in this sense the Spirit of Christ, the divine Word who has become man.”⁶¹² Incarnation and the cross of Jesus Christ become the “final cause” of God’s self-communication to the world, which can be identified as the Holy Spirit.⁶¹³ Here Rahner demonstrates his Trinitarian understanding related to the bestowal of God’s grace to human beings.

One of the traits of the presence of the Spirit in all faith is humans’ memory of the absolute savior.⁶¹⁴ This memory stems from humans’ transcendence that orients them to seek for the tangible and historical salvific event. From this perspective, Rahner argues, savior figures in the history of religion “can readily be regarded as an indication of the fact that mankind, always moved and everywhere by grace, anticipates and looks for that event

⁶¹⁰ Dych, “Theology in a New Key,” 14.

⁶¹¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 315.

⁶¹² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 316. Italics from Rahner

⁶¹³ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 317.

⁶¹⁴ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 318.

in which its absolute hope becomes irreversible in history, and become manifest in its irreversibility.”⁶¹⁵

Related to humans’ search for an absolute savior, Rahner speaks of three appeals that signify one’s acceptance of her existence as a positive response to God’s offer of grace in Jesus Christ.⁶¹⁶ First is the appeal to the love of neighbor. Commenting on Jesus’ saying in Matthew 25, Rahner believes that every loving action toward other human beings equates loving Jesus because “an absolute love which gives itself radically and unconditionally to another person affirms Christ implicitly in faith and love.”⁶¹⁷ Secondly, the appeal to readiness for death in which the death of Jesus connects with the depth of human existence. Someone who is ready to face death, which comes to her as radical powerlessness, expresses “the intimation or the expectation or the affirmation of an already present or future.”⁶¹⁸ In other words, death is not seen as the victory of emptiness but as an openness to life.⁶¹⁹ Lastly, the appeal to hope in the future despite various circumstances that bring despair and hopelessness.⁶²⁰ A person who dares to hope will perceive the history as already moving toward its promised goal even though it is still progressing.⁶²¹

At this point, it is clear that Rahner puts God’s universal self-communication in close connection with Jesus Christ as the culmination of the revelation in history. This explains his insistence on the necessity of missionary activity so that the anonymous Christians, who have accepted God’s gracious offer in Christ and live with implicit faith,

⁶¹⁵ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 321.

⁶¹⁶ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 298.

⁶¹⁷ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 295-296.

⁶¹⁸ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 297.

⁶¹⁹ Schineller, “Discovering Jesus Christ,” 102.

⁶²⁰ Schineller, “Discovering Jesus Christ,” 102.

⁶²¹ Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 297.

may have a chance to become explicit Christians. However, the particularity of Jesus Christ does not preclude the elevating and transforming grace in the lives of anonymous Christians, which is mediated by social and religious institutions, even in the case of refusal to accept the message of Christianity. Rather, Jesus Christ becomes constitutive as the source of that which enables all possible mediations of God's grace. Since the validity of non-Christian religious traditions does not vanish, it is possible to have non-Christians who function as a tangible manifestation of God's grace in history. Those people can be defined as saints in Rahner's definition because they play an indispensable role in mediating God's grace in tangible ways in the world.

2. Hidden Saints as Many Mediations

Rahner postulates Christ as the only mediator between God and human beings that constitutes God's self-communication to all humans. On the other hand, human beings are interrelated to God and one another through concrete mediations in history, including social and religious institutions. In other words, many mediations of God's grace form a web of intercommunication for salvation, although there is only one mediator, Jesus Christ. Rahner maintains the validity of those two aspects by saying: "Christ's unique mediatorship does not suspend this saving intercommunication and solidarity, but perfects it, since the latter is both the necessary precondition for Christ's mediatorship and also its effect."⁶²² Moreover, the experience of intercommunication of all human beings (whether accepted or rejected) presupposes the mediatorship of Christ.⁶²³

⁶²² Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 173-174.

⁶²³ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 174.

A person will consistently experience this inter-communicative existence as it covers all aspects of human lives and not only a particular one, such as biological, political, or personal. It is perceived as being unlimited, even though that person might not always interpret it positively. Therefore, if “the question of salvation is an unavoidable element of human existence, [then] intercommunication is also a factor of existence, whether for or against salvation. Here too no-one is alone; each one supports every other person, in the matter of salvation everyone is responsible and significant for everyone else.”⁶²⁴ This principle is not merely abstract but must become tangible in the love of one’s neighbor.⁶²⁵

Deriving from the notion of inter-communicative mediations and its concrete manifestation in loving one’s neighbor, Rahner formulates that “[w]herever salvation occurs in the individual’s salvation-history, it also mediates salvation for all others.”⁶²⁶ Therefore, individuals and their free response to the offer of God’s self-communication could function as many mediations. He states:⁶²⁷

Every person who abides in faith and love is in this relationship because of all the other people, since each person is intended by God to be an ‘element’—even though a unique and irreplaceable element—of the single salvation-history, and since God’s Pneuma, imparted to us and forming the context and history in which salvation takes place, both presupposes human intercommunication and makes it more radical.

This kind of mediation is not exclusive only to some people, but, rather, a possibility for all people. Those who respond positively to God’s grace, whether explicit or implicit, can become part of these inter-communicative mediations of salvation. In all of these

⁶²⁴ Rahner, “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” 176.

⁶²⁵ Rahner, “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” 177.

⁶²⁶ Rahner, “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” 181.

⁶²⁷ Rahner, “One Mediator and Many Mediations,” 181.

processes, Christ functions as the culmination and the only goal; he is the only mediator for salvation. In this sense, on the one hand, Rahner understands the many mediations as the existential precondition for Christ's mediatorship and not merely as secondary means. On the other hand, he affirms Christ's mediatorship as constitutive to all mediators.⁶²⁸

The "saints" in Catholic understanding are part of these many mediations connected to Christ, the one mediator. They are visible to other human beings to the extent that these "saints" can become intercessors. Rahner explains these phenomena of veneration of saints as an implication of the inter-communicative mediations because "these mediations can also become present to consciousness."⁶²⁹ It means that human beings can recognize consciously other humans who manifest God's grace as saving mediations. The manifestation of God's self-communication in history becomes visible in the loving action of one's neighbor. People might implement the acts of love in many ways. People who can demonstrate some of the manifestations of God's grace within them might be known by others as saints.

Even though Catholics and Protestants have different understandings of sainthood and saints, both will agree with the definition of a saint as someone who manifests God's grace. However, recognizing saints who are non-Christians might be a more difficult task than recognizing saints from among Christians. Rahner does not explicitly state the possibility of recognizing saints from outside Christianity, but, as I have shown in this part, anonymous Christians can be part of the inter-communicative mediations. In that sense, those people can be called saints. Still, those saints might be hidden from the eyes of

⁶²⁸ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 181-182.

⁶²⁹ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 181.

Christians, and one will need an a posteriori approach to recognize their existence. That is the reason I prefer to use the term “hidden saint” to refer to non-Christians who manifest God’s grace in their ways and are definitely part of the saving intercommunication.⁶³⁰ I will explore the aspect of hiddenness in the next chapter.

C. Towards the Recognition of the Hidden Saints

Elaborating on the universal and particular aspect of God’s self-communication, I have demonstrated how, from a Christian perspective, non-Christians can be saints because they might manifest God’s grace and become part of inter-communicative mediations in the salvation history. All humans who respond positively to God’s offer of grace and accept their existence can attain salvation through faith, even if implicitly. However, non-Christian saints might be very well hidden for Christians, so that to recognize their presence must be done in an a posteriori way. Therefore, in this section, I will attempt to clarify how God’s grace becomes manifest to human beings and how, as a result, one can recognize other human beings as saints, even if they are non-Christian people.

1. Hidden Saints as the Mystics of Everyday Life

Harvey D. Egan describes Rahner’s theology as “mystagogical” precisely because, throughout his theology, Rahner is “initiating us into the experience of Mystery, Revelation, and Love which haunts the roots of our being and has incarnated itself in the

⁶³⁰ Rahner employs the term anonymous saints to show that there are other saints unknown to Catholics and not mentioned by the church. Rahner refers to the Christians who are saints but not canonized by the Catholic Church. See Karl Rahner, “All Saints,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VIII, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1977), 24.

life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁶³¹ God offers the self-communication of God universally without exception as a salvific will so that human beings might come to the immediacy of God’s presence.⁶³² Since the self-communication of God is God’s very own being, a human person who responds positively to God’s offer of grace becomes a mystic.⁶³³ Consequently, following the concept of anonymous Christians, mysticism may occur outside Christianity and non-Christian religions may “contain and nurture a graced mysticism.”⁶³⁴ Moreover, because Rahner believes that any authentic experience of a human is a genuine experience of God, it is possible for a human being to have mystical experiences without any reference to God.⁶³⁵ Therefore, even someone who claims not to believe in God is still able to be a mystic as long as that person responds positively to God’s self-communication. The mystical experiences of all people, no matter whether they are Christians, non-Christians, even non-believers, provides the foundation for Rahner’s concept of the “mysticism of everyday life.”⁶³⁶

By utilizing the idea of the mysticism of everyday life, Rahner suggests that the path to spiritual perfection is open to all people and not only limited to some people with “special gift.” The basis for this mysticism is accessible to everyone, i.e., fidelity to daily

⁶³¹ Harvey D. Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 98.

⁶³² Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 99.

⁶³³ Harvey D. Egan, “The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner,” *The Way*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (April 2013): 43.

⁶³⁴ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 99.

⁶³⁵ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 103.

⁶³⁶ Rahner uses the phrase “mysticism of everyday life” a few times. For instance Karl Rahner, “Experience of the Holy Spirit,” in *Theological Investigations*, Volume XVIII, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 203. Harvey D. Egan develops Rahner’s idea in a more systematic manner. Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: The Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998). For another attempt to apply Rahner’s theology of saints, especially the concept “mysticism of everyday life,” see William M. Thompson, *Fire & Light: The Saints and Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), chapter 10.

life in faith, hope, and love.⁶³⁷ Moreover, for him, all mysticism relates to Jesus Christ, even though not all people might be explicitly aware of this connection.⁶³⁸ Egan explains Rahner's point by stating, "In Christ, God has assumed the everyday....Participation in the death of Christ....enables a person to die to self and to the world in order to surrender to the Mystery that permeates daily life. To experience that such death is not in vain is to participate in Christ's resurrection."⁶³⁹ Egan delineates the connection between the mysticism of everyday life and Jesus Christ in some concrete human experiences:⁶⁴⁰

For example, the experience of utter loneliness; forgiveness without expectation of being rewarded or even of feeling good about one's selflessness; radical fidelity to the depths of one's conscience, even when one appears like a fool before others; faithfulness, hope, and love, even when there are no apparent reasons for so acting; the bitter experience of the wide gulf between what we truly desire and what life actually gives us; a silent hope in the face of death—these and similar experiences are the experiences of the mysticism of daily life.

He adds that even an atheist could experience the circumstances mentioned above by living "moderately, selflessly, honestly, courageously," and by "silently serves others."⁶⁴¹ Whenever a person embraces life and her own self to live courageously, even in a hopeless situation, she has accepted God in Jesus Christ, even if it happened implicitly.⁶⁴² Therefore, taking one's situation as a human being is a way to respond positively to God's grace.

⁶³⁷ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104. See also Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 126.

⁶³⁸ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 106.

⁶³⁹ Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," 47.

⁶⁴⁰ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104.

⁶⁴¹ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104.

⁶⁴² Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104-105.

By formulating the concept of the mysticism of daily life, Rahner follows Ignatius of Loyola's principle of finding God in all things.⁶⁴³ Rahner mentions several other everyday examples in which a person could cultivate God's grace, such as working, standing, sitting, seeing, laughing, eating, and sleeping.⁶⁴⁴ These are all accessible to everyone and tangible manifestations of God's self-communication in the lives of human beings. A person can experience God in all things precisely because God, through God's self-communication, has become the ground of all experiences, the horizon "in which all our experiences take place....[and the] basal spiritual metabolism, more intimate to us than we are to ourselves."⁶⁴⁵ God's intimate relations with human beings is a favorite theme of many mystics in both Christianity and Islam. The Quran also beautifully states this fact when God says: "We are closer to him than his [own] jugular vein" (Q. 50:16).

Similar to how God is always looking to embrace and love human beings, human beings are called to love one another. Hence, the love of neighbors signifies a person who responds positively to God's grace. Here, Rahner understood the love of neighbor radically because he identifies it as the love of God.⁶⁴⁶ A human is capable of loving her neighbor because God's grace enables and unites her with God.⁶⁴⁷ As a result, every moral action of that person stems from the supernatural elevating self-communication of God within her

⁶⁴³ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 105. Ignatius' influences on Rahner cannot be exaggerated. Declan Marmion's thorough study on the Ignatian dimension of Rahner's spirituality explicates the relationship between the two figures. See Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, chapter 4.

⁶⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, *Belief Today* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 13-36.

⁶⁴⁵ Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," 45.

⁶⁴⁶ H. Urs von Balthasar is critical of this idea of Rahner. He accuses Rahner of subordinating the love of God to the love of neighbor. Marmion has correctly replied to Balthasar's criticism that "Rahner's aim is to elucidate how the whole truth of the Gospel is hidden and in germ in the love of one's neighbor." Marmion, *A Spirituality of Everyday Faith*, 285.

⁶⁴⁷ Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. VI, trans. Karl H. and Boniface Kruger, O.F.M. (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 236.

and, thus, can be categorized as connected to that person's faith.⁶⁴⁸ Rahner confidently states:⁶⁴⁹

[T]he categorized explicit love of neighbor is the primary act of the love of God. The love of God unreflectedly but really and always intends God in supernatural transcendental in the love of neighbor as such, and even the explicit love of God is still borne by that opening in trusting love to the whole of reality which takes place in the love of neighbor. It is radically true, i.e., by an ontological and not merely 'moral' or psychological necessity, that whoever does not love the brother whom he 'sees', also cannot love God whom he does not see, and that one can love God whom one does not see only *by* loving one's visible brother lovingly.

Rahner calls the individual mystics of everyday life "unknown saints" because they are saints who manifest God's self-communication within them in tangible ways, but they might not be canonized as "saints" in the Catholic sense.⁶⁵⁰ He gives an example of a Jesuit who lived in a village in India to dig a well for the poor people.⁶⁵¹ In another example, he tells the story of a Jesuit who worked as a prison chaplain. That person received more appreciation for the cigarettes he brought to the inmates compared to his constant preaching.⁶⁵² Rahner might not give an example of non-Christians who are mystics of everyday life, but it does not mean he ruled out the possibility of recognizing non-Christians as mystics of everyday life. He does believe one must find those people in an *a posteriori* way through direct experience. The mystic of everyday life, for Rahner, is "one who with difficulty and without any clear evidence of success plods away at the task of

⁶⁴⁸ Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," 239.

⁶⁴⁹ Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," 247. Italics from Rahner.

⁶⁵⁰ Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," 48.

⁶⁵¹ Karl Rahner, "Why Become or Remain a Jesuit?" <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/20th-century-ignatian-voices/why-become-or-remain-a-jesuit/> accessed June 29, 2019.

⁶⁵² Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," 48. See also, Rahner, "Why Become or Remain a Jesuit?"

awakening in just a few men and women a small spark of faith, of hope, and of charity.”⁶⁵³ Obviously, one can find such a person among non-Christians, and this supports my thesis on the existence of saints who manifests God’s self-communication outside Christianity, even if they might be hidden saints.

2. *Universal Paths of Realizing God’s Grace*

Drawing from Ibn ‘Arabī’s thoughts, James W. Morris suggests eight universal paths of *walāya* that are “present and effective in almost everyone’s experience.”⁶⁵⁴ These paths are nature, beauty, crises, devotion and service, Friends of God (*awliyā Allāh*), ethical challenges, active creativity and renewal, and the mystery of destiny (*sirr al-qadar*).⁶⁵⁵ I believe these paths extend and clarify the concept of saints as mystics of everyday life because those paths categorize in tangible ways how a person can respond positively to God’s self-communication.

The first path is the constant theophanies of the world of nature. One criticism of Rahner’s theology is that it gives too much emphasis on humans as the loci of the self-communication of God. As a result, it might perpetuate anthropocentrism in Christian theology. Morris states that the human soul corresponds to other creatures and natural elements because they are all God’s creatures. The Quran portrays how non-human creatures such as mountains, trees, and animals, worship God like human beings (Q. 22:18), even though most of the human beings cannot understand the way they

⁶⁵³ Rahner, “Why Become or Remain a Jesuit?” See also Egan, “The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner,” 48.

⁶⁵⁴ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 2.

⁶⁵⁵ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 3-4.

communicate with their creator. On the Christian side, contemporary Christian discourse proposes the concept of “deep incarnation” as the implication of God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ as a way to demonstrate how non-human creatures may be the loci of God’s self-revelation.⁶⁵⁶ God’s presence in the natural world can draw out or deepen a human sense of transcendence, even for non-religious people.

The second path of *walāya* is “the transforming, humbling, awe-inspiring spiritual power of beauty in all of its infinite forms and expressions.”⁶⁵⁷ The Islamic tradition takes this aspect seriously, mainly because a well-known *hadīth* states, “God is beautiful and God loves beauty.” One can easily find the tangible manifestation of this spiritual principle in the long development of various forms of arts in both Islamic and Christian traditions such as music, painting, architecture, dance, and others.

The third one relates to crises in human life, especially in the form of unwanted suffering and difficulty. Paying closer attention to personal experiences of suffering reminds that person of his human limitation. Such experiences can become “indispensable preconditions for....discovering, actualizing and expanding the central divine quality of Compassion....and actively bringing into existence all that is beautiful and good (*ihsān*).”⁶⁵⁸ Numerous figures in the Quran and the Bible demonstrate this aspect, such as Joseph and Job. Those narratives of suffering function as a mirror for the readers to reflect

⁶⁵⁶ Niels H. Gregersen coined the phrase “deep incarnation” to refer to God’s incarnation not only in Jesus but also “an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature.” Niels H. Gregersen, “The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Volume 40, Number 3 (2001): 205. Elizabeth Johnson further elaborates this notion to formulate the concept of “deep resurrection.” See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), chapter 7.

⁶⁵⁷ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 3.

⁶⁵⁸ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 3.

upon their own experiences of suffering and to open the possibility of spiritual growth and transformation.

The next path is devotion and service in various forms and expressions that involve discipline and contemplation. The formation of religious rituals and the piety of the people can illustrate this path. However, it is not limited only to religious rituals. Morris suggests that people who are not following any religious or cultural form of devotion or ritual may discover this path in the “mastery of any form of sport, art, science, profession, or any other ‘discipline’ in every area of life.”⁶⁵⁹

The fifth path is through encountering, directly or indirectly, the Friends of God or saints as the living instrument of God’s mercy and grace. In Rahner’s terms, they manifest the inter-communicative mediations of God’s grace. In Islam, Prophet Muhammad’s centrality, along with his companions and also numerous figures of the *awliyā’*, indicates this path in a vivid manner. The tradition of preserving the narratives and teachings of holy people in Islam and Christianity through hagiography and the recognition of a saint by his or her proximate community can be regarded as examples of this path.

The sixth path corresponds to an individual’s ethical challenges in everyday life. A human being is always facing moments where she must choose to do something ethical on a daily basis, mainly when dealing with other human beings. Often this involves overcoming or setting aside one’s inclinations, habits, and selfish interests. Even though she can follow external prescriptions (laws, religious principles, customs, and so on), her decision always belongs to her ultimately. Rahner emphasizes the primacy of following one’s conscience as the fundamental way to respond positively to God’s grace. Human

⁶⁵⁹ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 3.

history has witnessed the development of ethics. For instance, slavery was considered legal and ethical in the past, but it is condemned as inhuman today. This kind of transformation might take a long process, but one can argue that it started through individuals who chose differently and dared to be different from other people at their time.

The seventh path of *walāya* is identified as active creativity and renewal. Morris explains that neglect and destruction could become the end of the things in the world (*hayāt al-dunyā*) such as buildings, homes, and places of worship, and human bodies unless “they are countered by....human responsibilities of ‘spiritual maintenance.’”⁶⁶⁰ Human beings are tempted to become a passive spiritual “consumer,” but in “this relationship of *walāya*....each soul knows what is alive and real and authentic, and what is not.”⁶⁶¹ It is the reason why Islam and Christianity, or any other religious tradition, always encounter renewal movements, sometimes initiated from within and sometimes from without.

The last path is the discovery and unfolding of each person’s mystery of destiny (*sirr al-qadar*). Different from Christian theological discourse in which there is a broad consensus on the importance of human freedom, Sunni theological discourses focus on the notion of destiny (*qadr*) because of the heavy emphasis on the idea of God’s will that is superior to human freedom.⁶⁶² This path encompasses the other paths of *walāya* because one must take into account her whole life experiences and her discovery of different paths

⁶⁶⁰ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 4.

⁶⁶¹ Morris, “Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*,” 4.

⁶⁶² The defeat of the Mu’tazilites, who championed human free will, in the 9th century CE, has paved a way for the dominant Ash’arite school of thought and its emphasis on God’s free will in human destiny. For further discussion on this topic see Khalid Blackinship, “The Early Creed,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The Ash’arites still dominate the Sunni theological discourse even today albeit there are some modern Muslim thinkers who lean toward Mu’tazilite thought.

to understand the last one.⁶⁶³ I think the most profound example of this path can be found in the Quranic narrative of Moses and Khadir (Q. 18:60-82). Since Khadir is the bearer of inspired divine knowledge, Moses wanted to learn some wisdom from him. Khadir told Moses that he would not be able to learn patiently, but Moses insisted. Khadir then gave him one condition: if Moses asks him the meaning of his conduct, then he would have to leave. Afterward, there were three occasions where Moses could not hold himself and asked Khadir about the meaning of the latter's action. These are the three occasions: (1) Khadir made a hole in a ship they embarked in, (2) Khadir killed a child whom they met on the way, and (3) they reached a city whose inhabitants refused to give them hospitality, and when they found a wall that was almost crumbled, Khadir suddenly repaired the wall. Moses questioned Khadir's decisions on each occasion. As a result, Khadir asked Moses to part after the third occasion and told him the reasons. For the first occasion, the ship belonged to poor people, and Khadir knew that a wicked king behind them was seizing every ship that was in good condition. As for the second, Khadir knew that the child would become an evil person, so God would give a better child to the parents. And for the third one, Khadir knew about a treasure buried under the wall that belonged to two orphans of the city. Should the treasure be found when they were children, the adults would take custody of it, so Khadir delayed the treasure from being found. In this story, Moses represents human beings with their usual incapability of understanding the course of destiny except in an *a posteriori* way, while Khadir symbolizes God who, unlike humans, owns divine knowledge. For me, this is an invitation to constant personal spiritual reflection to gain deeper awareness and understanding.

⁶⁶³ Morris, "Discovering and Deepening the Relationship of *Walāya*," 4.

3. Saints as Revealers of New Modes of God's Grace

If saints are those who respond positively to the self-communication of God by accepting their own existence and live daily with faith, hope, and love, then one should not perceive sainthood as something static and as an end in itself. Rather, sainthood always corresponds to diverse paths in human history as the actualization of God's salvific will. As a result, there are various new modes of holiness, stemming from God's offer of grace, and different kinds of saints who reveal those modes. Rahner understands the Catholic procedure of canonization of saints in this regard, as I have mentioned in chapter one.⁶⁶⁴ Therefore, what differentiates the canonized saints and the hidden saints are not the degrees of holiness, but explicit recognition by the Catholic Church.⁶⁶⁵ For him, it is still necessary to have the canonization because the naming of new saints equates the acceptance to the new modes of holiness.

The canonization of Óscar Romero in 2018 is a compelling case. Romero was an Archbishop of San Salvador who was killed when celebrating Mass. Even though many people honor him as a martyr since the time he was killed in 1980, the Catholic Church did not declare him as a martyr until 2015. One of the reasons for the delay was because some people doubted his death as a martyrdom. The traditional understanding of a martyr is someone who died because of his identity as a follower of Christ. In the case of Romero, his martyrdom case was unclear because one might argue that the reason for his killing was more of political involvement where he was an outspoken defender of the poor and the

⁶⁶⁴ See chapter 1 section B. For further study, see Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," 91-104.

⁶⁶⁵ Egan, "The Mystical Theology of Karl Rahner," 48.

vulnerable.⁶⁶⁶ Nowadays, one can easily argue that Romero demonstrated a life worthy of a follower of Christ and died in the way Christ died. Therefore, Romero has become an example of someone who shows a new mode of holiness, namely through his political activism for the poor in his context. Through his and other political martyrs' lives, different dimensions of salvation-history are revealed so that other people can follow their footsteps. Romero has influenced not only Catholics but other Christians and even non-religious people.⁶⁶⁷

In light of the understanding of saints as revealers of new modes of God's grace, I want to return to the icons of Abraham Lincoln, Horace Mann, Booker T. Washington, and Alexander Graham Bell on the wall of Marsh Chapel at Boston University. I can clearly understand now why a president who abolished slavery, an educator, an African-American political figure, and a scientist can stand side by side with John the Baptist, Peter, and Paul. All of them were part of the inter-communicative mediations that reveal different modes of God's grace in history. Those modern figures might not always explicitly confessing Jesus Christ. But through embracing humanity and their existence, they have responded positively to God's self-communication and became part of salvific inter-communicative mediations for other human beings in their ways. In this regard, one can understand these figures as saints.

⁶⁶⁶ See for instance Society of Saint Pius X, "Is Romero a Martyr of Faith?" February 6, 2015, <https://sspx.org/en/news-events/news/is-romero-a-martyr-for-the-faith>, accessed July 2, 2019.

⁶⁶⁷ For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and Anglican Church include Óscar Romero in their Calendar of Saints (March 24). For ELCA's list of saints see Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pew Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 15. For Anglican Church see The Church of England, "The Calendar," <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/churchs-year/calendar>, accessed July 2, 2019.

In this chapter, I presented first a theological construct of an inclusive theology of saints from a Christian perspective, i.e., saints as manifestations and revealers of God's self-communication in history. After exploring Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of *walāya*, I found that it is necessary to connect the discourse on saints with the idea of God's self-communication. Rahner elaborates his thoughts on saints primarily for the context of Christianity. However, as I have shown in this chapter, the implication of Rahner's ideas can be extended to the hidden saints from among non-Christian people. It is entirely possible to recognize those hidden saints. Still, one needs to approach them a posteriori because, as tangible manifestations of God's self-communication, saints will always play an indispensable role in salvation history: i.e., as part of the inter-communicative mediations of God's grace. As a result, Rahner's theology of grace becomes essential in recognizing saints from among non-Christian people.

Among some possible types of learning in comparative theology as described by Catherine Cornille, my approach in this chapter demonstrates a combination of the mode of intensification, recovery, and appropriation.⁶⁶⁸ It is intensification because I draw on similarities between Christian and Muslim ideas of sainthood. Second, it is recovery because I am revalidating Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian in dialogue with Islam. Last, the chapter also presents an appropriation because I borrow new ideas from Morris' elaboration of Ibn 'Arabī's conception of *walāya*.

⁶⁶⁸ See Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 115-148.

CHAPTER 6

THE HIDDENNESS OF SAINTS

Dorothy Day (1897-1980), the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, is currently a candidate for canonization by the Roman Catholic Church. Many people perceive her as a saint because of her social activism. However, some people do not support her canonization based on Day's own words: "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be dismissed that easily."⁶⁶⁹ It is true that in her later years, she was irritated when people called her a "saint."⁶⁷⁰ What is the reason for her remark? As a Catholic, Day admired and prayed to various saints, so her refusal to the title is not a rejection of the saints. As stated by James Martin, S.J., Day believed sanctity as a vocation for every Christian, even before Vatican II declared the theme of the universal call to holiness.⁶⁷¹ Besides humility, which is a quality of a true saint, the reason for that famous remark was people's perception of a saint as superhuman. People tend to dismiss their capability by saying that they are only a human, unlike the saints who are not ordinary human beings. Day was afraid that, by being called a saint, she would be placed on a pedestal where admiration and awe might exist, but without the urge to participate in and to expand the same work that she had done.

In chapter five, I have explored the first aspect of an inclusive theology of saints, i.e., saints as manifestations and revealers of God's self-communication. Utilizing Karl

⁶⁶⁹ James Martin, S.J., "Don't Call Me a Saint?" in *America: The Jesuit Review*, November 14, 2012, <https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/dont-call-me-saint>, accessed July 19, 2019.

⁶⁷⁰ Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 110.

⁶⁷¹ Martin, "Don't Call Me a Saint?"

Rahner's concept of anonymous Christians, I argue that non-Christian people can become saints in Christian sense because they can partake in the inter-communicative mediations of God's grace, even without realizing it. As explained by Karl Rahner, the inter-communicative mediations must be tangible in history. However, he admits that answering the question of how Jesus Christ is present and operative in the faith of the non-Christian person is beyond the task of a systematic theologian. The task requires an a posteriori investigation of non-Christian religions from a historical point of view.⁶⁷² Therefore, to recognize a saint as a manifestation and revealer of God's self-communication, an a posteriori approach through direct experience must be exercised. Frequently, it is easier for Christians to acknowledge the sanctity of other Christians than to recognize the sanctity of non-Christians because, historically, Christians live and interact more within Christian communities. Recognizing non-Christian saints is more difficult because the task requires more effort in encountering non-Christian people and examining the presence of Christ as God's grace in their lives. That is the reason I prefer to use the term "hidden saint" to refer to non-Christians who manifest God's grace in their ways and are part of the saving intercommunication. Nonetheless, recognizing the sanctity of non-Christian persons remains a possibility.

This chapter continues the previous chapter's endeavor by elaborating on the notion of the hiddenness of a saint as the second aspect of an inclusive theology of saints. This aspect applies to both saints who are Christians and non-Christians. Can a saint be aware of their own sanctity? How does the hiddenness relate to the perception of others regarding a saint? The notion of the hidden saints exists in both Islamic and Christian traditions. In

⁶⁷² Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 315.

the Catholic tradition, the idea of the hiddenness of saints is inherent to canonization because saints are hidden during their life until the recognition after their death and the proof of miracles. It is a form of hiddenness. However, I argue that this idea of hiddenness is more complicated because it is related to the perception of the community toward a saint while he or she is still living, which is demonstrated in the case of Dorothy Day. Through a comparison of two religious traditions' idea of the hiddenness of the saints, I argue that this aspect does not lessen the status of the saint or makes the hidden saint inferior to other saints. Instead, hiddenness is the mark of all saints because it interrelates with three types of interpretation of sainthood: saints as occupying a liminal space between banality and holiness, only saints are capable of recognizing other saints, and the transparency of saints as icons of God.

This chapter delineates each of these types of interpretations of sainthood. In the first section, I explore the dynamic between banality and holiness as the liminal locus of sanctity. A saint is hidden because they occupy the liminal space where banality and holiness are intertwined: a saint embarks on the journey of sanctification towards holiness, yet, at the same time, she can only participate more in-depth in the holiness by embracing the banality of the world. The second section tries to answer the fundamental dilemma related to the hiddenness of a saint: if a saint is hidden, not only from people's recognition but also from his self-understanding, then how could one recognize sanctity? Drawing from Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the *malāmiyya* and Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological account of sainthood, I develop an argument on the paradox of sanctity, where sanctity is only visible to those who partake in it. Yet, general population could apprehend it to some extent. Contrary to Marion's argument, the reason is that there are "degrees" of perception

in encountering sainthood. Lastly, in the third section, saints are hidden because they act as icons of God, where transparency is a norm. However, that does not hinder their role as mediations that invite people into encountering God's holiness.

A. Banality and Holiness: Sanctity as Liminal Space

1. "He Who Eats Food and Walks in the Markets:" Saints in the World

The phrase "he who eats food and walks in the markets" comes from the Quran 25:7, namely from the mouth of the disbelievers who mocked the Prophet Muhammad when they saw him as no different from an ordinary person. They thought that his appearance and life did not meet their expectations of someone who possessed the divine or angelic qualities befitting a prophet of God. The disbelievers knew that the kings, rulers, and other notable people considered themselves to be above those ordinary people who walked in the markets.⁶⁷³ A Friend of God (*walī Allāh*), or a saint in Islam, follows the example of Prophet Muhammad, who is ordinary in the sense of their participation in worldly affairs. Consequently, a *walī*'s sanctity is concealed from the eyes of those who are ignorant.

Hiddenness from the eyes of people as one of the signs of a *walī* has its root in several well-known *hadīth*. For instance, a divine saying (*hadīth qudsī*) states:⁶⁷⁴

God, ever mighty and majestic is He, says: "Among My Friends, the one to be envied most, in My eyes, is the believer who has but little means and whose fortune is prayer, who worships his Lord in the best of modes, obeying Him in secret and in public. *He is unnoticed among men; they do not point him out with their fingers.* His livelihood is just sufficient, and he

⁶⁷³ Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 891 n.7.

⁶⁷⁴ Italics mine; wording is as translated in Ibn 'Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 9. See also At-Tirmidhi, *English translation of Jāmi' At-Tirmidhī*, 375.

accepts that with patience.” Then the Prophet snapped his fingers and said: “His death is hastened, his mourners few, his estate of little worth.”

Another prophetic saying (*hadīth*) related to the hiddenness of a saint says:⁶⁷⁵

Abū Hurayra recounts: “I went in one day to the Prophet. He said to me: ‘In a moment a man will come towards me through that door; he is one of the seven men by means of whom God protects the inhabitants of the earth.’ And behold, an Ethiopian (*habashī*) came through that door. He was bald and his nose had been cut off. On his head he carried a pitcher of water. Allāh’s messenger said, ‘This is he.’ Now this man, explains Abū Hurayra, was the servant of al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba, and it was he who washed down and swept out the mosque.”

In both *ahādīth* (sing. *hadīth*), the interplay between banality and holiness constitutes a *walī*: A *walī* occupies a liminal space between the banality of the world and the holiness of God. The first *hadīth* illustrates the feature of total servitude and devotion (*‘ubūdiyya*) to God. One who has attained the level of complete servitude expresses humility because that person does not need to impress people with visible piety and service. The second *hadīth* elucidates the theme of hiddenness because the Friend of God escapes the gaze of many people in this case through his menial outward appearance and lowly status as a slave of an Arab Muslim. Nevertheless, the Prophet Muhammad can recognize the superior spiritual status of that person as one of the seven *abdāl* (one of the highest ranks of sainthood). A *walī* demonstrates holiness amid the banality of life.

In the pious rhetoric of the Sufi tradition, there was often a firm rejection of this world to embrace God’s love, because this world is popularly understood in opposition to God. However, most examples of the Friends of God (*Awliyā Allāh*) indicate how they lived in their community in an impoverished mode of living, as a sign of complete surrender

⁶⁷⁵ Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī lī’ l-fatāwī*, Cairo 1959, 28, cited in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 90.

and devotion to God. For instance, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya, one of the most famous Friends of God who lived in the 8th century CE, used to be a slave because an evil person had sold her during the time of a great famine in Basra. After her master saw a miraculous occasion, he released Rābi'a, and she continued to live in Basra in prayer and meditation.⁶⁷⁶

One day, two prominent men came to Rābi'a. They were hungry, so they wanted to eat whatever she could provide. After their arrival, Rābi'a prepared two loaves of bread for them. But, after hearing a beggar crying out from hunger, she took the bread from the two guests and gave them to the beggar. The two men were surprised. At that moment, a serving girl brought eighteen warm loaves of bread sent by her mistress. Rābi'a counted the number of loaves and said to the girl: "Take them back. You have made a mistake." The girl was hesitant, but because Rābi'a insisted she brought back the bread to her mistress. The mistress listened to the girl's story and added two more loaves of bread. Afterward, Rābi'a accepted the gift and set the twenty pieces of bread for the two men. Later on, the two men asked Rābi'a about what had happened. She explained how she knew the two men were hungry and that she was ashamed to give them only two loaves of bread. Thus, she prayed to God when giving the beggar the two loaves: "My God, you have said, 'For each thing given, I will return tenfold.'⁶⁷⁷ Certain of this, I just gave away two loaves to please you, so that you would give back ten for each one."⁶⁷⁸ This story of Rābi'a demonstrates how a *walī* lives in the world yet orients her awareness entirely toward God. The *walī* occupies a liminal space between banality and holiness.

⁶⁷⁶ 'Attār, *Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Memorial of God's Friends*, 98-99.

⁶⁷⁷ See the Quran 6:160.

⁶⁷⁸ 'Attār, *Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's Memorial of God's Friends*, 102.

2. *Worldly Saints: Sanctification as the Journey in the Liminal Space*

Dorothy Day's reason for her objection to the label of saint illuminates the tendency of some Christians to attribute holiness only to some people or particular professions. In the Roman Catholic tradition, there was a time when many of the canonized saints were religious people such as priests and other members of religious orders.⁶⁷⁹ Martin Luther insisted on the fact that all Christians are saints who are called to live a holy life in the world, so holiness does not belong only to the hermits and monks.⁶⁸⁰ In the modern context, the Vatican II documents, especially *Lumen Gentium*, state that holiness cannot be limited to some people or professions or even to members of the Church itself. Instead, holiness can be found in the banality of human life: a married couple can follow the path of holiness through faithful love, and labor can follow the path of holiness through working diligently.⁶⁸¹ Karl Rahner understands holiness in the same way. That is the reason he speaks about the canonization of saints as a recognition of new modes of holiness, not as a way to appoint some people as more special than others.⁶⁸²

Moreover, as explored in chapter five, Rahner develops further the notion of holiness through living in the world authentically as a human.⁶⁸³ He proposes that all people have access to the path of spiritual perfection through fidelity to daily life in faith, hope,

⁶⁷⁹ Lawrence Cunningham calls this problem as "the bureaucratization of sainthood," in which the heavy emphasis on the clericalization of the calendar of saints is one of its signs. As a result, the non-clerical people in the Catholic Church tend to be seen as living outside the boundary of sanctity. See Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 49-51. See also table 10 in Weinstein and Bell, *Saints & Society*, 204.

⁶⁸⁰ Luther, "A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," 160.

⁶⁸¹ See LG no. 41.

⁶⁸² See chapter 5 section C3.

⁶⁸³ See chapter 5 section C1.

and love.⁶⁸⁴ Therefore, human beings can encounter God and cultivate God's self-communication in everyday life by living in modesty, selflessly, by silently serving others.⁶⁸⁵ That way, they, even non-Christians, become part of inter-communicative mediations as they manifest and reveal God's self-communication to other human beings. Related to this understanding, social and religious structures become significant since they can potentially mediate God's grace. Holiness manifests through the banality of the world. The overlapping between the two opens a liminal space for human beings to undergo the process of sanctification as a journey in that space. The more elevated a saint in the process, the more she will be involved in the world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as stated in chapter two, elaborates on the dynamic between banality and holiness in his understanding of sanctification. He perceives sanctification as a process that is integral to justification by God's grace. There is a threefold significance of sanctification in his understanding. First, people who undergo sanctification no longer belong to the world. Second, although they are not of the world, they still live in the world as representatives of God's holiness. Third, the status of their sanctification will be hidden from themselves until the end of time.⁶⁸⁶ The first and second significance demonstrates how holiness manifests through the banality of the world. For Bonhoeffer, sanctification encompasses the whole dimension of human life, including politics.⁶⁸⁷ It is not limited to personal piety. The most profound example of this sanctification is perhaps Bonhoeffer's own life and death.

⁶⁸⁴ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104. See also Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 126.

⁶⁸⁵ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104.

⁶⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 314.

⁶⁸⁷ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 314. See also Psalms 24:1.

Bonhoeffer was an influential theologian and pastor. When the Nazis rose to power in Germany, he refused to flee and instead stayed in Germany. He became part of the resistance movement against the Nazis and one of the leaders of the Confessing Church.⁶⁸⁸ Because of his political activity, Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in 1943. After being transferred to a concentration camp, the Nazis executed him on April 8, 1945. Many people consider Bonhoeffer a martyr and a saint for his struggle against the evil Nazi government.⁶⁸⁹

In a letter written in May 1944 from prison, Bonhoeffer states that a saint must partake in the worldly affairs, even if suffering becomes the cost of that involvement. There is no need to develop a particularly “pious” religious life or asceticism, except being as she is in the world as a human being.⁶⁹⁰ In a different letter written in July 1944, Bonhoeffer expresses how he became more appreciative of the “worldliness” of Christianity during his time in the prison. He says that a Christian “is not a *homo religiosus*, but a man, pure and simple, just as Jesus was man....I don’t mean the shallow this-worldliness of the enlightened, of the busy, the comfortable or the lascivious.”⁶⁹¹ He continues the letter by citing an occasion when he met a young French pastor thirteen years before. They talked about the ultimate goal of human life. The French pastor said he would like to be a saint, and Bonhoeffer replied that he would prefer “faith.”⁶⁹² Bonhoeffer’s response was driven by his preference to live entirely in the world.⁶⁹³ Thus the worldliness he meant is to take

⁶⁸⁸ The Confessing Church was a movement among Protestant Christians in German whose aim was to oppose the government-sponsored church during the time of the Nazis.

⁶⁸⁹ Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, chapter 6 and 7.

⁶⁹⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 166.

⁶⁹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 168.

⁶⁹² Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 168.

⁶⁹³ Marty, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison*, 144.

“life in one’s stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness.”⁶⁹⁴ Life in this world is indispensable to the process of sanctification.

Does Bonhoeffer think of sanctification as exclusively for Christians? His writings are mostly intended for the Christian community. Yet, Bonhoeffer approached saints and sanctification more inclusively in the letters he sent from prison. In a poem about how both Christians and unbelievers encounter God in their daily struggle in the world, especially in their sufferings, Bonhoeffer proclaims:⁶⁹⁵

Men go to God when they are sore bestead,
Pray to him for succour, for his peace, for bread,
For mercy for them sick, sinning or dead:
All men do so, Christian and unbelieving.

God goeth to every man when sore bestead,
Feedeth body and spirit with his bread,
For Christians, heathens alike he hangeth dead:
And both alike forgiving.

In another letter, Bonhoeffer speaks of the world that seems to work on its own, and that has only little room for God. He declares, “God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15.34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. *Before God and with him, we live without God.*”⁶⁹⁶ The paradoxical last sentence indicates Bonhoeffer’s intention to make the saints really partake in the world, even in the world where God seems not to exist.

⁶⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 169.

⁶⁹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 167-168.

⁶⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 164. Italics mine.

Therefore, in Bonhoeffer's understanding, a saint must engage entirely with the worldliness as an ongoing process of sanctification. What is necessary for the process is that the person must have the courage to make decisions in her life and be responsible for the consequence of those decisions. Again, this reflects Bonhoeffer's decision to oppose the Nazis through espionage and even planning a coup against the Hitler regime. Bonhoeffer had taken a position as a pacifist, but the suffering of people and the moral responsibility towards his country motivated his audacious transition into radical resistance.⁶⁹⁷ Bonhoeffer demonstrates his brave acceptance of the consequence of his decisions and struggles through his life and death. His is an example of the process of sanctification of a worldly saint who occupies a liminal space between banality and holiness. The elevation of holiness makes the saint participate even more rooted in the world, and, by doing that, spread holiness in the world.

B. "Only a Saint Can Recognize Another Saint:" A Phenomenology of Sainthood

Another similarity between the two religious traditions related to the saints is the role of the community in recognition of a saint. In the Christian tradition, only the Roman Catholic Church has an official authority for canonization. Nevertheless, even in the Catholic tradition, before the canonization of a saint, often the local community has venerated that person as a saint. This procedure of communal recognition is the common practice in both Islamic and Christian tradition. Therefore, a recognition by the people of

⁶⁹⁷ Raymond Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 64, Suppl. (1992): 134-146.

a saint is indispensable in both Islam and Christian tradition because a saint does not become a saint because he claimed he is one, but because of people's recognition.⁶⁹⁸

The phrase “only a saint can recognize a saint” came from a famous principle regarding a Friend of God or *walī*. This principle is known not only in the local context, such as in Javanese Islam in Indonesia as I mentioned previously (*la ya 'rifu al-walī illā bi-al-walī*),⁶⁹⁹ but also in Sufi classical texts, such as Al-Hujwīrī's *The Revelation of the Veiled (Kashf al-Mahjūb)*.⁷⁰⁰ If a saint is hidden not only from people's recognition but also from his self-understanding, then how could one recognize sanctity? Despite the recognition by the people, hiddenness remains a significant aspect of sainthood because a saint might not recognize his own sanctity. This section explores the paradox of sanctity that refers to the interplay between the hidden and recognizable aspects of sanctity.

1. “The One Who Blames Oneself:” The Malāmiyya according to Ibn 'Arabī

Among the stories I mentioned in chapter three related to Gus Dur, there is a story on how he managed to identify a *walī*.⁷⁰¹ When Gus Dur was in a mosque in Egypt, he greeted a random person who was sitting and asked the person to pray for him. Immediately, the man got upset and left while saying, “What is my sin, O Lord, that you disclosed my rank to this man?”⁷⁰² The story suggests that Gus Dur's spiritual rank is better than that of this man, so that the man could not conceal his standing from Gus Dur. The

⁶⁹⁸ See chapter 8 section B.

⁶⁹⁹ Chapter 3 section B. See also, Zamhari, *Rituals of Islamic Spirituality*, 68.

⁷⁰⁰ He quotes a divine saying (*Hadīth Qudsī*), in which God said: “My friends (saints) are under My cloak: save Me, none knoweth them except My friends.” Al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-Mahjūb*, 63.

⁷⁰¹ See chapter 3 section B3.

⁷⁰² NU Online, “Wali yang Lari dari Hadapan Gus Dur.”

story illustrates the awareness of spiritual ranks in the Islamic tradition concerning the *walī*, in which the ones who occupy higher ranks are not recognizable by the lower ones. Different from Christianity, where there is no formal distinction between saints by degrees and functions, the Islamic tradition has developed various concepts related to the classification of Friends of God. Ibn ‘Arabī was one of the most influential writers who systematized the various ideas that existed before his time into a more explicit system. To elucidate all those ideas would be a daunting task and is outside the scope of this dissertation.⁷⁰³ Therefore, this section will explore only one prominent type of Muslim sainthood, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, that corresponds to this topic of a hidden saint: i.e., the *malāmiyya*.

According to Ibn ‘Arabī, there are two axes in sainthood: a horizontal and a vertical axis. The horizontal axis corresponds to different types of saints, as explained in chapter four, while the vertical axis relates to the degrees of sainthood along with their functions and ranks.⁷⁰⁴ Take the example of the hadīth mentioned above on the Ethiopian slave. There the Prophet Muhammad says that he is one of seven people through whom God preserves the earth. Ibn ‘Arabī’s technical term for these seven people, following earlier Sufī tradition, is the *abdāl*.⁷⁰⁵ The *abdāl* occupy one of the highest ranks in the “vertical”

⁷⁰³ For the most accessible study on Ibn ‘Arabī’s system of *Walāya*, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*.

⁷⁰⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 89.

⁷⁰⁵ Louis Massignon discusses the notion of *abdāl* in his writings and even appropriated the idea for Christian theology. See Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 92; Louis Massignon, “The Notion of the ‘Real Elite’ in Sociology and in History,” in *Testimonies and Reflections: Essays of Louis Massignon*, trans. Herbert Mason (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 57-64. Massignon treats al-Hallāj as an example of the *abdāl*. For Massignon’s monumental work on al-Hallāj, see Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallaj*. Moreover, his fascination to Mohandas Gandhi in his later years made him to include Gandhi into the rank of *abdāl*. See Christian S. Krokus, “Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in Louis Massignon’s Appropriation of Gandhi as a Modern Saint,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*

degrees of sainthood. Since the earth cannot exist without those people, anytime a person among them passes away, God appoints a new one immediately.⁷⁰⁶ The Ethiopian slave from the *hadīth* might belong to a type of saint that is hidden from people's eyes called the *malāmīyya*. At the same time, he is also a *badal* (singular of *abdāl*) by his function.

The *malāmīyya* literally means “those who put blame upon themselves” (singular form: *malāmī*). They are called *malāmīyya* because they always intentionally attract “blame” of themselves as “a ceaseless effort to detect their own imperfections.”⁷⁰⁷ The term is related to a Quranic passage (Q. 5: 54) that states:⁷⁰⁸

O you who believe! Whosoever among you should renounce his religion, God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward the believers, stern toward the disbelievers, striving in the way of God, *and fearing not the blame of any blamer*. That is the Bounty of God, which He gives to whomsoever He will. And God is All-Encompassing, Knowing.

The *malāmīyya* go unnoticed among the main body of believers and show no supernatural signs of sainthood. The jurist and the Sufis (in this case, the Sufis who have not achieved enough spiritual rank to recognize them) treat them like other people who are ordinary in their religious appearance.⁷⁰⁹ Their status is comparable to the case of Moses and Muhammad. In the *Epistle of the Light (Risālāt al-Anwār)*, Ibn ‘Arabī explains how after Muhammad’s nocturnal ascension (*isrā* or *mi‘rāj*), where he encountered the “spiritual realities” (*rūhāniyyāt*) of the prophets and then God, the Prophet did not show any outward

Vol. 47, No. 4 (2012): 532-533. For more analysis on Massignon’s appropriation of the *badaliyya* (plural form of *abdāl*), see Christian S. Krokus, *The Theology of Louis Massignon: Islam, Christ, and the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2017), chapter 7.

⁷⁰⁶ See the story of Shaykh Abū ‘l-Hasan al-Baghdādī in chapter 4 section D. For a version of that story, see Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 90-91.

⁷⁰⁷ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 109.

⁷⁰⁸ The Quran translation from Nasr, *The Study Quran*. Italics mine.

⁷⁰⁹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 109.

signs of that journey.⁷¹⁰ Moses, on the other hand, after his encounter with God at Mount Sinai, veiled himself to hide the mark of divine Proximity in the form of his radiant face.⁷¹¹ For Ibn ‘Arabī, the contrasting cases indicate the spiritual superiority of Prophet Muhammad over Moses, precisely because he did not bear any mark that is visible to people.⁷¹² Michel Chodkiewicz mentions that for Ibn ‘Arabi, Ibn Ja’dun was a striking example of a *malāmī*.⁷¹³ Ibn Ja’dun was one of the Supports (*awtād*) whom Ibn ‘Arabī had encountered in Andalusia.⁷¹⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī describes his hiddenness as follows:⁷¹⁵

When he was absent he wasn’t missed and when he was present no-one sought his advice; when he arrived in a place he was accorded no welcome and in conversation he was passed over and ignored....he earned his living as a henna siever. He always appeared disheveled and dusty, his eyes anointed with antimony because of the henna dust.

Though one of the highest-ranking saints, Ibn Ja’dun looked completely ordinary, and people tended to ignore his existence.

In a passage of *The Meccan Revelations (Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya)*, Ibn ‘Arabī wrote about these *malāmiyya* as follows:⁷¹⁶

Know, and may God assist you, that this chapter deals with those servants of God that are called the *malāmiyya*, that is, those spiritual figures who

⁷¹⁰ Ibn ‘Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, 59. See also James W. Morris’ note on “Ibn ‘Arabi’s Spiritual Ascension” in Ibn Al ‘Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations Volume I: Presentations and Translations from the Arabic*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2005), 329 n. 70.

⁷¹¹ See Exodus 34:29-35.

⁷¹² Ibn ‘Arabi, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, 59.

⁷¹³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 109.

⁷¹⁴ The Supports (*awtād*) is one of the Four Pillars in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system. It is one of the highest rank of sainthood.

⁷¹⁵ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia*, 115-116.

⁷¹⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, I, 181 as translated by Michel Chodkiewicz, introduction to *The Meccan Revelations Volume II: Selected Texts of al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya Presentations and Translations from the Arabic*, by Ibn Al ‘Arabi, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. Cyrille Chodkiewicz and Denis Gril (New York: Pir Press, 2004), 37.

possess the very highest degree of *walāya*. There is nothing above them but the degree of Prophecy. Their station is the station called the “station of proximity” (*maqām al-qurba*). Their specific verse in the Quran is “houris enclosed in tents” (Q. 55:72), a verse that, with this description of women in paradise and its houris tells us about the souls of those men of God that He has chosen for Himself, that He has preserved, that he has enclosed in the tents of divine jealousy in every corner of the universe such that no gaze can fall upon them and distract them—but no, the gaze of the creatures could not possibly distract them!....God has enclosed their outer forms in the tents of ordinary actions and customary devotions such that, from the point of view of apparent practices, they devote themselves only to obligatory devotions or to habitual supererogatory devotions. They do not make themselves noticeable with miracles. People do not glorify them, they do not point at them because of their piety, in the sense that people commonly understand, even though no evil can be imputed to them. They are the ones who remain hidden; they are the pious, the faithful guardians of the repository in the universe.

From this passage, Ibn ‘Arabī proclaims the exceptional place of the *malāmiyya* as the people who attain the highest degree of *walāya*, inferior only to the degree of prophethood. One needs to keep in mind the unique relationship between *walāya* and prophethood in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system.⁷¹⁷ Next, God assigns a special place in paradise for the *malāmiyya* in accordance with the Quranic verse quoted by the Shaykh (Q. 55:72). It is more of a spiritual allusion to the high rank of the *malāmiyya*—i.e., the unique proximity with God in the “station of proximity” (*maqām al-qurba*)—and not to be taken literally as a matter of worldly standing. Because of this distinctive inner proximity with God, their state is not visible to ordinary people. As for the outer appearance in visible acts of piety, the *malāmiyya* only do the basic obligatory devotions, such as praying five times a day, and

⁷¹⁷ See chapter 4 section B1.

do not practice excessive supererogatory devotions, which emphasizes the fact that they do not outwardly appear too different from other people.

Some Sufis were criticized for their antinomian approach toward legal obligations as a sign of their supposed superior spiritual status.⁷¹⁸ However, for Ibn 'Arabī, a true servant of God practices the legal requirements and engages in supererogatory prayers (*nawafil*).⁷¹⁹ This understanding is related to the famous divine saying (*hadīth qudsī*) known as “the hadith of the supererogatory works”.⁷²⁰

Whoever treats a friend of Mine as an enemy, on him I declare war. My servant draws near to Me by nothing dearer to Me than that which I have established as a duty for him. And My servant does not cease to approach Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. Then when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me [for something], I give it to him. If he seeks refuge with Me, I place him under My protection. In nothing do I hesitate so much as I hesitate [to take] the soul of a believer. He has a horror of death, and I have a horror of harming him.

Ibn 'Arabī states that for the *malāmiyya*, “it is no longer God who becomes the hearing and the sight and the hand of the *'abd* [servant], but the *'abd* who becomes the hearing with which God hears, the sight through which He sees, the hand with which He grasps.”⁷²¹ The reason is that when someone is doing supererogatory acts, the person is still using his or her own will. A *malāmī*, or a true servant, is acting without his own egoistic will and totally

⁷¹⁸ The Qalandar is one of those antinomian Sufis. For a study that analyzes various deviant dervishes who were antinomian in appearance and behavior see Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994). Karamustafa states that the basis of the antinomian Sufis is the strong rejection to society, along with the Islamic legal system, for the sake of piety. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends*, 22.

⁷¹⁹ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 110.

⁷²⁰ Wording as translated in Ibn 'Arabī, *Divine Sayings*, 70. See also Al-Bukhārī, *English Translation of Sahīh Bukhārī*, Vol. 8, 275-276.

⁷²¹ Fut. II, 16 as quoted and translated by Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 110.

following God's will.⁷²² The absence of supernatural, miraculous signs is related to their lack of a separate, egoistic will. The *malāmiyya* have reached the state of true servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*), so they never manifest supernatural power without God's command. They exercise no free will and subjugate themselves only to God's will.⁷²³

For Ibn 'Arabi, the highest degree within the type of the *malāmiyya* is called the "Solitaries" (*afrād*). They act by God's will and not their own will. As a *malāmī*, a Solitary is usually hidden from people's recognition. However, there is a second category of the *afrād* that is not entirely concealed from the gaze of people, because they hold the function of (outward) authority as bestowed by God.⁷²⁴ People can recognize the saints of this second category of *afrād* to some extent. According to Ibn 'Arabī, the reason for their visibility is because God bestows on this group the attribute of lordship (*rubūbiyya*) in addition to the attribute of servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*), while the first category of *afrād* only obtains the latter attribute. Since it is God who has given them the task, as a true servant they must conform with it: "a sacrificial renunciation of the *'ubūdiyya* [servanthood] in the name of the *ubūdiyya*, since the servant must clothe himself with the attributes of the *rubūbiyya* or lordship."⁷²⁵ They act without acting because God is the one who acts and not them. This paradox of affirmation and denial can be seen in the Quran 8:17, where God says of Muhammad (at the battle of Badr): "You did not throw, when you threw, but it was God who threw." The *afrād* of this second category are visible to people, but their authority belongs to God alone.⁷²⁶ Ibn 'Arabī lists several *afrād* in that category, whom he met during

⁷²² Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 110.

⁷²³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 110-111.

⁷²⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 112.

⁷²⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 112.

⁷²⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 113.

his youth in Andalusia. One of them is Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Sharafī, whose prayer was believed by people to be granted by God.⁷²⁷ Since no one dared to ask him to pray for them, people would make their supplications next to him in the mosque with a loud voice, so that he would be forced to say the “Amen.”

From the description of Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of the *malāmiyya*, it is clear that hiddenness marks a critical aspect of a *walī*: the closer a saint to God, the more their sanctity will be hidden, both from the saint and from other people. Therefore, the saint demonstrates what God says about God’s friends in the *hadīth* quoted above, “He is unnoticed among men; they do not point him out with their fingers.” Inspired by Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of the *malāmiyya*, I will explore the significance of the aspect of hiddenness to a Christian concept of sainthood in the next part.

2. Hiddenness as a Mark of Sainthood

a. Jean-Luc Marion’s Account of the Invisibility of a Saint

Among the Christian theologians whose thoughts on saints I explore in this dissertation, Jean-Luc Marion emphasizes the hiddenness or invisibility of a saint the most. For him, a saint cannot possibly recognize his or her own sanctity, and, furthermore, one’s sanctity is concealed from other people’s eyes.⁷²⁸ The invisibility of the saints stems from the nature of sanctity as derived from God’s holiness. There are three reasons for the impossibility of recognizing a saint. To begin with, the definition of holiness is always

⁷²⁷ Fut I, 206 as quoted by Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 112. For the narrative of al-Sharafi’s life, see Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia*, 77.

⁷²⁸ Jean-Luc Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 355-362.

restricted to “a particular fantasy of perfection” of a group or faction.⁷²⁹ Thus, this pretense entails a risk of idolatry, by taking one’s definition of holiness as an idol.⁷³⁰ Secondly, those who claim to know about sanctity means they have experienced it, but, at the same time, the claim negates their sanctity because it is a form of self-idolatry.⁷³¹ Marion illustrates the second point by referring to the experience of the survivors of a death camp. Those survivors cannot talk about death primarily because they did not experience it.⁷³² Thirdly, no one can claim to recognize other people’s sanctity, because no one can determine another person’s virtue and heart.⁷³³

Related to the illustration of the survivor of a death camp, Marion points toward the paradox of death: i.e., to talk about death experientially requires someone who dies and then comes back to life, and yet no one has ever done such thing except Jesus Christ.⁷³⁴ He speaks about the paradox of holiness here: no one can recognize holiness except those who have experienced God’s holiness. But who can claim to experience God’s holiness? God is holy, and no human can lay his or her gaze on God’s holiness. Marion utilizes examples from the Bible showing how God’s holiness prevents any human being from approaching and encountering God in totality, as expressed in the story of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-17). Marion asserts, “God’s alterity imposes itself as absolute precisely as the alterity of holiness. And this alterity of holiness is manifested only as it remains invisible. Or, more precisely, insofar as it only manifests itself as invisible, inasmuch it cannot

⁷²⁹ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 356.

⁷³⁰ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 235.

⁷³¹ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 356.

⁷³² Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 357-358.

⁷³³ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 357-357.

⁷³⁴ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 359.

become an object for the intentionality of a gaze.”⁷³⁵ Moreover, holiness sheds light on human sinfulness, which characterizes humans as a separate entity from God.⁷³⁶

For Marion, as Jesus Christ is the only one who can overcome the paradox of death, he is also the only one who can manifest God’s holiness to the fullest in the world. In other words, Christ is the only true saint.⁷³⁷ Nonetheless, as he partakes in God’s holiness, Christ is invisible from the world’s point of view. The reason is that “holiness cannot give itself to be seen to what is not (yet) itself holy; manifestation can only be fulfilled to the extent that the eyes can bear it.”⁷³⁸ To illustrate this point, Marion employs Blaise Pascal’s three orders that ascend from the lower order to the highest: the order of the flesh, mind, and heart. The law of those orders entails the invisibility of the bearers of the higher-order from the gaze of those who belong to an inferior order. Therefore, Marion argues that the holiness of saints remains invisible to those who are not part of the holiness.

Does Marion completely disregard any attempt to recognize another person as a saint? Can a person become a saint? While his essay seems to suggest the futility of any endeavor to recognize holiness and saint, I believe his argument has more nuance. If Christ is totally invisible because of his partaking in God’s holiness, then no human being could recognize Christ’s holiness. Yet, that is not the case. In the essay itself, Marion mentions how one can perceive the holiness of Christ, but only to the degree one could “bear” it. He compares it with the disciples at the road to Emmaus who witness “the visible sign of the

⁷³⁵ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 360.

⁷³⁶ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 360.

⁷³⁷ Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness: On Saturation in Jean-Luc Marion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 155.

⁷³⁸ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 361.

thing that as such is invisible, in the breaking of the bread.”⁷³⁹ Therefore, the attempt to recognize a saint is not entirely unavailing.

b. Holiness and the Saturated Phenomenon

Marion’s concept of phenomenality is the root of his insistence on the invisibility of a saint. Contrary to the dominant paradigm in phenomenology since Edmund Husserl that emphasizes the individual who perceives the phenomenon, Marion accentuates the phenomenon that gives itself to the individual. He argues that the intentionality of the individual in perceiving the phenomenon reduces the effect of the phenomenon. Instead, what characterizes the phenomenon is the “givenness,” or an excess of intuition of that which gives itself to the individual, not the intention of the perceiver.⁷⁴⁰ The reversal of emphasis on the phenomenon becomes the foundation of his famous concept of the saturated phenomenon.⁷⁴¹ Marion states, “Because the saturated phenomenon, due to the excess of intuition in it, cannot be borne by any gaze that would measure up to it (‘objectively’), it is perceived (‘subjectively’) by the gaze only in the negative mode of an impossible perception, the mode of bedazzlement.”⁷⁴² Since the primary mode of the

⁷³⁹ Marion, “The Invisibility of the Saint,” 361.

⁷⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina M. Gschwandtner, et. al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 33.

⁷⁴¹ For Marion’s extensive elaboration on the idea of the saturated phenomenon, see Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Marion differentiates phenomena based on their increasing intuitive content in three fundamental domains. First of all, the poor phenomena “that are deprived of intuition.” Secondly, the common-law phenomena, “whose signification...can ideally receive an adequate intuitive fulfillment but...do not reach such fulfillment.” Lastly, the saturated phenomena, which “the excess of intuition shields from objective constitution.” Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 47. See also, Marion, *Being Given*, 221-228.

⁷⁴² Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*, 36.

saturated phenomenon, i.e., bedazzlement, is created from the excess of intuition, then, as Christina M. Gschwandtner articulates, the “Saturated phenomena are identified precisely through the effect they have on the one who witnesses them.”⁷⁴³

Saturated phenomena can occur through four categories of experience.⁷⁴⁴ First, phenomena can saturate a human sense of quantity by giving too much information or data. Historical and cultural events are examples of this category. Second, there is bedazzlement through quality, such as paintings. Next, phenomena can saturate through their relationship as they appear as immediate without analogy. Marion gives an example of this category through an analysis of human flesh, such as suffering, pleasure, or aging.⁷⁴⁵ Fourth, the encounter with the human face of others can appear as saturated in modality, whether through an ethical or erotic encounter.⁷⁴⁶ Marion adds another category, namely the phenomena of revelation that combines those four categories of saturation and which he discusses as a possibility.⁷⁴⁷ Elaine Petra Turner rightly notes that “As the limit case of saturation, Revelation demonstrates the profundity of its self-gift to the receiver, and in this, the receiver’s more apparent incapacity to receive this self-gift in its entirety, and the necessary recognition of the provisionality of her response to it.”⁷⁴⁸ The notion of

⁷⁴³ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 7.

⁷⁴⁴ Marion explores each of these categories of experience in a chapter in Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), chapter 2-6.

⁷⁴⁵ Marion, *In Excess*, 91-96.

⁷⁴⁶ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 7.

⁷⁴⁷ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 7-8. For further elaboration on the phenomenology of revelation, see Marion, *Being Given*, 234-245. Marion addresses the topic of Revelation in his Gifford Lectures in 2014, see Jean Luc-Marion, *Givenness and Revelation*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁷⁴⁸ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 237.

Revelation becomes essential in our discussion because it is intertwined with Marion's thought of holiness and the saint.

c. Sanctity as a Mode of Participation in Holiness

Holiness marks the presence of the Holy One and sets itself as totally different from the world so that it is invisible to those who belong to the world. Similar to the saturated phenomenon, one cannot grasp or define holiness but, instead, one must take the posture of receiving it as the gift.⁷⁴⁹ Marion exemplifies this point through the story of the burning bush in which Moses responded by hiding his gaze for fear of facing God.⁷⁵⁰ Turner explains the significance of the story to Marion's argument as follows:⁷⁵¹

For Marion, this invisibility and refusal to gaze makes manifest holiness' resistance to becoming an intentional object. But this very pairing demonstrates a certain visibility that holiness engenders. *This is not a visibility of holiness itself, but is rather a visibility present only in the reception of holiness and the response to it.* As such, although holiness cannot be adequately defined or perceived within the confines of a traditional phenomenological approach, Marion locates the manifestation of holiness in the alteration of the receiver who encounters it. *It is thus that although holiness remains and must remain invisible, its 'visibility' occurs in the response of the one who receives it and who participates in it.*

Even though it is implicit, one who encounters the holiness might participate in it precisely because she "experiences the impact of the phenomenon upon her."⁷⁵²

The profundity of this impact, according to Marion, makes the person incapable of grasping it and, thus, the holiness becomes invisible to her although she might have become

⁷⁴⁹ Turner, "The Unknown Saint," 238.

⁷⁵⁰ Marion, "The Invisibility of the Saint," 360.

⁷⁵¹ Turner, "The Unknown Saint," 238. Italics mine.

⁷⁵² Turner, "The Unknown Saint," 239.

part of it. It is the first element of lack, i.e., the lack of perception. Another element of lack is “the moral or ethical disparity,” where the person becomes aware of her sinfulness.⁷⁵³ This understanding is the reason why a saint could never recognize his or her own sanctity. Instead, as in the case of the paradox of death, the encounter with holiness will make the saint know that she is not holy by imparting “a counter-knowledge about the self.”⁷⁵⁴ Therefore, both elements constitute the response of a human being when encountering holiness and explain the invisibility of the saint.

Marion’s reference to Pascal’s three orders signifies the possibility of becoming saints. Someone who still belongs to the lesser orders of the flesh and mind could not recognize the things that belong to the superior order of the heart. Since the recognition of holiness requires participation in it, “holiness must bestow itself upon the individual in order for her to receive it. This very need for holiness to bestow itself, however, creates the conditions for the individual herself to cross into the invisibility which marks out holiness’ phenomenality.”⁷⁵⁵ At this point, she partakes in the invisibility of holiness and becomes invisible to those who do not belong to the holiness.⁷⁵⁶ At the same time, Turner explains, “Because she receives holiness only insofar as she is able to bear it, that which she cannot bear remains invisible to her, experienced as a phenomenological excess which itself promotes and sustains the individual’s sense of her own finitude before the infinite.”⁷⁵⁷ The saint remains invisible even to herself while participating in the journey of sanctification,

⁷⁵³ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 239.

⁷⁵⁴ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 240.

⁷⁵⁵ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 243.

⁷⁵⁶ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 244.

⁷⁵⁷ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 244.

perpetually “confronted and changed by that holiness.”⁷⁵⁸ A person who boasts about his or her own sanctity is never a true saint.

Marion draws some criticism on how he articulates the way human beings respond to the phenomenon because people more often use their intentionality in perceiving a phenomenon.⁷⁵⁹ Turner notes that Marion’s essay on the saint implies the existence of different modes of reception that lessen the criticism because it opens up the possibility for “an individual’s refusal to receive phenomena, and also casts Marion’s phenomenology as the way we should *endeavor* to receive phenomena.”⁷⁶⁰ Therefore, Marion seems to clarify what is the *ideal* response when a person encounters a phenomenon, rather than speaking *descriptively* of how human beings usually intercept a phenomenon. Parallel to Turner’s point, Gschwandtner also notes the existence of the degrees of phenomenality in the saturated phenomenon, which allows for more hermeneutical space for the perceiver.⁷⁶¹ Consequently, as Turner says, besides realizing one’s imperfection when encountering holiness, that person’s fundamental perspective and governing intentionality will undergo revision that seems to be far more complicated than what Marion delineates.⁷⁶² This revision “reveals the space where the individual’s recognition of holiness constitutes her participation in it....[and] shifts her into a posture of kenotic self-abnegation, as if the individual were bowed before the holy in an attitude of genuflected adoration.”⁷⁶³ As the person is engulfed by the holiness, her acknowledgment of personal sinfulness as distinct

⁷⁵⁸ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 244.

⁷⁵⁹ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 241.

⁷⁶⁰ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 242. Italics from Turner.

⁷⁶¹ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 9, 193.

⁷⁶² Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 242.

⁷⁶³ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 242.

from the holy marks the expanding reception of holiness that brings her into perpetual transformation by and into holiness.⁷⁶⁴

Therefore, sanctity is a process in which a person gradually participates deeper in God's holiness and becoming holy through the realization of one's human limitation or, using a more theological language, sinfulness. It is the process of sanctification. The saint continues to be unaware of her holiness, but, at the same time, she becomes part of the inter-communicative mediations of God's holiness to other human beings, so that other human beings can encounter God's holiness through encountering her. Here the saint functions as a mediator who spreads holiness among people. As a result, other people who encounter God's holiness might partake in the same process of sanctification similar to the saint, and thus recognize the saint as a saint because they now belong to God's holiness.

Following Turner and Gschwandtner, a person's perception toward holiness follows the degree of phenomenality, in which not everyone participates in holiness with the same degree. Nonetheless, communal recognition of a saint reflects some degree of participation in God's holiness. This interplay explains the principle "only a saint can recognize other saints" in Islam and Marion: the members of the community participate in holiness to some degrees so they can recognize the saints among them. In essence, this is the meaning of the communion of saints in Christianity, where all members are saints because they have received God's grace. Yet, each person might differ in their sanctification process due to their degree of participation in holiness. The next section will explain the mediating role of a saint.

⁷⁶⁴ Turner, "The Unknown Saint," 243.

C. “He Who Sees You Sees Me:” The Transparency and Mediating Role of a Saint

1. *Friends of God as Mediations between God and Human Beings*

The phrase “he who sees you sees Me” was heard by Rūzbehān Baqlī (1128-1209 CE), a famous ecstatic Sufi, in a vision that he received when he was accompanying his son who was ill. In that vision, Baqlī asked God, “O my God, why do You not speak to me as You did speak to Moses?” God replied, “Is it not enough that he who loves you loves Me and that he who sees you sees Me?”⁷⁶⁵ The phrase reflects the general function of Friends of God as mediations between people and God: by encountering them, people remember God (*dhikr*).

Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/986), one of the early Sufi masters, highlights the mediating function of a *walī* when he comments on the Quranic verse “Verily, the Friends of God have no fear nor sorrow” (Q. 10:62). Al-Tustarī asserts that whenever the believers are seeing the Friends of God, they are reminded of God.⁷⁶⁶ He also quotes a famous *hadīth* that widely circulated among the Sufis. In the *hadīth*, Prophet Muhammad says: “‘Shall I not tell you the best of you?’ They said: ‘Yes, O Messenger of Allah.’ He said: ‘The best of you are those who, when they are seen, Allah the Mighty, the Majestic, is remembered.’”⁷⁶⁷ This *hadīth* demonstrates a feature that is closely related to the function of a *walī* as mediation, i.e., transparency.

⁷⁶⁵ Hazif Hoca, *Rūzbehān al-Baklī ve kitāb kaşf al-asrār*, (Istanbul 1971), 117 as quoted in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 44. For an excellent study of Baqlī’s *The Unveiling of the Secrets (Kashf al-Asrār)*, see Carl W. Ernst, *Rūzbehān Baqlī: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996).

⁷⁶⁶ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī*, 89.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibn Majah Al-Qazwini, *English Translation of Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Vol. 5, 296

The feature of transparency correlates to Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the *malāmiyya*. For instance, in the case of Ibn Ja'dūn, described above, he was a humble henna collector, yet he attained the high status as one of the highest ranks of saints. From his outer appearance, Ibn Ja'dūn did not show any signs of a *walī* as popularly understood and expected by people, such as the familiar phenomena of inspired, supra-natural powers and charismata (*karāmāt*). Furthermore, he suffered from being tongue-tied, so he spoke with great difficulty, except for the time he was reciting the Quran. In his entire situation, even when people did not pay too much attention to him, Ibn 'Arabī says that he was pleased.⁷⁶⁸ In this regard, the transparency of the saint exemplifies their hiddenness from the eyes of the people while being exposed to God's continuous gaze, especially in the case of those saints who have attained the higher spiritual rank.

There is a paradox of invisibility in the case of the *malāmiyya*. If the *malāmiyya* are transparent and cannot be seen by people, except in the case of the second type of the *malāmiyya* on whom God has bestowed a particular authority so they are recognizable by people to some extent, then how could they act as mediations and make people remember God? The perception of holiness is not only an individual action but also a communal one. Utilizing Marion's idea, the recognition of another person's sanctity requires the participation of the perceiver in holiness through the process of being grasped by the intuitive excess. Even though the *malāmiyya*'s sanctity is concealed from the eyes of those who are not yet at the same level of perception of their holiness as them, the *malāmiyya* act as perpetual mediations of God's holiness to the community by inviting the deeper participation of the community in the holiness. Consequently, the people in the community

⁷⁶⁸ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Sufis of Andalusia*, 115-116.

might begin their own process of sanctification because of the encounter with God's holiness through the *malāmiyya*, even though the sanctity of the mediation—in this case, the *malāmī* Friend—is hidden from them.

2. *Saints as Icons of the Invisible God*

Paul Tillich defines saints as “persons who are transparent for the ground of being which is revealed through them and who are able to enter a revelatory constellation as mediums.”⁷⁶⁹ He criticizes the identification of sanctity with religious or moral perfection because sainthood is not about personal perfection, but about openness to God's revelation.⁷⁷⁰ As a result, a saint can function as a “sign-event” for God's revelation for other human beings through his or her faith and love.⁷⁷¹ Tillich emphasizes sainthood as a process instead of a goal. In this sense, it is more appropriate to speak of sanctification as a journey. The purpose of sanctification is to bring humans to a new life that overcomes the ambiguities of life and cultivates their creative possibilities. In this regard, Tillich shares Bonhoeffer's focus on the role of saints in the world as part of the worldly, banal life, as opposed to the more popular depiction of saints in Christianity and Islam as persons who belong to the realms “beyond” this world. As a journey, sanctification will never make the saint attain the state of perfection, but rather helps them to become a better symbol of the Ground of Being or God.⁷⁷² Tillich mentions the transparency of a saint and the mediating role of a saint but does not explore much more.

⁷⁶⁹ Tillich, *ST I*, 121.

⁷⁷⁰ Tillich, *ST I*, 121.

⁷⁷¹ Tillich, *ST I*, 122.

⁷⁷² Tillich, *ST III*, 237.

Marion elucidates the notion of transparency in the form of an icon in his works. Even though he does not apply the understanding of icon explicitly to saints, I argue that human beings,—in this case, the saints—can function as icons of God. In agreement with Gschwandtner, who points to the deficient elaboration on the notion of community in Marion's works, including his essay on the saint, I will apply Marion's idea of the mediating function of the icon to the saints.⁷⁷³ Consequently, the notion of community becomes indispensable in this understanding of saints as part of inter-communicative mediations.

To begin with, for Marion, the primary reason why a person's self-understanding of sanctity disproves her participation in holiness stems from the attempt to define holiness, or even God, by using human intentionality. In other words, the self-claim to sanctity is always a form of self-idolatry because the person's conception of holiness becomes an idol. The idol makes the phenomenon or the gift—in this case God's holiness—conform to one's intentionality rather than the opposite.⁷⁷⁴ The opposite mode of perception, the correct one, is through the icon that “does not limit itself to the fulfillment of the individual's intentionality, nor does it stop at the perception of the visible, but rather engenders or impels vision.”⁷⁷⁵ Here, Marion establishes the icon and the idol as “two manners of being for beings.”⁷⁷⁶

The idol captivates a person's intentionality and masks itself as something that could be grasped entirely. As a result, the idol fills that person's gaze and makes the gaze

⁷⁷³ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 156, 167.

⁷⁷⁴ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 234.

⁷⁷⁵ Turner, “The Unknown Saint,” 234.

⁷⁷⁶ Marion, *God without Being*, 8.

stop at the idol.⁷⁷⁷ By stopping at the idol, the person fails to see what beyond the visible: that which is invisible. As Marion states, “the gaze no longer pierces things, no longer sees them in transparency.”⁷⁷⁸ The idol exhausts the gaze by making it stop at the visible. In this regard, the idol functions as an invisible mirror that “reflects the gaze’s image, or more exactly, the image of its aim and of the scope of that aim.”⁷⁷⁹ Like a mirror, the idol reflects the individual’s gaze back to the person. Therefore, the invisible mirror negates the presence of the unseen.⁷⁸⁰ The idol can appear as a phenomenon, such a painting, or a concept, including the idea of “God.”⁷⁸¹

Contrary to an idol, an icon “does not result from a vision but provokes one.”⁷⁸² The icon is transparent so that it allows one’s gaze to see the invisible that lies beyond the icon. The icon renders the invisible visible.⁷⁸³ Marion states that what Apostle Paul said about Christ as the “icon of the invisible God” (Col 1:15) can be generalized to every icon.⁷⁸⁴ If the idol obstructs a person’s gaze by captivating it in an invisible mirror that reflects his gaze into himself, the icon makes the gaze “lost in the invisible gaze that visibly envisages him.”⁷⁸⁵ The icon does not function as an invisible mirror. Instead, the gaze of the person acts as the optical mirror through which the invisible engulfs the person. Therefore, Marion illustrates, “the icon displaces the limits of our visibility to the measure of its own—its glory. It transforms us in its glory by allowing this glory to shine on our

⁷⁷⁷ Marion, *God without Being*, 10.

⁷⁷⁸ Marion, *God without Being*, 11.

⁷⁷⁹ Marion, *God without Being*, 12.

⁷⁸⁰ Marion, *God without Being*, 13.

⁷⁸¹ Marion, *God without Being*, 16. For idol as a phenomenon, see Marion, *In Excess*, 54-81.

⁷⁸² Marion, *God without Being*, 17.

⁷⁸³ Marion, *God without Being*, 18.

⁷⁸⁴ Marion, *God without Being*, 17.

⁷⁸⁵ Marion, *God without Being*, 20.

face as its mirror.”⁷⁸⁶ The icon is the mode of perception that enables a person to partake in God’s holiness.

To participate in God’s holiness means to begin the process of sanctification. A saint begins with encountering the excess of God’s holiness and being enabled to see what is available to her, while the rest stays invisible to her. As Gschwandtner rightly notes, different from Marion’s portrayal of the encounter with God’s holiness as an ideal one, sainthood “increases by ‘degrees’ and also requires hermeneutic interpretation.”⁷⁸⁷ The person who encounters the excess of God’s holiness then realizes her sinfulness and imperfection as the opposite of the holiness she faces. This response is the appropriate response. The “degrees” refer to the process of becoming more rooted in the participation in God’s holiness. Deeper involvement in holiness brings an even greater realization of one’s imperfection and sinfulness so that a saint never proclaims her holiness, precisely because her holiness is hidden from herself. Therefore sanctity is not something to be claimed but only to aspire as the goal of the journey of sanctification.⁷⁸⁸

Those who have started to partake in God’s holiness through the process of sanctification are saints. As saints, they play the role of mediating God’s holiness to other human beings. In this sense, the saints perform as the icon of God in a similar way to Christ, albeit to a lesser degree. However, as understood by Marion, Christ is the true saint because he participates in the fullness of God’s holiness and is, in this sense, the only mediator to God. Although other saints could not attain perfect participation in God’s holiness like Christ, they still can function as mediations to other human beings.

⁷⁸⁶ Marion, *God without Being*, 22.

⁷⁸⁷ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 167.

⁷⁸⁸ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 167.

Marion does not emphasize the role of community in his account of sanctity although his note on Pascal's three orders implies the notion of community: someone who belongs to the third-order—i.e., the order of the heart—can recognize other people who belong in the same order, even though they are invisible to the eyes of those who belong to the lesser orders. In my opinion, besides the degrees of holiness as proposed by Gschwandtner, Marion's account needs a revision on the aspect of the community.

Historically, the community plays an indispensable role in determining a saint, even in today's context. As an icon of God's holiness, a saint can become a mediation through which another person encounters the excess of the holiness, precisely because the holiness of the saint is transparent. When the excess is grasping the other person, he also starts the process of sanctification by partaking in God's holiness. He cannot perceive the saint's sanctity comprehensively, but there are traces of holiness from the encounter with the saint because the person is transformed. The person then begins to partake in God's holiness and embarks on the journey of sanctification. This is how a communion of saints works, i.e., through the expansion of the web of holiness through human beings who participate in the sanctification process. In this regard, the saint acts as perpetual mediations of God's holiness to the community by inviting the deeper participation of the community in the holiness. Since the people in the community have encountered God's holiness, they can recognize the saint who mediates the process. In this case, the paradox of sanctity remains the norm. While sanctity is hidden from the saint's self-understanding and from the perception of others who are not participating in the holiness, there are people from the community who are part of the web of holiness and thus are capable of recognizing the saint.

At this point, one may ask a question related to the means through which the mediation of a saint happens. Here there is a necessity to expand Marion's account of saints because he "stresses only the purity of the heart but says little of outward actions."⁷⁸⁹ Marion is not incorrect when he focuses almost exclusively on the "excess" of the holiness through the saturated phenomenon, but his account of sainthood lacks emphasis on the issue of actions. What kinds of action constitute or express sanctity? Sanctity is indeed related to the purity of heart, but it is also a matter of praxis in the world as emphasized by Bonhoeffer. Gschwandtner is correct when she points out that Marion's account of sanctity needs to be enriched with a discussion of the historical manifestation of holiness "through acts of charity, kindness, compassionate care, or even explicit social and political action on behalf of the poor and marginalized of society."⁷⁹⁰ In this regard, the criteria of a saint that cross religious boundaries as delineated by Egan may be useful: live in modesty, selflessness, and serving others.⁷⁹¹ I will elaborate further on this corporeal and active dimension of sainthood in the next chapter.

Returning to Dorothy Day's remark, it is clear now that her refusal of the label of the saint by other people reflects the paradox of sanctity: her sanctity is hidden to herself, but visible to other people. Holiness is something to be aspired to, but not to be claimed. Instead, the realization of imperfection and sinfulness are signs of the process of sanctification. On the other hand, the exploration of the aspect of the hiddenness of a saint also gives an intelligible reason for the insistence of people who call Day a saint: a saint

⁷⁸⁹ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 156.

⁷⁹⁰ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 156.

⁷⁹¹ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104.

acts as a transparent mediation through whom other people can encounter God's holiness and participate in the journey of sanctification. Since those people have started to be grasped by that holiness, they can also perceive what is holy, although only to some extent. It is how the communion of saints works.

To conclude this chapter, one can become a saint when one is grasped by God's holiness in which the excess of it becomes accessible. At this point, one starts to embark on the journey of sanctification in the liminal space of banality and holiness. The ascending move makes the person realize more of her imperfection and impedes the self-recognition of her sanctity even though she is participating in it. It explains the Christian understanding of a Christian as a saint and a sinner at the same time. Sanctification is a journey of a saint to engage deeper into God's holiness while living truly in the world. During this process, the person acts as an icon of God who mediates God's holiness to other human beings. She becomes the saturated phenomenon through which God's revelation encounters other people. This way, God's holiness touches other people too, and enables them to partake in the journey of sanctification as well. The web of holiness is always expanding through the saints who act as the inter-communicative mediations. Consequently, while the saint could not perceive her own holiness, other people, who are grasped by God's holiness through encountering her, can recognize the saint even if only to some extent precisely because those people are undergoing the sanctification process too.

The current chapter primarily displays the intensification type of learning in comparative theology.⁷⁹² It elucidates how the notion of hiddenness corresponds to the notion of sainthood in Islam and Christianity, along with their types of interpretation of

⁷⁹² Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 116-117.

sainthood. In addition, the chapter demonstrates the recovery type of learning⁷⁹³ because I made some modifications to Marion's idea of saints through the comparison with the Islamic principle "only saints can recognize other saints" by emphasizing the importance of community who perceives the sanctity of a saint. This theological move illuminates the Christian understanding of the communion of saints whose members are undergoing a different process of sanctification and, as a result, can recognize different degrees of holiness.

⁷⁹³ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 124-125.

CHAPTER 7

SAINTS AS COMPANIONS

During a Christmas Eve service at a church in Mojokerto, Indonesia, a participant found one suspicious package in front of the church's door. Riyanto, a Muslim security volunteer who guarded the church with other Muslim youths, saw cables from the package, and he shouted that everyone should lie prone immediately. He took the bomb and threw it outside the church. Unfortunately, the bomb did not fall far enough, so he retook it and ran farther away. The package blew up when Riyanto tried to get rid of it, and he passed away. This incident happened in the year 2000 as part of a series of terror attacks on churches in several cities in Indonesia. At that time, it was customary to have Muslims guard churches during grand celebrations such as Christmas or Easter. Thus, Riyanto died while trying to save the worshippers at the church.⁷⁹⁴

In 2004, the interreligious tension escalated in the city of Jos, Nigeria. While a Christian was making his way home from the Muslim side of the town, he was murdered by five youths in front of his mother's eyes.⁷⁹⁵ Mrs. Babagario, along with her family, was devastated by this incident. However, instead of succumbing to revenge and anger, she chose something else: forgiveness and reconciliation. The man's older brother, who is a

⁷⁹⁴ Dian Kurniawan, "Riyanto, Anggota Banser yang Memeluk Bom Meledak di Malam Natal," *Liputan 6*, December 24, 2016, <https://www.liputan6.com/regional/read/2687069/riyanto-anggota-banser-yang-memeluk-bom-meledak-di-malam-natal>, accessed September 19, 2019.

⁷⁹⁵ Amy Robinson, "A Nigerian Peacemaker's Journey," *Praxis: News from Hartford Seminary* Vol. XXIII, No. 3 (2011): 4. https://www.hartsem.edu/wp-content/uploads/hs_praxis_dec11_web.pdf, accessed September 19, 2019.

friend of mine, told me that two of the five youths who killed the younger brother later confessed and apologized to Mrs. Babagario. She forgave them and even took one of them into her household as part of the family.

Riyanto and Mrs. Babagario illustrate the purpose of this chapter, i.e., to demonstrate the importance of the corporeal dimension of sanctity that crosses religious boundaries. Concerning the whole project, the dimension opens up the possibility of recognizing the sanctity of a person who is not part of one's religious tradition. By emphasizing the integration between the purity of one's heart and one's actions, this chapter follows Christina M. Gschwandtner's suggestion to enrich Jean-Luc Marion's discourse on sainthood with the historical manifestations of holiness.⁷⁹⁶

In chapters five and six, I have explored the first and second theological constructs of the inclusive theology of saints proposed in this dissertation. The first one perceives saints as manifestations and revealers of God's self-communication. Non-Christian people can become saints in a Christian sense because they participate in the inter-communicative mediations of God's grace, even when they are unaware of it. As long as a human being, Christian or non-Christian, responds positively to God's offer of grace and accepts her existence, that person becomes part of the salvific inter-communicative mediations for other human beings in their own ways. As pointed out by Karl Rahner, the inter-communicative mediations must be manifest concretely in history, and any attempt to recognize a saint requires an a posteriori approach through direct experience.

The second theological construct draws inspiration from the notion of the hiddenness of saints, as explained by Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the *malāmiyya* and Jean-Luc

⁷⁹⁶ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 156.

Marion's phenomenological account on sainthood. I argue that a person can become a saint when he or she is grasped by God's holiness in which the excess of it becomes accessible to the person. That is the beginning of the journey of sanctification in the liminal space of banality and holiness. In this process, the person's sanctity is hidden to himself or herself because holiness is something to be aspired but not to be claimed. Instead, sanctification encourages the realization of the person's imperfection and sinfulness. Moreover, sanctification is a journey to engage deeper into God's holiness while living truly in the world. That is the reason why the saint becomes an icon of God who mediates God's holiness to other human beings. She becomes the "saturated phenomenon" through which God's revelation encounters other people so that they can partake in the journey of sanctification as well. The web of holiness is expanding through the saints who act as the inter-communicative mediations. As a result, while the person's sanctity remains invisible to himself or herself, other people might recognize the saint even if only to some extent because they are captivated by God's holiness and are participating in the process of sanctification. Therefore, the community's perception of someone's sainthood is possible precisely because the community has participated in the holiness itself, although the degrees of holiness accessible to each member might differ one from another.

The present chapter probes the third theological construct of the project, i.e., saints as companions. Since sanctification is more of a process than a goal, every human being can participate in it. Instead of playing the role of paradigmatic figures, which might be seen as too perfect and inimitable for contemporary people, companions offer a better understanding of saints in contemporary circumstances. The cultivation of sanctity inspires mutual engagement of people in which guiding and learning from each other constitutes

the foundation of the community. The idea of saints as companions consists of some characteristic features, as each of the following sections will describe. First, there is a necessity of focusing attention on the companionship paradigm in rejuvenating the notion of the communion of saints. Second, it is essential to expand the Christian ideas of friends of God and the cloud of witnesses to include all people who respond positively to God's grace. In this attempt, Elizabeth Johnson's narrative memory of solidarity may play an instrumental role in reconfiguring the intermediary role of saints. The last section elaborates on the intersectionality of sanctity and practice where one's perception of saints affects their action.

A. Reinvigorating the Communion of Saints: the Significance of Companionship Paradigm

In this section, I want to argue that the Christian concept of the communion of Saints does not primarily refer to paradigmatic figures through whom other people could obtain God's power and blessings. Instead, the communion of saints encompasses "the whole community of people graced by the Spirit of God."⁷⁹⁷ Its members are not only the dead but also living people. In other words, the communion of saints symbolizes the ongoing relationship between God and human beings and between the people of God, those who are still living and those who have passed away.⁷⁹⁸ Traditionally, as mentioned in the New Testament writings by Apostle Paul, the symbol denotes the church community.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 1.

⁷⁹⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 7.

⁷⁹⁹ For instance, Paul addresses fellow Christians as saints at the opening part of his letters: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, *called to be saints*, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2); "To all God's beloved in Rome, *who are called to be saints*: Grace to you and peace from

However, in this project, I seek to expand the implications of that symbol so that non-Christians might have a place in it.

The most striking image of saints in the history of Christianity is their extraordinary intermediary power that energizes the practice of venerating saints across the globe.⁸⁰⁰ Similarly, their intermediary power is at the core of the Muslim veneration of the Friends of God (*Awliyā Allāh*) that occur everywhere from Morocco to Indonesia, including in the United States.⁸⁰¹ Despite periods of intense opposition to that tradition in both Christianity and Islam, many places are still vibrantly living this practice even today.⁸⁰² However, in some geographical locations, especially in the more secular part of the world, the practice of veneration of the saints is declining. The reason for the decline, according to a

God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7). He calls his ministry to people as a ministry to the saints, including the poor among them: “At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem *in a ministry to the saints*; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources *with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem*” (Romans 15:25-26). Paul illustrates the communion of saints as the church as a human body with different parts: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another...Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. *Contribute to the needs of the saints*; extend hospitality to strangers (Romans 12: 4-5, 9-13). For Paul’s explanation of the relationship of a congregation and its members as a human body with different parts, see 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31.

⁸⁰⁰ For a classic study of the emergence and development of the veneration of saints in Latin Christianity, see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

⁸⁰¹ For a study of the role of saints in Morocco, see Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*. For Indonesia, see Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices*. For an example of veneration of saints among Muslims in America, see Merin Shobhana Xavier, *Sacred Spaces and Transnational Networks in American Sufism: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen and Contemporary Shrine Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

⁸⁰² The Protestant Reformers’ opposition to the practice of veneration of saints is one example; see chapter 2, section A. In Islam, criticism of the practice of venerating the Friends of God had begun with Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328), whose thought inspired Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhāb’s (1703-1792) systematic exclusion and condemnation of the practice when the latter gained political power together with the Saud family in Arabia. In the present day, the Wahhabis still consistently oppose the practice of veneration of saints by Muslims based on ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s ideas. For Ibn Taymiyya, see Yahya Michot, “Between Entertainment and Religion: Ibn Taymiyya’s Views on Superstition,” *The Muslim World* Vol. 99, No. 1 (2009): 4-6. For Abd al-Wahhab, see Natana J. Delong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapters 1 & 2.

sociologist John A. Coleman, S.J., is the fact that contemporary people have lost the essential vocabulary of sainthood because of cultural changes brought by modernity.⁸⁰³ Two of those cultural changes, as analyzed by Johnson, are the deterioration of a sense of the dead's presence in people's awareness and the change of pattern in human interaction where the traditional depictions of saints are no longer appealing because they are too perfect as a role model. Coleman seeks to investigate various forms of sainthood in different cultures and throughout history as a way to recover "the passing of the saint."⁸⁰⁴ His finding shows that saints across cultures and traditions resemble each other on the following functions: exemplary model, extraordinary teacher, wonder worker, intercessor, and possessor of an extraordinary and revelatory relation to the holy.⁸⁰⁵

Without denying the usefulness of Coleman's proposal, I believe it is necessary to reinterpret those functions of saints in ways that are intelligible for contemporary people. This attempt at reinterpretation must begin by reimagining the Christian concept of the communion of saints. Here, Johnson's proposal of applying the companionship paradigm to the current understanding of the communion of saints is indispensable.

1. The Paradigm of Companionship and Its Significance

The flourishing of the Christian practice of remembering special people in public

⁸⁰³ John A. Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" in *Saints and Virtues*, ed. John Stratton Hawley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 206-207.

⁸⁰⁴ Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 207, 213. The notion of "the passing of the saints" is borrowed from John Mecklin's book title in which the author touched upon the absence of sanctity in modern secular cultures. John Mecklin, *The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Cultural Type* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 5.

⁸⁰⁵ Coleman, "Conclusion: After Sainthood?" 214.

took roots during the age of the martyrs (1st to early 4th century CE).⁸⁰⁶ The term “cloud of witnesses” applies to those who died for the sake of their faith and who have then taken their place along with God. As explained by Johnson, the practice of mentioning the name of the martyrs in the prayer was a means to establish the solidarity between the “pilgrims on earth and those who had been sealed with the victory of Christ.”⁸⁰⁷ These martyrs played a role in Christ’s intercession by remembering the living Christians. Thus, the practice of remembering tied together the whole community of God’s people. At the end of the age of the martyrs, the list of the cloud of witnesses “grew to include confessors who had been tortured for the faith but not killed; ascetics, especially those who lived a life of celibacy; wise teachers and prudent church leaders; and those who cared for the poor, the sick, and the ignorant.”⁸⁰⁸ Later on, the practice of commemorating special people after they died continued and became one of the roots of the practice of venerating the saints in the Christian tradition.

What is interesting from this brief historical background is the question: “how did persons in the community envision their relationship to the martyrs and other holy persons who had died, and how did they conceive of all of them, living and dead together, standing in relation to God?”⁸⁰⁹ Johnson identifies two different paradigms related to the question in the history of Christianity: the companionship paradigm and patron-petitioner paradigm. The first paradigm constitutes an egalitarian model that recognizes the martyrs and holy

⁸⁰⁶ Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 19.

⁸⁰⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 78.

⁸⁰⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 78. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 19-21. For the ascetics, see Philip Rousseau, “Ascetics as Mediators and as Teachers,” in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45-59.

⁸⁰⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 78.

people as companions and friends, while the latter establishes a patriarchal relation that placed specific figures within the role of patrons.

The companionship paradigm was the earliest mode of relationship before the patron-petitioner model, which started to emerge in the late third century, eventually became the dominant paradigm in the late fifth century.⁸¹⁰ The companionship paradigm places all people, both the living and the dead, in a circle of friends linked by God's grace.⁸¹¹ As a circle of friends, "the saints are not situated *between* God and living disciples, but are *with* their sisters and brothers through the one Spirit poured out in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ."⁸¹² Whenever the living people remember the saints, the memory encourages them to emulate or follow in the footsteps of the saints in witnessing to the faith and taking care of the world.⁸¹³ Moreover, the memory of the martyrs and saints also boosts their hope and faith amid adversities.⁸¹⁴

When the patron-petitioner paradigm took over as the dominant paradigm, the role of the departed saints as intercessors eclipsed their role as partners of hope.⁸¹⁵ The people felt they lived far from the majestic God, so, to shorten the distance, the saints became the necessary intermediaries. Their role shifted into patronizing those who sent prayers and

⁸¹⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 86. The paradigm of patron-petitioner contributed greatly to the rise of the cult of saints in Latin Christianity where saints are seen as figures of power. For wider historical perspective for the beginning of the cult of saints, see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*. For more elaboration on the topic of the cult of saints, see also James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁸¹¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 79.

⁸¹² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 81.

⁸¹³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 82.

⁸¹⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 85. Since the ages of the martyrs, Christians have circulated literature about exceptional martyrs who died for the sake of their faith. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 13-16.

⁸¹⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 86. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 6. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 25-26.

devotions to them.⁸¹⁶ Johnson explains that the saints were placed “in the role of sponsors who could plead one’s cause before the throne of God and even dispense favors in their own right. Henceforth, the major way of connecting with the honored dead is not effective remembrance but pleas for their intercession before God for protection from both physical and spiritual danger.”⁸¹⁷ The emphasis is no longer the bond between the living and the dead as fellow people of God that even death cannot sever nor the memory that incites emulation in hope. As a substitute, the term “saint” was preserved only for the dead who are living in heaven with Mother Mary.⁸¹⁸ The saints were also set in a hierarchy in both liturgy and official iconography.⁸¹⁹ People depicted the saints as patrons whose access to God allowed the saints to distribute God’s bounties to the living as their clients. As a result, “though subject to God themselves, these mediators have their own spheres of influence, in descending order according to their place in the hierarchy of importance, and may prove to be benefactors in return for prayers and devotions such as pilgrimage to their tombs or reverence to their relics.”⁸²⁰ Later on, the bishops gave the practice of veneration of the saints “a new aristocratic shape in their own social circumstances, one that enhanced the altar of the bishop and the intercessory of the saint in direct proportion.”⁸²¹ By the sixth

⁸¹⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 87.

⁸¹⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 86.

⁸¹⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 87. Mother Mary is given the highest honor among the saints in heaven. Lawrence Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 30. For a theological reformulation of Mary within the framework of the communion of saints, see Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*. Although the term saint refers mostly to saints in heaven who have already died, gradually people venerate living saints as well. For a study on the making of saints in Middle Ages period, see Kleinberg, *Prophets in Their Own Country*.

⁸¹⁹ Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 28-30. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 87.

⁸²⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 87. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 88-94. Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 19-27.

⁸²¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 91. Brown analyzes how the bishops’ authority correlates with the local cult of saints. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 31-32, 39-41.

century, thaumaturgic power had become the principal standard for legitimating the status of a saint.⁸²² The patron-petitioner paradigm became more intense through the period of late antiquity up to the medieval period with its devotion to the saints as figures of powers.⁸²³ The Protestant Reformation movement criticized it heavily to the extent of abandoning it almost altogether.⁸²⁴

There are at least three criticisms launched by Johnson against the patron-petitioners paradigm that make it relatively unsuitable for the contemporary context. The first relates to the fact that the existence of the intermediaries between the faithful people and Christ might endanger the role of Christ as the only savior.⁸²⁵ This first criticism resembles the Protestant Reformers' criticism of the practice of invoking saints as intermediaries. Second, the paradigm sustains a patron-subordinate relation that situates the petitioners as dependent and powerless. As a result, this mode of relationship hampers the liberating power of God through the Spirit and projects God "as a monarchical God to whom access is limited except for the privileged few."⁸²⁶ Last is criticism from modern/postmodern Christians who emphasize the unidentifiable nature of what happens after death and who can no longer sense any direct communication between the living and the dead. Rather than assuming that dead people are still intervening due to the actions and

⁸²² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 91.

⁸²³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 92. See also Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, chapter 1 and 2.

⁸²⁴ Despite their theological differences on the idea of saints, both Luther and Calvin prohibit the practice of invoking saints. Eventually, the devotion to the saints diminished almost completely in Protestant churches, although currently there is a resurgence of interest to saints among Protestants. See chapter 2 section A and B.

⁸²⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 131.

⁸²⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 131.

words of the living, it is believed that silence is a better, more respectful gesture toward the dead.⁸²⁷

Johnson grounds her proposal to revitalize the Christian concept of the communion of the saints on the recuperation of the companionship model as the better paradigm for approaching the phenomena of saint and sainthood in our day. She offers the companionship paradigm as the frame to conceptualize the practice so that it would continue to inspire the living for the betterment of the world.

I will continue to delineate the concept of saints as companions in the next section. Before that, the issue of hierarchy entrenched in Ibn 'Arabī's idea of saints needs some clarification. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes two axes in sainthood: a horizontal and a vertical axis. The concern that arises in this context is with the "vertical" conception, as it could imply a hierarchical relationship among the Friends of God, which might be incompatible with the companionship paradigm proposed by Johnson. Before clarifying this point, I need to confirm that the particularity of each religious tradition must be appreciated and that I do not endeavor to reconcile differences. Instead, my only concern is how to draw some lessons from the idea of the "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints," which is a substantial and highly distinctive part of Ibn 'Arabī's concept of *walāya*, and then to incorporate those lessons into my theological construct of saints as companions.

2. The Seal of the Muhammadan Saints and the Problem of Hierarchy

⁸²⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 131-132.

As exemplified in chapter three, the notion of community extends to the dead ones, as the relationship between people does not end with death. That is the reason why in Muslim societies, people conduct pilgrimage (*ziyāra*), not only to shrines and tombs of saintly figures but also to the resting place of their loved ones. Individuals who are identified as Friends of God or saints are perceived special recognition because of their higher spiritual level. Yet, the knowledge about saints and spiritual levels is primarily the domain of Sufism as the mystical tradition of Islam, which is accessible only to certain people and not to the mass. As demonstrated in chapter six, the higher level saints are mostly hidden from the eyes of people and even to saints of lower degrees. They might look the same as ordinary people without any traces of grandeur and power. We need to situate Ibn 'Arabī's seemingly hierarchical system of saints within this context.

Ibn 'Arabī calls a type of saint that is hidden from people's eyes the *malāmiyya*. The general rule applies: only saints can acknowledge other saints. However, the vertical axis outlines the degrees of sainthood related to functions and ranks among the saints.⁸²⁸ The saints who attain the lower spiritual levels might not recognize the saints of higher levels. For instance, in the *hadīth* about the Ethiopian slave, who is one of the *abdāl* of his time, people are ignorant about his spiritual status, and only Prophet Muhammad can identify his identity.⁸²⁹ Among various titles associated with functions and ranks among Friends of God, the most enigmatic one is the Seal of the Saints (*khatm al-awliyā'*) or,

⁸²⁸ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 89. Different from the other conceptions regarding sainthood which recognize hierarchy within the rank of saints based on the individual's spiritual stage, the early Sufi teacher Abu al-Qāsim al-Junayd (d. 910 CE) seems to perceive all saints on an equal level. See Karamustafa, "Walāya According to al-Junayd," 66-67.

⁸²⁹ Suyūṭī, *al-Hāwī li' l-fatāwī*, Cairo 1959, 28, cited in Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 90.

more precisely as used by Ibn ‘Arabī, the “Seal of the Muhammadan [or “praised”] Saints” (*khatm al-awliyā’ al-Muhammadiyya*).⁸³⁰

The term “Seal of the Saints” appears for the first known time in the work of that title written by the early Sufi author Hakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 298/910). It has always been a controversial idea because the people who claimed the title, from al-Tirmidhī and Ibn ‘Arabī on up to modern times, are often accused of putting their status above, or at least equal with, that of a prophet. Al-Tirmidhī describes the Seal of the Saints as the first among the saints, who receives a special place and privileges.⁸³¹ Moreover, al-Tirmidhī poses a challenge to anyone who claims to hold the title of Seal of the Saints, by posing one hundred and fifty enigmatic and puzzling questions that could only be answered by the true “Seal.”⁸³² Ibn ‘Arabī became the first person who answered all those questions triumphantly in his *Meccan Revelation (Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya)*.⁸³³ Although in a lesser form, al-Tirmidhī had begun to elaborate on the idea of the Seal of the Saints by giving a unique role to the person as one of the groups of people through whom God preserves the earth.⁸³⁴ This attempt to formulate the concept of Seal of the Saints was a key forerunner of the more complex, comprehensive system built by Ibn ‘Arabī.

⁸³⁰ By adding “Muhammadan” into the phrase “Seal of the Saint,” Ibn ‘Arabī makes a distinction of this role from the Sunni understanding (based on certain hadith) of Jesus as the historically final saint who will return to earth at the eschatological end-time. Furthermore, the addition clarifies the universal and all-inclusive aspect of the role, as opposed to restrictive or limiting, given Ibn ‘Arabī’s understanding of the “Reality of Muhammad” (*Haqīqa Muhammadiyya*) as encompassing all the prophets and messengers. See chapter 4 fn. 553. See also Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, chapter 1 (Adam).

⁸³¹ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 106.

⁸³² Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 72-86.

⁸³³ Ibn ‘Arabī answers those questions in chapter 73.

⁸³⁴ Al-Tirmidhī, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, 109.

Ibn ‘Arabī claims (in several carefully coded passages) to hold the office of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints, which is bestowed by God.⁸³⁵ For him, the office of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints is quite exceptional compared to other roles and functions of saints, similar to the unique position of Muhammad among other prophets as the “Seal of the Prophets” (*khatm al-nabiyyīn*).⁸³⁶ In the case of Prophet Muhammad, that Qur’anic epithet later came to be popularly understood as indicated the “last” prophet sent by God. However, this is different from Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion of the Seal of Muhammadan Sainthood, in that it does not impede the later appearance and existence of many other Friends of God, along with their ranks and functions. Nonetheless, in his conception (which remained quite controversial and often disputed), it seems that none of those later saints would be able to obtain the office of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints.⁸³⁷

To get a hint of what the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints signifies requires that we look at the related passage of Ibn ‘Arabī’s highly influential work, *The Bezels of Wisdom* (*Fusūs al-Hikam*).⁸³⁸

The Prophet [Muhammad] likened the office of prophet to a wall of bricks, complete except for one brick. He himself was the missing brick. However, while the Prophet saw the lack of one brick, the Seal of Saints perceived that two bricks were missing. Those [missing] bricks of the wall were of silver and gold. Since he saw himself as filling the gap, it is the Seal of Saints who is the two bricks and who completes the wall. The reason for his seeing two bricks is that, outwardly, he follows the Law of the Seal of Apostles, represented by the silver brick. This is his outer aspect and the rules he adheres to in it. Inwardly, however, he receives directly from God

⁸³⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 134.

⁸³⁶ See the Quran 33: 40. Although the notion of the “seal” is often understood as the “last” in the Islamic tradition, Ibn ‘Arabī understands it as completeness and inclusiveness, not temporal or historical “last” as demonstrated by his understanding of the concept of the Muhammadan Reality (*Haqīqa Muhammadiyya*). See chapter 4 fn. 553. See also Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, chapter 4.

⁸³⁷ Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 8.

⁸³⁸ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 66.

what he appears [outwardly] to follow, because he perceives the divine Command as it is [in its essence], represented by the golden brick. He derives his knowledge from the same source as the angel who reveals it to the Apostle. If you have understood my allusions you have attained to the most beneficial knowledge.

There are two key things to take from this passage. To begin with, it clarifies the complicated relationship between “sainthood” or divine Proximity (*walāya*), and the more public missions of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and messengerhood (*risalā*). Ibn ‘Arabī mentions that, as the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints, he subscribes to the revelation brought by Muhammad outwardly. Inwardly, he obtains inspired knowledge from God, which makes him more similar to the inspired knowing of the prophets and messengers. As explained in chapter four, Ibn ‘Arabī was later often misunderstood or criticized because of the way he seemed to prioritize *walāya* over prophethood and messengerhood, primarily because the latter categories have an end, while *walāya* remains until the end of time.⁸³⁹ However, for him, a prophet and a messenger are also a saint. Therefore, the saints who are not prophets will never be superior in status to the prophets and messengers. Instead, as observed by Michel Chodkiewicz, *walāya* “is in some way dependent on *nubuwwa* [prophethood], and in short represents a mode of participation in it.”⁸⁴⁰ The Seal of the Muhammadan Saints holds the position of a leader, similar to Prophet Muhammad. However, while Prophet Muhammad was a leader in both spiritual and worldly realms, the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints only inherits the leadership of the spiritual realm, not of the worldly one.

⁸³⁹ See chapter 4 section B1

⁸⁴⁰ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 52.

Secondly, the passage reveals another distinctive feature of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints, namely the repository or bearer of divine knowledge. Ibn 'Arabī says, “As for the Seal of Saints, he is the Saint, the Heir, the one whose [knowledge] derives from the Source, the one who beholds all levels [of being].”⁸⁴¹ The knowledge here is not merely the transmitted knowledge, which is derived from intellectual learning, but the divine knowledge as given from God through various phases of unveiling or inspiration.⁸⁴² As explained by Chodkiewicz, Ibn 'Arabī views the holder of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints as one who has not only “an office of high dignity, but has a mission to accomplish.”⁸⁴³ The mission, as conceived and fulfilled by Ibn 'Arabī, is to assist the preservation of divine religion through the cultivation of inspired spiritual knowing. Thus the later Sufī thinkers often perceived the works of Ibn 'Arabī as both doctrinal teaching and a source of divine grace.⁸⁴⁴ Chodkiewicz states, “Through his work, and especially through that mighty synthesis, the *Futūhāt*, he has preserved the spiritual deposit (*amāna*) intact when it was being imperiled both by the internal rifts in the Muslim world and by the dangers that threatened from outside.”⁸⁴⁵ The influence of his works encompasses the whole discourse of Sufism (and much of later Islamic intellectual thought) until the present time and helps to maintain the ways of sainthood.⁸⁴⁶

The claim to possess divinely inspired knowledge is not unique to Ibn 'Arabī in the history of Sufism, because many other Sufi masters before and after him have made similar

⁸⁴¹ Ibn al-'Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, 67.

⁸⁴² Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds*, 7-8.

⁸⁴³ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 139.

⁸⁴⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 139.

⁸⁴⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 139.

⁸⁴⁶ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 140.

claims. This emphasis on knowledge, both transmitted and divinely inspired knowledge, reflects the distinctiveness of the discourse of Sufism, in which the participants embark on an arduous, long spiritual journey to obtain divine wisdom to know their selves as the way to know God.⁸⁴⁷ In the Sufi tradition, each person at different times in life passes through his or her distinctive spiritual stations (*maqām*). Sufi masters play an essential role as guides for their disciples to monitor and accompany disciples' spiritual growth. The path of achieving higher spiritual rank, which is part of the mission of *walāya*, is open to all human beings. Famous Sufi literature, such as Rumī's *Masnawī*, The *Diwan* of Hafiz, and Aṭṭar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* ("Conference of the Birds"), depicts the human being's spiritual journey as grounded in the importance of receiving divine knowledge. Therefore, the hierarchy of spiritual ranks does not necessarily make people succumb to the patron-petitioner model of relation. Instead, it primarily sets out the structure for human beings to pursue a spiritual journey in which the saints act (inwardly, and sometimes outwardly) as teachers, guides, and companions throughout that journey.

The close connection between the idea of the Seal of the Muhammadan Saints and divine knowledge is the first reason why that idea is not incompatible with Johnson's proposal of applying the companionship paradigm to the Christian notion of the communion of the saints. A second reason why this idea might not necessarily reinforce the concept of a patron-subordinate relation that situates the petitioners as dependent and powerless lies in the concept of hidden saints. On a practical level, despite the popular veneration for the figures of Friends of God, no one can determine another person's

⁸⁴⁷ One famous hadith that is widely circulated among the Sufis states "whoever knows their self, know their Lord" (*man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbuhu*).

spiritual rank because the privilege to judge belongs only to God. Instead, one should focus on his or her own spiritual journey.

B. Expanding the Boundaries of the Communion of Saints

By utilizing the companionship paradigm to inform the Christian concept of the communion of saints, this section explores the reinterpretation of that concept. To begin with, I will delineate two primary metaphors for the companionship paradigm. Afterward, I will propose a reconfiguration of the intermediary role of saints. The goals of this effort are to bolster the Christian concept of the communion of saints by expanding its boundaries to include non-Christian saints, while helping to perpetuate its liberating power in today's multi-religious contexts, both locally and globally.

1. Friends of God and Cloud of Witness as Primary Metaphors of the Companionship Paradigm

At the heart of the effort to revitalize the notion of the communion of saints by applying the companionship paradigm is the rethinking of the two metaphors of friends of God and the cloud of witnesses. Johnson and the Islamic tradition use the first metaphor to refer to saints. The latter metaphor is a biblical one (Hebrews 12:1), and, in the Christian tradition, it is usually referring to Christian martyrs and saints. By applying the companionship paradigm, both metaphors no longer indicate a hierarchical structure of relationship but an equal one, namely people of God, the living and the dead, as a circle in which all members are of the same status.

The underlying theme under the two metaphors is the interconnection between people who “experienced the graciousness of God, which led them to a new sense of identity as holy people.”⁸⁴⁸ That is the reason the early Christians called each other saints, as mentioned in the New Testament. Moreover, Johnson says, their experience of holiness “does not consist first and foremost in ethical or pious practices, nor does it imply innocence of experience or perfection of moral achievement. Rather, it is a consecration of their very being.”⁸⁴⁹ The key to their robust sense of relationship is the memory and hope grounded in the story of Jesus Christ. Death could not break apart the relations between the members of the community because the power of the Spirit unites them all.⁸⁵⁰ As the friends of God, people are “freely connected in a reciprocal relationship characterized by deep affection, joy, trust, delight, support in adversity, and sharing life; knowing and letting oneself be known in an intimacy that flows into common activities; as in Abraham, ‘friend of God.’”⁸⁵¹

On the other side, the cloud of witnesses expresses a strong sense of solidarity where “the faithful dead are proposed not as the objects of a cult, nor even as exemplars to be imitated in any one particular, but as a compact throng of faithful people whose journey Christians are now called upon to share and continue.”⁸⁵² The practice of remembering the cloud of witness through naming and telling their stories, including even the unnamed

⁸⁴⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 23.

⁸⁴⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 56.

⁸⁵⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 65. For an example, see Romans 8: 34-35, “Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

⁸⁵¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 41.

⁸⁵² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 68.

women and men, enliven the moral and religious energy of the living in their journey.⁸⁵³ Emphasized in this metaphor is a robust and passionate hope that the pain and suffering experienced by people today will not have the last word because of God's redemptive and liberative power.⁸⁵⁴

Does the expansion of the idea of the community of saints include non-Christian people? Johnson does not address this issue conclusively because her focus is on something else. Yet, she definitely agrees that the community of saints does include non-Christians. For instance, Johnson states that the work of God's Spirit and Christ encompasses all people, even to non-human creations, enabling every creation with grace to respond positively to God's call. She declares that "the boundaries of the community of the saints are far from rigid and certainly include persons of persuasions other than Christian and

⁸⁵³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 68. Johnson is inspired by the current resurgence of women's practices of memory. Many women reclaim the forgotten memory of women of ages past and use it to fuel the resistance to patriarchy in all of its form. Related to the heritage of the patron-petitioner paradigm, women's history of holiness has been marginalized, if not totally erased. The narratives of female saints are interpreted primarily as models of virtue that continue the male-dominated power and maintain the marginalization of women. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 27-28. One trajectory of this resurgence of women's practices of memory is through biblical hermeneutics and its pioneer is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's monumental work *In Memory of Her*. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Tenth Anniversary Edition (New York: Crossroad, 1994). For more works on feminist biblical interpretations, see Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century: Scholarship and Movement* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014). See also chapter 2 fn. 112.

⁸⁵⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 41. See also Romans 8: 18-23, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."

even of no religious belief who live according to the light of their conscience.”⁸⁵⁵ She asserts further on this issue that:⁸⁵⁶

In the first place, the communion of saints comprises all living persons of truth and love. The point to emphasize is “all”: all Christians as well as persons of good will. While the term itself springs from the experience of grace within the church, the communion of saints does not limit divine blessing to its own circle. Within human cultures everywhere, Spirit-Sophia calls every human being to fidelity and love, awakening knowledge of the truth and inspiring deeds of compassion and justice. The friends of God and prophets are found in every nation and tongue, culture and region, and even among religion’s cultured despisers. Indeed, where human participation in divine holiness disappears the opposite appears—barbarity, cruelty, murder, and unspeakable despair. At its most elemental, then, the communion of saints embraces all women and men who hear Holy Wisdom’s call and follow her path of righteousness: “whoever finds me finds life.”

What brings together this inclusive understanding of the communion of saints is her understanding of the Christian idea of a sacrament. She pronounces the world itself as the “primordial sacrament, reflecting the glory of God and speaking a revelatory word; human beings are made to the image and likeness of God; and religious words and rituals in turn make explicit the gracious, compassionate ways of the divine with the world known through concrete revelatory events.”⁸⁵⁷ Consequently, the communion of saints includes non-human creatures because they are also sacred beings.⁸⁵⁸ Since the focus of this dissertation lies in human beings as saints, I will not discuss further here the implication of Johnson’s proposal for ecology.⁸⁵⁹

⁸⁵⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 96.

⁸⁵⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 220.

⁸⁵⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 223. See also *LG* no. 50.

⁸⁵⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 240-243. Johnson elaborates the topic of non-human creatures further in another book, see Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*.

⁸⁵⁹ Christian theologians, including Johnson, have been focusing on the salvation of all, including non-human creatures, and its implication for ecology. One of the key terms for this endeavor is “deep

Johnson's position on the status of non-Christians related to the discussion of sainthood and saints is very similar to what I have developed in chapter five by employing Ibn 'Arabī's elaboration of the universality of the *walāya* and Karl Rahner's theology of grace as God's universal self-communication. The next section reconfigures the idea of the intermediation of saints in the frame of a companionship paradigm.

2. Reconfiguring the Concept of Intermediations of the Saints

Because of the pervasive influence of the patron-petitioner paradigm, saints are traditionally understood as an intermediary between God and human beings through which God's blessings are given (and human petitions are transmitted). In order to apply the companionship paradigm, it is necessary to perceive this central role of saints as an intermediary in a different way. Before describing Johnson's assertions on this topic, I will begin by recalling what we have observed in chapters five and six related to the concept of intermediation of the saints.

In chapter five, I presented the first theological construct, i.e., saints as revealers and manifestations of God's self-communication. Rahner postulates Christ as the only mediator between God and human beings that constitutes God's self-communication as grace to all humans. This grace infuses not only the structure of one's nature as a person but also inter-personal relationships through social and religious realms. Thus, human beings, through concrete, historical manifestations, experience God's self-communication.

incarnation" that formulates how Christ's incarnation in flesh implies God's intended salvation for all beings. See Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," 192-207; Niels H. Gregersen, "The Emotional Christ: Bonaventure and Deep Incarnation," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* Vol. 55, No. 3 (2016): 247-261; Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God's Redemptive Suffering with Creatures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019).

In this regard, I argue that a non-Christian person can become a saint in Christian sense if she or he responds positively to God's offer of grace.⁸⁶⁰ The person then participates in the inter-communicative mediations of God's grace, even without realizing it. As a mediation, the person reveals different modes of God's grace in history that call other people to respond positively to God's Self-communication. Consequently, other people can recognize the mediating role and identify the person as a saint.

Chapter six explains another feature of saints as icons of God. Drawing from Jean-Luc Marion's idea of God's holiness as captivating power to human beings, I describe a saint as someone who encounters the excess God's holiness through saturated phenomena. In the process, God's holiness enfolds the person and enables her to see what is available to her while the rest stays invisible. Following Gschwandtner's critique of Marion, the process demonstrates that there are "degrees" of sainthood, which I have called sanctification. The "degrees" refer to the process of becoming more rooted in the participation of God's holiness. Deeper immersion in holiness brings an even greater realization of one's imperfection and sinfulness so that a saint never proclaims holiness, precisely because holiness is hidden from oneself. Nevertheless, when someone participates in holiness, she plays the role of mediating God's holiness to other people because she functions as a saturated phenomenon of God's holiness to other people. That way others can encounter the excess of God's holiness to start their own journey of sanctification. In this role, the saint becomes an icon of God, similar to Christ, although to a lesser degree. Since other people have started to be grasped by holiness, they can also perceive what is holy. As a result, while holiness remains invisible to oneself, other people,

⁸⁶⁰ Rahner, "One Mediator and Many Mediations," 181.

who are grasped by God's holiness through encounter, can recognize the saint even if only to some extent. This process is what I called the paradox of sanctity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to accompany Marion's account of sainthood with Gschwandtner's thoughts on the importance of outward actions because Marion focuses mostly on the person and his or her internal response when captivated by the excess of God's holiness. Gschwandtner correctly points out that Marion's idea of sanctity needs to be enhanced with a discussion of the historical manifestations of holiness.⁸⁶¹ How does the intermediary of saints generate praxis? Johnson's view of the narrative memory of solidarity is crucial to answering that question.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the key to recuperating from the adverse effects of the patron-petitioner paradigm of the veneration of saints is not dismissing the whole practice. Rather, it is to rediscover and reinterpret the practice through the lens of companionship. To begin, the saints are no longer positioned as intermediaries with a faraway God or with a judgmental Christ. Instead, they are fellow friends of God and disciples of Christ. The living saints, namely the people, and the dead saints form a circle of friends. In this regard, the practice of remembering and calling the name of the faithful deceased "has the effect of strengthening bonds of persons today with the whole holy people of God throughout time."⁸⁶² The companionship paradigm exemplifies the relationship within the Christian community in the early Church period. This paradigm connects the memory of Christians at the time with the memory of Jesus Christ and his followers. The remembrance of the passing saints and martyrs intertwines with the

⁸⁶¹ Gschwandtner, *Degrees of Givenness*, 156.

⁸⁶² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 134. For more discussion on this practice, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, "May We Invoke the Saints?" *Theology Today* Vol. 44, No.1 (1987): 32-52.

narrative of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that shaped the practices of the following generations of disciples of Christ. With the centrality of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God, the remembrance of saints and martyrs ignites a spiritual event witnessed by the Gospel: liberation for the poor and the oppressed, passionate work for justice, and diligently following Christ by cultivating new ways of discipleship. The narrative memory of solidarity encapsulates the above values because the phrase contains both cognitive content (memory and narrative) and communal praxis (solidarity).⁸⁶³

The narrative memory of solidarity sustains the hope for a better future that empowers the living to live faithfully and compassionately in the present.⁸⁶⁴ Johnson provides an example of how in the case of marginalized women "remembering the great crowd of female friends of God and prophets opens up possibilities for the future; their lives bespeak an unfinished agenda that is now in our hands; their memory is a challenge to action; their companionship points the way."⁸⁶⁵ The saints as companions confer guidance to the living. In moments of crisis, the human capability to narrate produces incredible energy for survival and resistance. Interwoven with the narrative of the saints, the story of Jesus amplifies the power that summons actions as demonstrated by the martyrs, from the past to contemporary ones, and other faithful women and men who have responded to the call of the Spirit in suffering and joy.⁸⁶⁶ All these people, living and dead,

⁸⁶³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 163-164. She draws on Johann Baptist Metz's groundbreaking work on the notion of dangerous memory and applies it into her analysis on the communion of saints. See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury, 1980).

⁸⁶⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 168.

⁸⁶⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 169. Johnson is inspired by the notion of the "cloud of witness" used by the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* in the New Testament to strengthen the faith of the living through the memory of holy figures in the past (11:1 – 12:1)

⁸⁶⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 170-171, 174.

comprise the great circle of friends of God and the cloud of witnesses; they are the community of saints.

Johnson explains solidarity as “a type of communion in which deep connection with others is forged in such a way that their sufferings and joys become part of one’s own personal concern and a spur to transformative action.”⁸⁶⁷ Moreover, solidarity functions “in an emancipatory way in the social-political sphere in that it includes not only community among the living but also alliance with the dead, especially those who have been overcome and defeated in history.”⁸⁶⁸ The event of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection along with the narrative of martyrs might be seen as foolishness, but they engender strong sense of solidarity, evoke hope, and empower emulation for the living faithful, especially the poor and oppressed.

The reinterpretation of the intermediate role of saints as presented here, rejuvenates the Christian understanding of the communion of saints. Furthermore, the memory of non-Christian saints can be added too because they are part of the broader circle of friends of God. As I have been trying to exemplify, saints are not an exclusive category for Christians because God’s grace encompasses all human beings, and anyone could become a saint as long as the person is willing to respond positively. This way, the Christian notion of the communion of saints “is retrieved as a source of comfort and joy for the heart, of grief for resistance, and of strength for the struggle. Then the doctrine is practiced less as a cult of

⁸⁶⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 175. See also Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 35.

⁸⁶⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 176. See also Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 54-56.

the saints and more as a discipline or way of remembering and connecting that brings life.”⁸⁶⁹ I will elaborate this point on the memory of non-Christian saints in the next chapter.

C. Following in the Footsteps of the Friends of God

This section elaborates on the interrelation between sanctity and actions. As I show above, when the intermediary role of saints is interpreted through a companionship paradigm, it can unleash the liberating power of the living people as manifested in passionate action for justice, peace, and mercy. Remembering becomes an *anamnesis*, which can be defined as making “something genuinely past to be present and active in the community today.”⁸⁷⁰ A memory of the friends of God encourages the other friends to follow Jesus in their way. All kinds of memory of solidarity are interrelated to the challenging memory of Jesus Christ, who demonstrates the paths to love God and to love one’s neighbors. I will divide this section into three parts.

1. The Intersections of Memory, Hope, and Praxis

Kathy Snider, a lay Catholic missionary from the United States of America, spent twenty years in a small Catholic Maya village in a rural area in Guatemala.⁸⁷¹ The name of the village is Santiago Ixcán, literally meaning St. James of the Ixcán, who is the patron saint of the village. Following God’s call to serve the poor in Guatemala, Ms. Snider left everything she knew and moved to Santiago Ixcán, starting from scratch. When she began

⁸⁶⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 180. See also Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 58-59.

⁸⁷⁰ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 234.

⁸⁷¹ Kathy Snider, presentation at the Collegeville Institute, September 24, 2019.

her ministry, the villagers built her a small wooden house on land they gave her. She named the simple house, “The Little Flower,” after the Carmelite nun St. Therese of Lisieux, the patron saint of missionaries. In this regard, St. Thérèse functions as a companion that points the way at the beginning of Ms. Snider’s mission as a contemplative in action. Her perception of herself and all the members of the village as one community of God’s people and co-disciples of Christ gave her the motivation to begin her ministry of presence. Ms. Snider emphasized the preciousness of all people, especially the women whose voice had been silenced, and did other outreach endeavors. Her example demonstrates how the remembrance of a saint can generate prayer and action in the form of imitation. In this regard, remembering a saint does not make her dependent and powerless, but rather, generates praxis for justice and ministry for the poor.

A memory of martyrs, in particular, endows the living to live with courage, as shown by the early Christians. The anchor of such courage is twofold: faith and hope. Johnson points out the fact that the memory of saints does not only inspire emulation through acts of loving care and struggle for justice but also reveals the destiny of those who have fulfilled their lives, either the ones at a distant time or the ones dear to the current people.⁸⁷² In other words, death is not the end of the whole journey. Johnson explains, “Because the God of love who holds the world in being still embraces the dead, they can be affirmed as being alive in communion with the living God, thus signaling the destiny that awaits all.”⁸⁷³ For the wielder of worldly power, the use of oppression is a tool to

⁸⁷² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 214.

⁸⁷³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 218. Here Johnson connects the Christian hope of the future, or eschatology, and social ethics. For further elaboration on the connection between eschatology and ethics, see Kathryn Tanner, “Eschatology and Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics*, eds. Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

prolong their authority through spreading fear. However, faith and hope generate courage, and courage is the antithesis of such a logic of oppression. Johnson notes, “Especially in situations of oppression, the symbolic power of a sacrificial death unleashes powerful forces that galvanize resistance and energize commitment.”⁸⁷⁴ The memory of the martyrs empowers the living to fight the injustice.⁸⁷⁵

Another story from the village of Santiago Ixcán vividly illustrates the point. The village survived the Guatemalan civil war, although not without casualties. In the mid-1980s, many rural communities were destroyed by the government’s army, as they suspected those villages to be part of the revolutionary army. On the other side, many people of those rural villages joined the revolutionary army either voluntarily or by force. On one occasion, during the period of the civil war, a group of the revolutionary army came to the village of Santiago Ixcán and told three adult men to join their side. The three men refused the offer, so they were threatened to be killed a week from then. The three men and the whole village prayed for deliverance. A week later, the group from the revolutionary army returned to the town. After getting the same response of rejection, they took the three men outside the city, killed two of the men, and left one alive. They told the man that they would come again in a week to get a different answer. Otherwise, they would kill him and other villagers. The survivor told the village about what happened. They buried the two

⁸⁷⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 72. See also, Karl Rahner, “Dimensions of Martyrdom,” in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XXIII, trans. Joseph Donceel and Hugh Riley (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 111.

⁸⁷⁵ In Islam, this aspect is demonstrated the most by Shi’ism through the narrative of Husayn Ibn ‘Alī, the Grandson of Prophet Muhammad, who was martyred in the Battle of Karbala (680 CE). The narrative of Husayn plays a great role in the formation of the community and devotional life. See Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islām: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ‘Āshūrā’ in Twelver Shi’ism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978); Said Hyder Akbar, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

men and, again, prayed for deliverance. Exactly a week later, the same people from the revolutionary army arrived, gathered the villagers, and picked the survivor along with two other men. While they walked to the outskirts of the village to repeat the killing, suddenly, a couple of villagers who followed them secretly shouted: “The [government] army has arrived! They have arrived!” Afterward, all villagers started to cry the same words. Taken by surprise, the group of the revolutionary army ran away and never returned to the village. There was no government army approaching. It was a smart move to rid them of that group and to save their fellow villagers.

The story characterizes Johnson’s point on the memory of martyrs. Motivated by the sacrificial death of the two men killed by the revolutionary army, the villagers mustered the courage to resist the oppression. The resistance was not easy because if they were found out for having falsified that news, the revolutionary army would have killed them. The guidance of the Spirit not only strengthened their faith and hope amid oppression but also enabled them to be resilient. The circle of friends of God and the cloud of witnesses encompass a wide range of people with their narrative of defeats and victories. At the same time, their narratives empower the living to struggle in creative ways to establish justice, peace, and love in the world.⁸⁷⁶

2. Multiple Paths of Holiness

The actions of saints follow numerous paths. Johnson confirms this fact by saying that “People live in different times and places, which have different needs; they have

⁸⁷⁶ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 215. See also Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 42, 53.

different temperaments, face different sufferings, delight in different joys. Being disciples means that they strike out on their own, transpose, innovate, as the Spirit creates something fresh while still in accord with the compassionate direction of his life and teaching.”⁸⁷⁷ The communion of saints comprises many people, known and unknown, who follow the call of the Spirit in their lives while facing sin, oppression, depression, and death.⁸⁷⁸ Even after death, their narratives inspire the friends of God who are still living.

Along similar lines, Rahner emphasizes that sainthood corresponds to diverse paths in human history as the actualization of God’s salvific will.⁸⁷⁹ Throughout history, various new modes of holiness appear from different kinds of saints showing the dynamic work of the Spirit. In the history of Christianity, many acclaimed saints were the ones who cultivated prayer and contemplative lives, sometimes even far from society. There was also the notion of “holy fools of God” that refers to the saints who exhibit strange and unusual behaviors.⁸⁸⁰ In chapter five, I gave an example of Óscar Romero, who is canonized by the Catholic Church in 2018, after a lengthy debate concerning the reasons for his death. Romero has become an example of sanctity through his political activism for the poor in his context. Before his canonization, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) commemorated him by listing him in their calendar of saints. Through narrative memory

⁸⁷⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 225.

⁸⁷⁸ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 228. See also Hinze, “Over, Under, Around, and Through,” 56-58.

⁸⁷⁹ Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 99.

⁸⁸⁰ Although the notion of the “holy fools of God” is more prominent in the Orthodox tradition, the Latin Christianity commemorates several saints who can be included into this category. See Thomas Lederer, “Fools and Saints: Derision and Regenerative Laughter and the Late Medieval and Early Modern Hagiographic Imagination,” *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* Vol. 37 (2006): 129-130.

of solidarity, Romero's life and death inspire other people to partake in various efforts of transforming structural injustice and oppression.

It is important to remember that the minimum requirement of sainthood is one's positive response to God's grace and the Spirit through his or her conscience. Johnson claims, "Saints may not necessarily be persons who have found God; in fact, they may experience in a profound way the absence of God. Yet they try to walk with others faithfully even in the darkness and their restless hearts do not stop seeking."⁸⁸¹ This requirement mirrors Rahner's standard.⁸⁸² Our earlier example of the icons of modern American figures (Abraham Lincoln, Horace Mann, Booker T. Washington, and Alexander Graham Bell) on the wall of Marsh Chapel, Boston University, underlines this point vividly.⁸⁸³ Those figures might not always explicitly confess Jesus Christ. Still, through embracing humanity and their existence, they convey different paths of holiness: abolishing slavery, prioritizing education, leading an oppressed community, and advancing technology.

Related to our discussions of Ibn 'Arabī's concept of *walāya*, saints are the heirs or inheritors of the Prophets and Messengers, similar to how sainthood links to prophethood and messengerhood. It means, for Ibn 'Arabī, a saint inherits one or more gifts identical to the prophets. Thus, there are various types of saints, such as 'Moses-like' (*Mūsawī al-wirṭh*) and 'Christ-like' (*ʿĪsawī*).⁸⁸⁴ The 'Christ-like' saints possess signs analogous to Jesus' miracles, such as the ability to walk on water or healing, but not the ability to fly

⁸⁸¹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 231.

⁸⁸² Rahner, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," 294. See also Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104.

⁸⁸³ See the beginning and the end of chapter 5.

⁸⁸⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 75, 83. For further elaboration, see chapter 4 section C.

because that is an ability associated with ‘Muhammad-like’ type of saint, which mirrors Muhammad’s nocturnal ascension (*isrā* and *mi’rāj*).⁸⁸⁵ Furthermore, the characters or capabilities of a saint correspond to these types of saints, such as compassion and gentleness, as demonstrated by Jesus, beauty and wisdom as shown by Joseph, and inspired leadership as exhibited by Moses and Muhammad. Above all, Ibn ‘Arabī regards the “Muhammadan” type of *walāya* as representing the most complete or most comprehensive signs, a way that encompasses the other types.

The willingness to recognize different holy figures linked to various types of saints is rooted in the Islamic beliefs concerning prophethood and messengerhood: in that perspective, God has sent a great number of prophets and messengers to all human beings before Muhammad. Therefore, it is crucial to notice that in this understanding, the saints of the Muhammadan community are not at all exclusive and superior to or superseding other types of saints. As exemplified by Morris’ eight universal paths of *walāya*.

Similar to this theological move, one could imagine recognizing different modes or paths to sanctity, even those that exist outside Christianity. For example, Riyanto, who was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, sacrificed his life for the people in the church because of what he believed as a Muslim. And Ms. Babagario displays forgiveness and reconciliation to people who killed her child. Kathy Snyder has worked in a rural village in Guatemala for twenty years because of her Catholic beliefs. From a Christian perspective, all these different paths are the work of the same Spirit, who calls people to cultivate holiness in many ways, including the non-Christian paths of holiness that continue to inspire their adherents. All these paths of holiness unveiled in the past must be

⁸⁸⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, 79-80.

remembered and respected. At the same time, the contemporary living saints must also forge their own paths of holiness, perhaps including ones that are unprecedented. Johnson conveys some of the multiplicity of the paths as follows:⁸⁸⁶⁸⁸⁷

Some work anonymously in fidelity to duty; others speak loudly in the assembly; some risk the wrath of the powerful by engaging in structural analysis and action on behalf of justice, for the poor and for women; others are the powerful converted to their responsibility; still others perform miracles of nonviolence in bringing about peace; some bountifully nurture and nourish young life; others show the way in caring for the earth; some compassionately tend the sick and the dying; others are artisans of new visions, new images, new designs for society; some know the pleasure of sexual expression; others experience their sexuality as the locus of violation; some fulfill a particular mission or office in the church; many more live “ordinary lives,” growing in love through the complex interactions of their work, play, and relationship; some are well-off; many more are numbered among the poor who struggled for bread; some know success; many others are broken by suffering, both personal and political; some clearly make God attractive; others wrestle with demons that obscure the immediacy of divine presence.

The list above suggests vibrant depictions of the multiple paths of holiness that correspond to Rahner’s idea of new modes of holiness. Still, it is not by any means exhaustive, and the list can always be expanded.

3. Encountering Hidden Christ through Praxis

As I mentioned in earlier chapters, one of the reasons I think the concepts of the Seal of the Saints and the spiritual ranks in Ibn ‘Arabī’s system can be compatible with the Christian theological construct of saints as companions is the notion of hidden saints. By

⁸⁸⁶ See chapter 5 section C2

⁸⁸⁷ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 222-223.

emphasizing the unimaginable aspect of a saint—i.e., the recognition that the higher spiritual ranks are invisible to the lower ones—people are obliged to practice humility while interacting with others. This notion empowers the Quranic exhortation, “So vie with one another in good deeds” (Q. 2: 148).⁸⁸⁸ It implies that only God can judge, so each human should focus on doing good deeds.

Drawing insights from the notion of the hiddenness of saints in Islam and Christianity, as explained more thoroughly in chapter six, I would like to correlate the numerous historical manifestations of holiness with the narrative of Jesus Christ by employing the notion of the hidden Christ. There are two post-resurrection stories of the Gospels that portray Jesus’ identity as hidden, so his disciples could not recognize him immediately (Luke 24:13-35, John 20:11-18). I will focus on the text from Luke 24: 13-35 “The Walk to Emmaus:”

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, **14** and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, **16** but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. **17** And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” **19** He asked them, “What things?” They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in

⁸⁸⁸ The verse says, “Everyone has a direction toward which he turns. So vie with one another in good deeds. Wheresoever you are, God will bring you all together. Truly God is Powerful over all things.” Translation from Nasr, *The Study Quran*. This exhortation confirms that each religious community has its own *qiblah* or direction of prayer, and God decides each direction, whether it is Jerusalem or the Ka’bah. Instead of competing with other religious communities, each community should compete in good deeds. The context of this verse about the *qiblah* suggests the meaning of “good deeds” might be related specifically to prayers and their specific rules from each community. However, there are other verses in the Quran that include exhortation on competing with one another in good deeds without any reference to the *qiblah* (e.g., 3: 114 and 5: 48). This fact confirms that the exhortation applies to general ethical values of doing good.

deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. **22** Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, **23** and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.” **25** Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! **26** Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. **29** But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. **30** When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31** Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. **32** They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” **33** That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. **34** They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” **35** Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

In this passage, the two disciples failed to identify Jesus, their teacher, when they met on the road to Emmaus. They walked together and conversed until they arrived at the two disciples’ house. They invited Jesus, whom they saw as a stranger, to stay with them. Their welcoming gesture depicted generosity and hospitality. However, the story twists at the moment of the meal. Jesus suddenly broke the bread, and that opened the two disciples’ eyes so that they recognized Jesus. The event changed their hearts, and they returned to Jerusalem to gather with other disciples.

The story demonstrates that people can encounter the hidden Jesus through their actions. An act of hospitality and generosity enabled the two disciples to identify the hidden Jesus. Consequently, Christians and non-Christians who respond positively to God's grace and the call of the Spirit can similarly encounter the hidden Christ. Thus, Christians should not dismiss the deeds of non-Christians, or treat them as inferior, because Jesus may be present in those deeds, although perhaps hidden. To appreciate the value of multiple paths of holiness means to encounter the hidden Jesus, who might present himself in unprecedented, surprising ways.

Understanding the connection between sanctity and action helps us to discover the meaning of Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:31-46. Jesus declares in verses 34-36, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Like the Spirit, Christ's presence cannot be limited. He is present "where human wounds are touched and healed and, in a special way, served where the hungry receive bread, the thirsty drink, and the naked clothing."⁸⁸⁹

⁸⁸⁹ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 210. A very influential divine saying (*hadīth qudsī*) resembles Jesus' words in Matthew 25:34-36. The hadith states, "the Apostle of God said: 'God says on the Day of Resurrection : 'O son of Adam, I was sick and you did not visit Me.' He [the man] says: 'O my Lord, how could I visit You, when you are the Lord of all beings?' He says: 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was sick, and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him? — O son of Adam, I sought food from you, and you did not feed Me.' He [the man] says: 'O my Lord, how could I feed you, when you are the Lord of all beings?' He says: 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so sought food from you, and you did not feed him? Did you not know that if you had fed him, you would have found that to have been for Me? — O son of Adam, I asked you for drink, and you did not give Me to drink.' He [the man] says: 'O my Lord, how could I give you to drink, when You are the Lord of all beings?' He says: 'My servant so-and-so asked you for drink, and you did not give him to drink. [Did you not know] that if you had given him to drink, you would have found that to have been for Me?'" Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 179.

The Christian concept of the communion of saints has become a contested idea, with different Christian denominations viewing it differently. However, since the concept is rooted in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, it reflects the core understanding of the Christian community as the people of God.⁸⁹⁰ This chapter's goal is to uphold the relevance of the communion of saints by accentuating its practical implications. By using the framework of saints as companions, this chapter presents a way to redefine our understanding of the communion of saints through reimagining its boundary, scope, and function.

First of all, the communion of saints does not refer to only some special people. It comprises all people whose lives are transformed by God's grace in many ways and at different stages of sanctification. Secondly, the term "saint" suggests both personal and communal interconnection with God's holiness. Each saint becomes a companion for other saints in their journey of sanctification. Furthermore, the sturdiness of the connection between them holds that bond even after death. The saints form the circle of friends of God and the cloud of witnesses. Next, the narrative memory of solidarity grounds the reconfiguration of the intermediary function of saints. Intermediation is no longer reserved only for the dead saints, but for living ones as well. Memory keeps alive the ways in which the Spirit works in the lives of saints. As companions, the narratives of the saints illuminate the paths of other saints and inspire the emergence of different practices and observances. That is how the interrelation works within the circle of communion of saints and the cloud of witnesses. Finally, this multiplicity of actions resonates with different modes of holiness

⁸⁹⁰ See fn. 807. See also Cunningham, *A Brief History of Saints*, 8-9.

as the fruits of the Spirit. Those multiple paths of holiness become the loci of the hidden Christ.

Despite primarily an exploration of Christian reflections of saints, this chapter expresses two types of learning in comparative theology: intensification and appropriation.⁸⁹¹ The comparison between the companionship paradigm and Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the "Seal of the Muhammadan Saints" in connection with the Islamic idea of the *umma* indicates the intensification type of learning by elucidating that the hierarchy in the system of saints does not always impose hierarchical relations between saints and ordinary people. The interplay between the egalitarian relationships of all believers and the hiddenness of saints makes it compatible with the companionship paradigm proposed by Johnson. Second, the comparison between Ibn 'Arabī's explanations on various types of saints brings insights to illuminate the possibility of multiple paths of holiness. The latter suggests the latter type of learning in comparative theology, i.e., appropriation.

⁸⁹¹ Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, 116-117, 134-135.

PART IV

ALL-ENCOMPASSING GOD AND THE COMMUNITY OF GOD'S FRIENDS: CROSSING THE BORDER

CHAPTER 8

APPROACHING SAINTS: AN INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY OF SAINTS IN PRACTICE

Many people applauded Mother Teresa of Calcutta as a saint, even before her canonization in 2016 by the Catholic Church. However, the fact that she derived a lot of inspiration from another saint might be unknown, especially to the non-Catholics. Born as Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu, she chose the name “Teresa” after St. Thérèse of Lisieux. The latter is known for her example in showing fidelity in small things, which also inspired Mother Teresa in her long ministry.⁸⁹² In chapter seven, I told the story of Kathy Snyder and her connection with St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who is the patron saint for missionaries. This flow of inspiration from one person to another demonstrates how sanctity works in the world: it connects and binds people in a web of holiness through actions. The memory of a saint generates multiple paths of holiness. Related to the topic of this dissertation, I want to ask if non-Christians can be part of this web of holiness? If yes, how could Christians recognize non-Christians as a saint? How to convert the recognition of non-Christian saints into emulation and not merely admiration?

Similar to Mother Teresa, many people, including Christians, easily recognize Mohandas Gandhi as a saint. What fewer people may know is how Gandhi deeply inspired Martin Luther King Jr., a central figure of the United States Civil Rights Movement, not

⁸⁹² Kathryn Spink, *Mother Teresa: An Authorized Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 235

only in the latter's political strategy of non-violence but also spiritually.⁸⁹³ King's famous non-violent struggle imitated Gandhi's philosophy of *satyagraha*.⁸⁹⁴ King confessed that Gandhi helped him to affirm the relevance of Jesus' ethics. King says, "Prior to reading Gandhi, I had about concluded that the ethics of Jesus were only effective in individual relationships....Gandhi was probably the first person in history to lift the love ethic of Jesus above mere interaction between individuals to a powerful and effective social force on a large scale."⁸⁹⁵ Gandhi admired Jesus' teaching and borrowed insights from Leo Tolstoy's ideas of Christianity.⁸⁹⁶ Reading history, one might notice that the mode of holiness does not always transmit through Christians.

As I have argued in previous chapters, I give an affirmative answer to the first question related to the status of non-Christians as a saint. Theologically speaking, I propose three theological constructs as the foundation for constructing an inclusive theology of sainthood resulting from the comparison with Ibn 'Arabī's idea of *walāya*. This notion of an inclusive theology of sainthood enables Christians to perceive non-Christians as part of the communion of friends of God. In other words, the recognition of saints works primarily inductively. It takes us to the importance of the second and the third question that the present chapter is attempting to answer.

Before probing those second and third questions, the opening section recapitulates the three theological constructs I have proposed earlier in this dissertation. The following

⁸⁹³ Roger Bruns, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 18-20.

⁸⁹⁴ Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 84

⁸⁹⁵ King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 84.

⁸⁹⁶ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 81. Janko Lavrin, "Tolstoy and Gandhi," *The Russian Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (1960): 132-139.

section investigates the applicability of the *vox populi* approach for recognizing saints, whether Christian or non-Christian ones, in the contemporary context. In the third section, I will discuss two cases of recent saintly figures to illustrate how people are capable of recognizing saints interreligiously. Afterward, I present a working definition of a saint that is derived from the three theological constructs. In the fifth section, I propose some practical suggestions on keeping alive the memories of non-Christian saints and integrating them into Christian practice.

A. An Inclusive Theology of Saints: Three Theological Constructs

Through chapters five to seven, I elucidated three theological constructs: saints as manifestations and revealers of God's self-communication, the hiddenness of saints, and saints as companions. The first theological construct provides the ground for universal sainthood. From Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of *walāya*, I learned that the discourse on saints interrelates with the discourse on God's self-revelation. Among Christian theologians, I found Karl Rahner's theology of grace instrumental in supporting this idea. God's self-communication or God's grace infuses all human beings without exception; what God gives is genuinely Godself. For him, religions are part of the mediation of grace in the world, and religious diversity reflects more of God's grace. As long as a human being, Christian or non-Christian, responds positively to God's offer of grace through the acceptance of his or her existence, the person becomes part of the salvific inter-communicative mediations for other human beings in their ways. Therefore, a saint is a manifestation and revealer of God's self-communication because of his or her positive response. The saint connects with Christ through grace but is not always aware of it. For

Christians, to identify someone as a saint requires an a posteriori approach through direct experience. As a result, in the past, when people lived more in cultural and religious isolation, it was easier to recognize the sanctity of a person of the same religion. However, in today's pluralistic societies, the recognition of the holiness of non-Christian persons can happen more frequently. For instance, Christians can recognize Riyanto, the young Indonesian Muslim who sacrificed his life to protect people in the church from bombing, as an excellent example of God's grace in history, even though what motivated his sacrifice was his faith as a Muslim.⁸⁹⁷ In that sense, he is a saint. Although the Catholic procedure of canonization might never recognize Riyanto as a saint, his saintly action of self-sacrifice can inspire Christian praxis in a multi-religious context.

The second theological construct of the hiddenness of saints derives insight from Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the *malāmiyya* and Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological account of sanctity: hiddenness is a mark of true sanctity. The Catholic procedure of canonization implies this aspect of hiddenness. Although canonization names only a few among the many, it does not negate the sanctity of the many. It is one of the ideas behind All Saints' Day. At the same time, All Saints' Day also reflects how holiness surpasses human being's limited understanding. Therefore the aspect of hiddenness does not signify the inferiority of the unknown saints to the known ones. Rather, hiddenness corresponds to these three types of interpretation of sainthood: occupying a liminal space between banality and holiness, only saints are capable of recognizing other saints, and the transparency of saints as icons of God. Through these types of interpretation, I argue that a person becomes a saint when God's holiness grasps her. That is the beginning of the journey of sanctification

⁸⁹⁷ See the introduction of chapter 7.

in the liminal space of banality and holiness. Holiness, as an endless journey, explains why many saints are not aware of their sanctity. Instead, the deeper a person is engulfed by God's holiness, the more profound her realization of imperfection and sinfulness. Dorothy Day's constant refusal of people labeling her as a saint illustrates this point. At the same time, sanctification is a journey to communicate God's holiness while living truly in the world. The saint acts as an icon of God who mediates God's holiness to other human beings. She becomes the saturated phenomenon through which God's revelation encounters other people. In this way, God's holiness touches other people too. This process enables other people to partake in the journey of sanctification as well. The web of holiness is always expanding through the saints who act as the inter-communicative mediations. Lastly, since only a saint can recognize another saint, other people who are captivated by God's holiness can recognize her sanctity even if only to some extent. Therefore, the paradox of sanctity explains the hiddenness of saints: the saint's sanctity remains invisible to herself, yet other people might identify her as a bearer of God's holiness. This interplay between hiddenness and visibility explains the nature of the communion of saints.

The third theological construct presents the saints as companions. Utilizing Elizabeth Johnson's idea of the companionship paradigm, I reinterpret the Christian concept of the communion of saints as a community of friends of God. The saints are not situated as the intermediary between the living and God because God stands far above people. Instead, the saints are intermediary because of their role in perpetuating connections between human beings and other humans, both the living and the dead, and with God in the web of holiness. This link is sturdy enough to overcome death, and thus death cannot sever the relationship between the friends of God. This understanding is

similar to the idea of *walāya*, which according to Ibn 'Arabī is friendship with God and people that is open to all people. In this regard, this theological construct expands the limit of the community of God's friends beyond Christianity, following God's grace that encompasses all human beings. Furthermore, the meaning of intermediary is transformed by memory as a catalyst for the ongoing relationship. Memory is not only about commemoration or veneration, but more of an anamnesis, i.e., making something past to be active in the present. Thus, remembrance of saints engenders the emulation of the living. In this regard, memory brings solidarity through multiple paths of holiness as the saints manifest and reveal new modes of holiness in the world. Praxis becomes one of the marks of holiness as taught and epitomized by Jesus Christ. As one of the paths of holiness, it serves as the loci of the hidden Christ.⁸⁹⁸

B. The *Vox Populi* Approach of Sainthood: Weaving Remembrance and Imitation

1. *The Vox Populi and the Catholic Canonization of Saints*

There is no single criterion to characterize a person as a saint in the Christian tradition. In this dissertation, I have been focusing primarily on the Protestant and Roman Catholic theological perspectives and practices, especially since Vatican II. Each of these traditions has its unique approach to saints that might not be analogous to the other, either theologically or practically. Yet, the three theological constructs presented in previous chapters provide a common ground for both traditions, at least theologically. This section elaborates on a common ground for more practical issues related to Christians' perception

⁸⁹⁸ See chapter 7 section C2 and C3.

of saints and paves the way to answer the questions related to how Christians might recognize a non-Christian as a saint and the connection between remembrance and praxis.

Lawrence Cunningham launches three criticisms of the Catholic procedure of canonization of saints. Firstly, canonization has brought almost a total clericalization of the calendar of saints. The deficit of non-clerical people in the list of saints tends to undermine the holiness of the laity and their lifestyle, at least on a practical level.⁸⁹⁹ Even though Vatican II teachings state the importance of all vocations, which would elevate the value of non-clerical professions and lifestyles, the gap between clerics and laypeople in the list of saints perpetuates the assumptions that prioritize the former over the latter.

Secondly, the list of canonized saints reflects old prejudices that might contradict and become irrelevant to Christian values in today's world. For instance, Cunningham mentions sexual stereotyping, which includes an anti-sexual attitude and prioritizes celibacy as visible in traditional hagiography.⁹⁰⁰ Today, virgins and non-virgins, married and non-married people, are capable of demonstrating sanctity and even martyrdom, and thus becoming the models for the Christian life. The traditional sexual stereotyping of saints represents an outdated worldview that is no longer appealing to contemporary people.

Lastly, the list of the canonized saints excludes people whom the Catholic Church considers as "non-orthodox" or "heretical." In other words, the canonization of saints becomes a test for doctrinal orthodoxy. Cunningham argues that this is the reason why many famous mystics, such as Meister Eckhart and Julian of Norwich, have never made it

⁸⁹⁹ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 50-51.

⁹⁰⁰ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 52-53.

into the list of saints.⁹⁰¹ This criterion hinders the canonization of figures who were involved in ecclesiastical controversies, such as Blaise Pascal or Galileo Galilei, or those who have formulated Catholic doctrine in unusual ways, like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin despite their piety and generous contributions.⁹⁰²

For Cunningham, these critiques are among the reasons behind the decrease of the Catholic practice of veneration of saints in the contemporary world, especially in the Western context.⁹⁰³ On the other hand, despite that decline, today's Christians remain mesmerized with saintly figures. These figures often are not recognized as saints by the Catholic Church, and, unlike the traditional understanding of saints, are not known for manifesting thaumaturgic power.⁹⁰⁴ Moreover, some of these figures are not Catholics, such as John Wesley or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or are even non-Christian, like Gandhi.⁹⁰⁵ This shift in identifying saints as models is a positive one. As observed by Robert Ellsberg, the perception of saints primarily as miracle workers or heavenly patrons made the saints into figures whom Christians needed to venerate but not imitate.⁹⁰⁶

As an alternative, Cunningham proposes the proclamation of saints by listening to the *vox populi* or voice of the people. This idea stems from the history of Christianity before the tenth century when local Christians started their cult of saints spontaneously because they perceived particular individuals to be holy. Local bishops were involved and had the power to veto, but people were primarily responsible for deciding on a person as a saint.

⁹⁰¹ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 54.

⁹⁰² Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 54-55.

⁹⁰³ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 49.

⁹⁰⁴ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 24-26.

⁹⁰⁵ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 55.

⁹⁰⁶ Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 1.

From the tenth to the thirteenth century, the church's intervention in this spontaneous procedure modified it considerably, and the power to name a saint was transferred to the church. As a result, the pope held the sole authority to canonize a saint.⁹⁰⁷ From then on, the official canonization procedure for saints was developed along with this intricate process until today.⁹⁰⁸

By returning the procedure of recognizing saints to the people, it would be possible to approach non-Christians as saintly figures. For Cunningham, the Vatican II teachings assert that holiness can exist outside the perimeter of the Roman Catholic Church, and that provides a solid ground for recognizing a non-Christian as a saint through the *vox populi* approach.⁹⁰⁹ The *vox populi* approach is in line with Rahner's suggestion of using an a posteriori method in identifying someone as a saint. The criteria mentioned by Rahner and Egan regarding an appraisal of a saint, i.e., serving others and live moderately, selflessly, honestly, and courageously, are applicable to determine a saint using the *vox populi* approach.

2. Protestantism and the Vox Populi Approach

As I have mentioned in chapter two, figures of Protestant Reformation hold different theological stances on the notion of saints. Phillip D. W. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey show how, despite his firm belief on Christ as the only mediator that diminishes the usefulness of invoking saints, Luther maintained the view of the saints and Mary as residing

⁹⁰⁷ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 44-45.

⁹⁰⁸ For an accessible study of the Roman Catholic Church's canonization process, see Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

⁹⁰⁹ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 55.

in heaven and continuously praying for the faithful on the earth.⁹¹⁰ Philip Melanchthon, another important figure in the early Protestant movement, also stated that Mary and the saints in heaven are praying for the church. He states, “To be sure, concerning the saints we grant that in heaven they pray for the church in general, just as they prayed for the entire church while living.”⁹¹¹ Luther’s and Melanchthon’s theological view of saints was contested by John Calvin, as the latter had no theological belief regarding the saints in heaven. However, there are two distinctive points shared by all of the reformers that separate their positions from the Catholic Church’s: the emphasis on the priesthood of all believers and the prohibition of invoking saints as heavenly intercessors. The first point relates to the perception of saints. Because the concept of the priesthood of all believers had been diminished, the differentiation between religious and lay people was dense enough to discourage lay people from thinking that they are part of the communion of saints. The concept of the priesthood of all believers was instrumental in recuperating the notion of all people as legitimate members of the communion of saints. The latter point on the prohibition of invoking saints as heavenly intercessors had to do with the fact that, by having saints as intercessors, God is projected as being far from people’s lives, and this practice undermined Jesus’ role as the only intermediary.⁹¹²

Elizabeth Johnson appreciates the Protestant Reformers’ criticism of the excessive practice related to the saints as formed primarily by the patron-petitioner paradigm.⁹¹³ She recognizes that the reformers rediscovered the importance of all people as saints and as

⁹¹⁰ Krey and Krey, introduction to *The Catholic Luther*, 10.

⁹¹¹ Melanchthon, “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” 238, 241.

⁹¹² Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 108.

⁹¹³ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 108-111.

equal members of the communion of saints, of which the Scriptures witness. Moreover, they placed the saints as the exemplars of Christian faith, which the living Christians should emulate. These two aspects constitute the core of the companionship paradigm of early Christians.⁹¹⁴ Unfortunately, the polemics between the Catholic Church and Protestant churches worsened, with each side rigidly holding to their position, especially after the Council of Trent (1543-1563). Johnson observes, “Honoring the saints became a badge of Catholic identity, while Protestant worship and spirituality diminished interest in the saints to the vanishing point: on the one hand, a certain fixation; on the other, a case of amnesia.”⁹¹⁵ The practice related to saints in Protestant churches has dimmed to the point of being neglected and avoided. Some Protestant churches even judge the practice as intrinsically idolatry.

As a Protestant from Indonesia, I experienced firsthand the hostility of Protestants toward the “Catholic” understanding of saints. Indonesian Protestants know that all Christians are saints and part of the communion of saints, but such understanding means very little theologically. In other words, the Protestant’s rejection of the practice of sainthood expressed itself in not only the practical but also the theological aspect.⁹¹⁶ It is unfortunate because Protestants have become oblivious to the memory of saints, and the latent power of remembering the saints to inspire praxis remains unexplored.

Fortunately, Protestant Churches have undergone some changes in their attitudes toward saints at the end of the twentieth century. The move came with the renewal in

⁹¹⁴ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 109.

⁹¹⁵ Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets*, 111.

⁹¹⁶ One of its signs is the scarcity in literature on the topic of saints. For some examples of studies related to theological aspects of sainthood from Protestant perspectives, see chapter 2 fn. 203.

liturgical context through the influence of “Liturgy Lima.”⁹¹⁷ The communion of saints is no longer referring only to the living saints but also the departed ones. I gave the example of the celebration of All Saints Day in different Protestant churches in the United States that signifies a greater appreciation of the bond between people even beyond death.⁹¹⁸ Moreover, major Protestant theologians in the twentieth century, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich, have reformulated the meaning of sanctification for today’s context. Tillich, for instance, perceives a saint as a signpost for other human beings. Any Christian can become a medium for God’s revelation for others through his or her faith and love. This fact has little to do with moral perfection because a saint is also a sinner.⁹¹⁹ Although Protestant churches in general still rule out the veneration and invocation of saints, they acknowledge the importance of the communion of saints as one community in Christ, witnesses of faith, and exemplary figures to imitate. Both Catholics and Protestants share their acceptance of these three points.

Under the light of the shared points above, the *vox populi* method in approaching saints can bring Catholics and Protestants together. I do not think the Catholic Church would and should abolish the system of canonization. For the Catholic Church, the *vox populi* approach has always been an approach to recognize a saint, although the official canonization subdues its importance. On the other side, Protestants tend to utilize the *vox populi* method to identify saintly figures whom people need to imitate, although not all Protestant denominations label those people as “saints.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example, is well-respected by both Catholics and Protestants for his theological works, tenacity and

⁹¹⁷ See chapter 2 fn. 204. See also Lathrop, “The Lima Liturgy and Beyond,” 63.

⁹¹⁸ See chapter 2 section B.

⁹¹⁹ Tillich, *ST I*, 122.

prophetic struggle, and his martyrdom in a Nazi camp. Stephen R. Haynes describes how Bonhoeffer inspired a diverse range of contemporary people, including Catholics and Protestants, and is practically appreciated as a “saint” by them. There are books, pilgrimages to places related to Bonhoeffer, and other things that parallel the popular Catholic traditional notion of a saint, although in different forms.⁹²⁰ The Bonhoeffer phenomenon demonstrates my point that Protestants, similar to Catholics, do venerate specific saintly figures through the voices of the people, which denotes greater freedom and more forms of expression. Protestants remember these figures as models to inspire people in faith, hope, and love. Thus, the *vox populi* method applies to both Catholics and Protestants.

C. Recognizing Saints Interreligiously: Two Case Studies

In a book for daily reflections on saints, Ellsberg compiles short biographies of saints who could appeal to today’s Christians. What distinguishes this book from other books on saints is the inclusion of people who usually will not appear in traditional Catholic books on saints, either because the official Roman Catholic Church standards regard them as “non-orthodox,” including Protestants or other non-Catholic Christians, or because they are non-Christian figures. For examples of non-Catholic saints, Ellsberg lists George Fox (January 13), the famous Quaker figure, Fannie Lou Hamer (March 14), an American Civil Rights activist, Käthe Kollwitz (April 22), a German artist and pacifist, Karl Barth (May 10), Mohandas Gandhi (January 30), Rabbi Abraham Heschel (December 23), Martin Buber (February 8), Anne Frank (June 12), Baal Shem Tov (May 22), and Albert Camus

⁹²⁰ Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, chapter 6 and 7.

(November 7). He states that he chose these figures “whose impact on Christian spirituality and ethics has, arguably, equaled that of any orthodox Christian of our time” as the reason for the inclusion.⁹²¹ He quickly adds that his intention is far from including them unwillingly as Christians, but, rather, to orient Christians in the direction of God, whose works encompass religious traditions.⁹²² These people have humanity as the common ground, i.e., they have become authentic human beings in their own way.⁹²³ This stance mirrors Rahner’s notion of people who respond positively to God’s self-communication through becoming genuine human beings.

I notice that the list of saints that Ellsberg put in his book is informed by figures whose life narratives and works are readily available to Christians in the West. That is the reason why Gandhi and Rabbi Abraham Heschel made into the list, but not Muslim figures such as Al-Hallāj or Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya. The recognition of a saint requires encounter in terms of space, thoughts, and ethics. This principle of encounter corresponds to the three theological constructs I have proposed in this dissertation, i.e., that sanctity must be experienced as a tangible historical reality. In order to clarify this point in recognizing saints across religious boundaries, this section provides case studies of two recent saintly figures, one Christian and one Muslim, whose influence extends outside the limit of their religious identity.

1. *Frans van der Lugt, SJ.*

⁹²¹ Ellsberg, *All Saints*, 3-4.

⁹²² Ellsberg, *All Saints*, 4.

⁹²³ Ellsberg, *All Saints*, 6.

On April 7, 2014, the world heard the news of the death of a Dutch Jesuit, Father Frans van der Lugt, in Syria.⁹²⁴ A masked gunman killed him in his home, the Jesuit residence, at the city of Homs, a town that had been torn by the Syrian civil war. Although he had a chance to relocate from the besieged city, Father Frans insisted on staying with people whom he served.

Father Frans spent more than forty years in Syria, living among and serving people indiscriminately of their religion. He was born and educated in the Netherlands and joined the Society of Jesus in 1959. Seven years later, he departed for the Middle East and learned Arabic. He received ordination as a priest in 1971 and returned to Europe for his doctorate in Psychology. In 1976 Father Franz returned to Syria and stayed there until the day he died.⁹²⁵

After living for years in Aleppo and Damascus, in his sixties, Father Frans moved to Homs, where he established the Al-Ard Institute (an Arabic word that means “the Earth”) on a 50-acre farm. The Institute facilitated children with special needs to work on the farm and vineyard. The children came from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.⁹²⁶ As people from different religious backgrounds found the place as their home, it fostered interreligious encounters among them. Father Frans emphasized the humanity of all people as the common ground, not theological belief. In that regard, he perceived the importance

⁹²⁴ I give my gratitude to my colleague, Michael VanZandt-Collins, who introduced me to the figure of Frans van der Lugt. See VanZandt-Collins, “Spiritual Space and Christian Witness in Syria.”

⁹²⁵ “Father Frans van der Lugt — Obituary,” *The Telegraph*, April 20, 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/religion-obituaries/10775431/Father-Frans-van-der-Lugt-obituary.html>, accessed 29 October 2019.

⁹²⁶ “Father Frans van der Lugt — Obituary.”

of connecting with the earth.⁹²⁷ Besides farming, he used to organize an annual hike for young Syrians at the nearby Jebal Ansariya. The group consisted of Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Alawites. Explaining his reason for the hike, he says, “The hike brings people together. They share the common experience of fatigue, of sleeping and eating together, and this builds a link between people. After the hike it is not important that you are Christian or Muslim, it is important that you are present.”⁹²⁸

When the Syrian civil war broke out in 2011, the city of Homs became a battleground due to the existence of anti-government forces. The government then besieged the city, which impoverished people’s life significantly. As a result, although in the beginning the Institute had accepted displaced people due to the war, Father Frans finally decided to leave the Institute and relocate to the Jesuit residence.⁹²⁹ Although he had several chances to leave the city, he chose to accompany people who opted to stay; he was the only European left in the town.⁹³⁰

Father Frans sincerely appreciated Muslims and their spiritual heritage. In April 2012, he sent a message through social media related to the celebration of Holy Week and Easter in their residence. After taking seven families into the community, they became a big family. Muslims helped with cleaning the church and even joined the celebration.

⁹²⁷ “Frans van der Lugt, known as Pater Frans (10 April 1938 – 7 April 2014),” <http://fransvanderlugt.net/about/>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹²⁸ “Frans van der Lugt: A Dutch priest in Homs,” *BBC*, April 26, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-27155474>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹²⁹ Anne Barnard, “Long a Survivor in Syria, a Dutch Priest Is Slain,” *The New York Times*, April 7, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/08/world/middleeast/dutch-priest-shot-to-death-in-syrian-city-homs.html>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹³⁰ Father Frans stated the reason why he did not want to leave was because there were still Christians in the city. Yet, even if all Christians left, he still would not leave because his calling was for the Syrians, not only the Christians. “In remembrance of father / pater Frans van der Lugt,” *YouTube*, March 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DAbJ9RjFwHs>, accessed October 29, 2019.

Father Frans asked one of the Muslims, who happened to be an imam, to read a Quranic passage during the celebration of Palm Sunday.⁹³¹

A few months before he died, Father Frans delivered a message in January 2014 to the outside world through a video on YouTube. In that video, spoken in Arabic, he depicted the ordeal that he and other people had to endure during the siege. He states,⁹³²

Christians and Muslims are going through a difficult and painful time and we are faced with many problems. The greatest of these is hunger. People have nothing to eat. There is nothing more painful than watching mothers searching for food for children in the streets...I will not accept that we die of hunger. I do not accept that we drown in a sea of hunger, letting the waves of death drag us under. We love life, we want to live. And we do not want to sink in a sea of pain and suffering.

At that time, the government army barricaded part of the city and prohibited the flow of supplies, so the people were famished. Father Frans tried to share the little food he had with other people and supported them mentally by listening and caring as mental illness began to spread among people. He did not discriminate among these Syrian people based on their religion, Christian or Muslim, nor did he receive discrimination as a Christian. Father Frans says, “I have learned about the generosity of the Syrian people. As I was with these people in their good times, I am with them in their pain.”⁹³³

⁹³¹ Jan Stuyt, SJ., “Frans van der Lugt: Bridge Builder and Martyr,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, July 25, 2019, <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/frans-van-der-lugt-bridge-builder-and-martyr/?fbclid=IwAR3u3R02WcBHoa0bOUz63ZU-eG393JN7O6eF3q9CDkjOt9RHIsDG7G5zWkg>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹³² “Wake up Call,” *YouTube*, January 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhQHg6ivGPg>, accessed October 29, 2019. For the English translation of this video, see “A Voice Crying in the Wilderness A Dutch Jesuit, Besieged in Homs, Pricks the Conscience of the World,” *The Economist*, February 10, 2014, <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2014/02/10/a-voice-crying-in-the-wilderness>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹³³ “Father Frans van der Lugt — Obituary.”

After the broadcast, the United Nations sponsored a cease-fire that allowed hundreds of residents to leave the area. Nonetheless, Father Frans insisted on staying with the remnants.⁹³⁴ Among one thousand people who chose to remain in the part of the city, there were only about two dozen Christians (the Christians who lived in the area used to number sixty thousand before the war).⁹³⁵ A few days before he died, he posted another message that would be his last:⁹³⁶

I give you some news about us in Homs. Christians here wonder: What can we do? There's nothing we can do. God help us! A man cannot do anything, but he can believe that God is with him in his difficulties, that God will not abandon him. In these circumstances of need and hunger we experience the goodness of the people. Those who have nothing left will find some grain and lentils on their doorstep. If you have nothing left, you must accept and discover the goodness of others. We see evil around us, but this does not prevent us from seeing the goodness of others; evil must not drive goodness out of our hearts. We are preparing for Easter, for the transition from death to life. The light shines from a dark cave; those who look in the dark will see a great light. This is the resurrection we want for Syria... *Ila l-amam*, let's go forward.

After the killing, no one claimed responsibility for Father Frans' death. Anti-government and government forces pointed their fingers toward each other. In the afternoon of April 7, the residents, including commanders of anti-government forces, gathered to take care of his body. The burial happened the next day.⁹³⁷

After the death of Father Frans, Muslims and Christians keep his memory in various ways. Firstly, people visit the burial site of Father Frans, which is located on the monastery

⁹³⁴ Barnard, "Long a Survivor in Syria, a Dutch Priest Is Slain."

⁹³⁵ "Father Frans van der Lugt — Obituary."

⁹³⁶ This is a shorten version of the message he posted on Facebook, see Stuyt, "Frans van der Lugt: Bridge Builder and Martyr." For the longer version, see Tony Homsky, SJ., "A Man of Peace: Fr. Frans van der Lugt, SJ," *The Jesuit Post*, April 8, 2014, <https://thejesuitpost.org/2014/04/11881/>, accessed October 30.

⁹³⁷ "Father Frans van der Lugt — Obituary."

grounds in Homs. The place has become a site for pilgrimage not only for Christians but also for Muslims. The pilgrimage of people of different faiths demonstrates the depth of his love for Syrian people that they still feel connected with Father Frans even after his death.

Secondly, Father Frans appeared in an innovative play directed by Nawar Bulbul, a Syrian playwright and actor. The play contextualized Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in the correct Syrian context and was performed by young Syrians in two separate places, Amman and Homs, through Skype. Those who performed in Amman, Jordan, were Syrian refugees, while the others from Homs were those affected by the war. The figure of Father Frans replaced the character of Friar Lawrence to whom Juliet kneels in the original script.⁹³⁸ Thus, Juliet, played by a girl in Homs, knelt to Father Frans, who was performed by a Muslim boy. Furthermore, the ending of the play was altered from the original script and became more resonant with Father Frans' message of peace and his wish for the end of the conflict. Instead of voluntary death, Romeo and Juliet threw the poison away, and Juliet fervently declared, "Enough killing! Enough blood! Why are you killing us? We want to live like the rest of the world!"⁹³⁹

Thirdly, the memory of Father Frans' efforts of service and building interreligious continues to inspire other people to follow his example. For instance, Fr. Ziad Hilal, who was Father Frans' friend and colleague, is continuing his humanitarian work in Homs until

⁹³⁸ Preti Taneja, "Sweet Sorrow as Star-Crossed Lovers in Syria and Jordan Connect via Skype," *The Guardian*, April 14, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2015/apr/14/romeo-and-juliet-staged-in-amman-and-homs>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹³⁹ Taneja, "Sweet Sorrow as Star-Crossed Lovers in Syria and Jordan Connect via Skype."

today.⁹⁴⁰ Another Syrian Jesuit, Tony Homsky, SJ., also expresses how the memory of Father Frans inspires him to work for the church in Syria.⁹⁴¹ On another note, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) honored the legacy of Father Frans by naming a community center in Lebanon, “Frans van der Lugt Center.” It is an educational center for refugee children, youth, and adults. The center helps students to deal with past trauma and to protect them from the potential harm of displacement.⁹⁴² Furthermore, the JRS also produced a short animated film to commemorate the 5th anniversary of Father Frans’ death. The film is available in nine languages, including English, Arabic, and Dutch.⁹⁴³

2. *Abdurrahman Wahid*

I have given a brief description of Abdurrahman Wahid (b. 1940 - d. 2009), a prominent Muslim figure and a former President of Indonesia (in office 1999 – 2001), in chapter three when introducing the Islamic tradition of sainthood.⁹⁴⁴ Since I have delineated how Indonesian Muslims venerate him as a saint, in this part, I will focus on his influence and legacy among Muslims and non-Muslims, especially Christians, and how their remembrance correlates with praxis.

⁹⁴⁰ “A month after Jesuit Fr. Frans van der Lugt was murdered in the Syrian city of Homs in April, his friend and colleague Jesuit Fr. Ziad Hilal is continuing his tireless humanitarian work,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 23, 2014, 4. Gale Academic Onefile, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A371690000/AONE?u=mlin_m_bostcoll&sid=AONE&xid=dd15b07b, accessed October 29, 2019.

⁹⁴¹ Homsky, “A Man of Peace.”

⁹⁴² “Forward: Remembering Frans Van Der Lugt,” *Jesuit Refugee Service USA*, April 5, 2019, <https://www.jrsusa.org/news/forward-remembering-frans-van-der-lugt/>, accessed October 30, 2019.

⁹⁴³ “Overview of Different Languages Animation Film,” <https://www.jezuieten.org/overview-of-different-languages-animation-film/>, accessed October 30, 2019

⁹⁴⁴ See chapter 3 section B3.

Abdurrahman Wahid is widely known as “Gus Dur.” Coming from a prestigious line of traditional Muslim figures in Indonesia (his grandfather was the founder of the Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia),⁹⁴⁵ Gus Dur enjoyed mass popularity to a certain degree. However, most of his fame stemmed from his easygoing personality and his appreciation of the marginalized and disenfranchised. Gus Dur’s in-depth knowledge of the traditional Islamic sciences, combined with a keen intuition for politics, elevated him to the leadership of the Nahdlatul Ulama, whose members numbered approximately 30 million during his leadership. Without a doubt, he is one of the most important Muslim figures who has shaped Indonesian Islam.⁹⁴⁶ Even Suharto, whose authoritarian regime ruled Indonesia for thirty-two years (1966 – 1998), could not suppress Gus Dur’s influential presence. For instance, Gus Dur spoke very critically against the Suharto government on the issue of the Kedung Ombo Dam, which caused considerable controversy in the mid-1980 because the government relocated thousands of farmers from their land without appropriate compensation.⁹⁴⁷

Gus Dur’s role in democratizing Indonesia went parallel with the dissemination of a more tolerant and peaceful Islam.⁹⁴⁸ He was famous for his audacity in speaking his mind and in associating with pro-democratic figures who were the natural political enemies of Suharto. In 1991, he and forty-four other intellectuals of various religious backgrounds established *Forum Demokrasi* (Democratic Forum), and he became their main

⁹⁴⁵ The Nahdlatul Ulama is literally means “the revival of the ulama.” See chapter 2 fn. 364 & 365.

⁹⁴⁶ Barton, “Indonesia’s Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual Ulama,” 323-350.

⁹⁴⁷ Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 155.

⁹⁴⁸ See Gus Dur’s numerous writings on Islam and Indonesia in Abdurrahman Wahid, *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita* (Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, 2010).

spokesperson.⁹⁴⁹ Moreover, he represented a traditional Muslim figure whose ideas were deeply rooted in traditional Islamic discourse. Yet, his thoughts appeared to be relevant to contemporary needs. As a result, his position does not always resonate with that of other Muslims. For example, Gus Dur consistently promoted free speech as an essential foundation for democracy. In 1990, there was a famous case of “blasphemy” against the Prophet Muhammad. Arswendo, a Catholic and editor of popular magazine *Monitor*, surveyed the most influential historical figures that resulted in placing the Prophet Muhammad as number eleven. The survey angered Indonesian Muslims and, eventually, brought Arswendo into prison under the charge of breaching the blasphemy law. Gus Dur called Arswendo’s action foolish and wrong, but to put him in jail and to ban the magazine were inappropriate responses. If people disagreed with him, they should boycott the magazine.⁹⁵⁰ Gus Dur’s stance was similar in the case of Salman Rushdie, who caused a global controversy because of his book *The Satanic Verse*.⁹⁵¹ Consequently, he became a target of criticism from Muslim leaders, especially those who contested his position as the leader of the Nahdlatul Ulama.⁹⁵²

Besides building amicable personal relations with minority communities, such as Chinese-Indonesians and Christians, Gus Dur was willing to take a stance on protecting them even when assuming such a position might jeopardize his political, social, and

⁹⁴⁹ Hefner, *Civil Islam*, 162. Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid*, 185.

⁹⁵⁰ Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President* (Sydney: University of South Wales Press, 2002), 182.

⁹⁵¹ Seth Mydans, “Abdurrahman Wahid, 69, Is Dead; Led Indonesia for 2 Years of Tumult,” *The New York Times*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/31/world/asia/31wahid.html?auth=login-email>, accessed November 1, 2019

⁹⁵² Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid*, 182.

religious privilege. In October 1996, an anti-Christian and anti-Chinese riot broke out in Situbondo, East Java, a town whose residents were affiliated with the NU. Twenty churches and many Chinese shops were devastated, and at least five people died. Gus Dur came to the town and apologized to the Christian communities for the violence that had been conducted by the people. He also encouraged the local Christians and Muslims to build better communication with each other.⁹⁵³ When communal violence against Christians and Chinese Indonesians increased in the following years, especially after Suharto was removed from power in 1998, Gus Dur remained consistent in spreading the message of tolerance, mutual understanding, and peace.

During his presidency, he maintained his insistence on the message of tolerance, mutual understanding, and peace through several controversial political moves: visiting East Timor to apologize for atrocities perpetrated by Indonesian military and trying to establish a truth commission (albeit unsuccessful in that attempt), and negotiating peaceful solutions with the secessionist movement of Aceh (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or Free Aceh Movement). He also renamed the Irian Jaya province as West Papua following the demand of Papuan indigenous secessionist movement, *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (Free Papua Movement), despite various criticisms from both military and public.⁹⁵⁴ Concerning Chinese Indonesians, he revoked the government's policy from Suharto's time that limited

⁹⁵³ Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid*, 219-220.

⁹⁵⁴ Tom Fawthrop, "Abdurrahman Wahid Obituary: Former Indonesian President who Championed Human Rights," *The Guardian*, January 3, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2010/jan/03/abdurrahman-wahid-obituary>, accessed November 1, 2019.

the public expression of Chinese cultures, such as the Chinese New Year celebration, and he recognized Confucianism as one of Indonesia's official religions.⁹⁵⁵

After his death in December 2009, his grave, which is located in the *Pesantren Tebuireng* (Islamic Boarding School of Tebuireng), Jombang, East Java, has transformed into a pilgrimage site for numerous people across religious traditions. The visit of thousands of Muslims can be considered normal because traditional Muslims perceive Gus Dur as a saint. Still, the sight of Christians, Buddhists, and Confucians, among others, in the vicinity of the tomb is extraordinary.⁹⁵⁶ Apart from personal and spontaneous pilgrimage by Christians to the grave of Gus Dur, there are other occasions when Christians come in groups to pay respect to Gus Dur's grave and to learn from Muslims in the *Pesantren Tebuireng*. The *Pesantren Tebuireng* is famous as the home of Gus Dur and a place that embodies and continues his ideas. For instance, in October 2017, the *Pesantren Tebuireng* warmly hosted more than one hundred and fifty students from a Catholic high school in Jakarta who came to learn more about the educational system of a *pesantren*. A few weeks before, the executive board of *Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia*, a national organization for Christian College Students, visited the *Pesantren Tebuireng* to learn how to nurture diversity while paying respect to Gus Dur's tomb.⁹⁵⁷ These examples reveal how the remembrance of Gus Dur corresponds with the praxis of people who follow his footsteps and legacy.

⁹⁵⁵ Fawthrop, "Abdurrahman Wahid Obituary."

⁹⁵⁶ Idha Saraswati and Herpin Dewanto, "Ziarah Dalam Jejak Pluralisme Gus Dur," *Kompas*, August 7, 2012, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2012/08/07/1550552/ziarah.dalam.jejak.pluralisme.gus.dur>, accessed November 1, 2019.

⁹⁵⁷ Ayomi Amindoni, "Kisah Para Pelajar Non-Muslim yang Berkunjung ke Pesantren Tebuireng," *BBC Indonesia*, November 2, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-41827650>, accessed November 1, 2019.

At the end of August 2019, tension with the Papuans resurfaced because of several racist incidents that afflicted some Papuan college students in Java. Yenny Wahid, one of Gus Dur's daughters and a national figure, invited several Papuan college students to visit Gus Dur's tomb as a symbol of hope and peace for Papua. A representative from the *Pesantren Tebuireng* led a prayer in an Islamic way, followed by a pastor who led a prayer in a Christian way. Yenny stressed that, as a mother, she understood the anger and frustration of Papuan parents because of what happened to the Papuan college students. However, citing Gus Dur's peaceful approach and message, she underlined the mutual emotional relationship between all Indonesians as one big family that included the Papuans.⁹⁵⁸ I am not sure about the efficiency of this message in reducing the tensions. Yet, the event itself was an exciting medium for inciting people's memory of Gus Dur's warm treatment towards the Papuans and how he always favored a peaceful approach and respect for human rights in solving problems.

Another traditional Islamic way to remember a saint, besides conducting a pilgrimage to a saint's tomb, is the annual commemoration of the saint's death anniversary (Jv. *Haul*). The *Haul* of Gus Dur has become an interfaith celebration where people of different faiths assemble to celebrate Gus Dur's life and legacy. Furthermore, there are occasions where Christian churches host the ceremony. For instance, at the fifth *Haul* of Gus Dur, a Catholic Church in the city of Malang, East Java, became the host. An interfaith prayer in which a representative of each religion recognized in Indonesia simultaneously led a prayer to open the event. The event celebrated the diversity of Indonesia through

⁹⁵⁸ "Mahasiswa Papua Ziarah Ke Makam Gus Dur: Mengenang Kedekatan Gus Dur dan Papua," *Bangkit Media*, August 22, 2019, <https://bangkitmedia.com/mahasiswa-papua-ziarah-kemakam-gus-dur-mengenang-kedekatan-gus-dur-dan-papua/>, accessed November 1, 2019.

creative media, such as music performance, documentary film, interreligious discussion, and an interfaith declaration of faith.⁹⁵⁹

Various local interfaith organizations in different cities organize the *Haul* of Gus Dur annually. The existence of grassroots interfaith communities, whose purpose is to develop Gus Dur's interfaith legacy, signifies another way of remembrance. One popular interfaith community calls themselves "GUS DURian Community." This group has established informal, grassroots circles in many cities and has organized various events that advance and implement Gus Dur's ideas.⁹⁶⁰ It has been instrumental in facilitating the meeting of different faith communities to establish a better relationship.

A particular way of remembering Gus Dur that is considered unusual for Protestants is by mentioning Gus Dur in communal prayers. Shortly after he died in 2009, many Protestant churches remembered him in their prayer.⁹⁶¹ Generally speaking, Indonesian Protestants prohibit prayer for dead people, even during a funeral. Thus, the Indonesian Protestants who mentioned Gus Dur in their prayer must articulate their theological understanding delicately: the prayer is not *to* or *for* Gus Dur, but *about* Gus Dur's gift for Indonesia and the people, including themselves, who should continue his struggles for the betterment of the society. On the occasion of visiting Gus Dur's tomb, the prayer represents his or her sincere gratitude to God for sending God's blessings to people through Gus

⁹⁵⁹ Abu Nisrina, "Di Pelataran Gereja Ini Haul Gus Dur Diselenggarakan," *Satu Islam*, January 6, 2015, <https://satuislam.org/di-pelataran-gereja-ini-haul-gus-dur-diselenggarakan/>, accessed November 1, 2019.

⁹⁶⁰ "Komunitas Kampung Gus Durian," <http://www.gusdurian.net/id/paguyuban/>, accessed November 1, 2019.

⁹⁶¹ For instance, a church in Ambon, a region with a history of bloody Muslim-Christian conflict, prayed for Gus Dur "Jemaat Kristen Ambon Kehilangan Gus Dur," *Liputan 6*, December 31, 2009, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/256912/jemaat-kristen-ambon-kehilangan-gus-dur>, accessed November 1, 2019.

Dur.⁹⁶² It is clear that Indonesian Protestants have devised delicate ways to commemorate Gus Dur without transgressing the consensus surrounding sainthood within their religious tradition.

The more obvious form of cultivating Gus Dur's interreligious legacy, which is shared by Indonesian Protestants and Catholics, is through interfaith actions. For instance, during the fasting time in the month of Ramadan, many churches provide cheap or free foods for those Muslims observing the *sahur* (the meal before beginning the fasting) or to break the fast.⁹⁶³ In other words, the remembering of Gus Dur does not stop only on the intellectual level but also fuels the practices of people aiming to re-live and implement his ideas and values.

While Muslims and Christians respect and commemorate both Frans van der Lugt and Gus Dur, do they regard these figures as saints? There is no straight answer to this question. Nevertheless, the *vox populi* method might bring an affirmative answer to the question because the answer would be up to the community of faith. From Ibn 'Arabī's perspective of *walāya*, one can argue that Father Frans has manifested God's Divine Names and exemplified the understanding of connections between all creations and God. As *walāya* is a universal sphere that encompasses all human beings, one's religious identity does not restrict its manifestation. On the other hand, Gus Dur was not a Christian, and

⁹⁶² Andri Purnawan. An Interview via WhatsApp with Pastor Andri Purnawan from *Gereja Kristen Indonesia Darmo Satelit*, Surabaya, East Java, September 21, 2019.

⁹⁶³ In 2013, Gus Dur's wife participated in a *sahur* event at a Protestant church in Jombang. Sutono Surya, "Istri Gus Dur Sahur Bareng Umat Kristiani di Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan," *Tribun News*, August 1, 2013, <https://manado.tribunnews.com/2013/08/01/istri-gus-dur-sahur-bareng-umat-kristiani-di-gereja-kristen-jawi-wetan>, accessed November 1, 2019.

everything he had done might be rooted in his faith as a Muslim. Without attempting to include Gus Dur in Christian fold, that fact does not hinder Christians from perceiving Gus Dur as someone who responds positively to God's universal self-communication. Gus Dur demonstrates how holiness, as God's domain, works universally. *Vox populi* does not give a conclusive answer related to sainthood, but at least that method provides adequate tools for today's Christians, across denominations, to approach a saintly figure interreligiously.

D. Redefining Sainthood: Saints as “Sign-Event”

At this point, I concur with Cunningham that today's multi-religious context demands a redefinition of the meaning of sanctity or sainthood. In the Islamic tradition, the saints or friends of God are the ones of which the hadith states, “When they are seen, God is remembered.”⁹⁶⁴ In other words, the saints function as icons of God. This broader definition also applies to a Christian understanding of a saint. For instance, Paul Tillich defines saints as “persons who are transparent for the ground of being which is revealed through them and who are able to enter a revelatory constellation as mediums.”⁹⁶⁵ As a friend of God, a saint becomes a “sign-event” because she signifies something beyond herself.

Furthermore, when people direct their gaze to a saint, they catch a glimpse of what has transformed the saint, which potentially may change them as well. Cunningham highlights that aspect when defining a saint as “a person so grasped by a religious vision that it becomes central to his or her life in a way that radically changes the person and leads

⁹⁶⁴ Ibn Majah Al-Qazwini, *English Translation of Sunān Ibn Majah*, Vol. 5, 296.

⁹⁶⁵ Tillich, *ST I*, 121.

others to glimpse the value of that vision.”⁹⁶⁶ Encountering a saint means to glimpse the vision that has transformed the person. Cunningham elucidates, “Every Christian is, in a certain sense, a saint; but when a Christian’s love and faith is such that it becomes a sign for others who are grasped by the power and the creativity of that faith or love, then the person is a saint in a more specific and concrete way.”⁹⁶⁷

Cunningham’s definition of a saint is broad enough to be extended to people of different faith traditions because he understands “Christian” broadly following “the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on the presence of grace outside the visible parameters of institutional Christianity.”⁹⁶⁸ However, this definition might seem to exclude formally non-religious people. Instead of religious vision, God’s self-communication offers a universal ground for sanctity because even an atheist might embody a particular idea that leads his or her life into an authentic human being. That idea might be transmitted to other people who witness the person. Therefore, my working definition of a saint is *a person so grasped by God’s self-communication and responding positively in a way that transforms the person into an authentic human being and leads others to be transformed by God’s self-communication in their lives*. The three theological constructs I proposed in this dissertation inform this definition. It is possible to outline “an authentic human being” in the broad sense, which extended to include non-Christian religious identity and spirituality or even non-religious vision. According to Rahner, to live authentically requires faithfulness to one’s conscience.⁹⁶⁹ He says that an atheist, who rejects God conceptually,

⁹⁶⁶ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 65.

⁹⁶⁷ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 73.

⁹⁶⁸ Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 65.

⁹⁶⁹ Rahner, “On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation,” 294.

might respond positively to God's grace through self-giving action and embracing humankind and by living, as Egan suggests, "moderately, selflessly, honestly, courageously."⁹⁷⁰ The phrase "to be transformed by God's self-communication" correlates with the intermediary role of saints in advancing different modes of holiness in the world as the result of God's perpetual self-communication.⁹⁷¹

From a Christian perspective, this definition enables one to perceive Gus Dur as a saint because he has demonstrated a life of that authentic human being and inspired other people to experience God's grace in new ways. The openness of many Indonesian Christians toward building interreligious relations with their non-Christian neighbors is one example of experiencing God's grace in a new way through Gus Dur. In the case of Father Frans, his vision for peace and interreligious harmony has affected Syrian people who encountered him, even after his death. That vision is also an example of a different mode of holiness, i.e., to be an agent for peace.

An inclusive theology of saint perceives a saint as a "sign-event" of God in the world that draws other people to respond positively to God's self-communication. This understanding applies to interreligious relations between people of different faith traditions. Theologically, as I elucidate in chapter seven, praxis can be one of the loci where one encounters the hidden Christ.⁹⁷² Thus, praxis might pave the way for the recognition of sainthood interreligiously. As I mentioned earlier, the identification of a saint across religious boundaries requires encounter in terms of space, thoughts, and ethics. Among

⁹⁷⁰ Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season*, 127, 135; Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?*, 104. See also chapter 5 section C1.

⁹⁷¹ See chapter 7 section C2.

⁹⁷² See chapter 7 section C3.

these three requirements, praxis corresponds primarily to ethics. Father Frans might share the same space with Syrian Muslims, and Christianity and Islam may have similarities in their teachings. Still, if he had done nothing toward Syrian people, he would not be perceived as a saintly figure.

Edith Wyschogrod explicates how contemporary people can notice a saintly figure through nonverbal pedagogy. Rather than a perception of an argument through rational discourse, one recognizes a saint in a manner more similar to understanding a musical theme. To understand a musical theme, a person “must first have some notion of music and how people respond to it before the theme can be grasped.”⁹⁷³ Before one can understand the praxis of a saint, the person must have had a conscious perception of moral action. It is through this moral dimension that human beings can discriminate activities that belong to the realm of sanctity and not.⁹⁷⁴ Moreover, there are two aspects of understanding music: an appreciative and performative aspect. The appreciative aspect necessitates the hearer to focus on the music performers, not to look inside himself or herself. It is not an ordinary observation, because the hearer must pay attention to the experience of the performer that is manifested through expression or gesture. In the aftermath of the process of appreciation, the hearer may start to grasp the musical theme. Therefore, the appreciation changes the hearer from inside.⁹⁷⁵

Utilizing the cases of Father Frans and Gus Dur, people who gaze upon these two figures may gain the appreciative aspect even if only to some extent: they admire and respect what these two saintly figures do and get to know the visions that have driven their

⁹⁷³ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 47.

⁹⁷⁴ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 47.

⁹⁷⁵ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 47.

actions. However, admiration and respect might fail to stimulate imitation in terms of moral actions. Unlike music, moral understanding necessitates imitation of the observers after the observed: the performative aspect completes the perception of a person toward a saint. Wyschogrod states, “Appreciation and performance are mutually reinforcing. But in the case of moral acts, appreciation needs neither prompt nor reinforce moral action... Moral understanding misfires when appreciation, severed from performance, does not result in ‘making the movements’ after the saintly individual.”⁹⁷⁶ These two figures influence their surroundings, and the remembrance of them stimulate other people to be transformed from within and to continue their visions and works. Here imitation does not mean doing exactly the same things done by them. Instead, people emulate them creatively and in different ways. Similar to the reproduction of an excellent music performance might be as simple as repeating it through whistling or humming, people might imitate the saints through small things.

E. Remembering Gives Rise to Practice

To designate the *vox populi* approach to saints as a valid option for today’s Christians supports the theological constructs of an inclusive theology of sainthood. Recognizing a non-Christian person as a saint is not merely a theological exercise, but also a practical program to empower the Christian communities. As the only Christian denomination that possesses an official procedure of canonization of saints, the Catholic Church might find the *vox populi* approach acceptable because it does not negate the current system but complements it. On the other hand, for Protestant churches, the practice

⁹⁷⁶ Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism*, 48.

of remembering a saint strengthens the current understanding of the communion of saints by relating remembrance to praxis.

In this section, I will give practical suggestions for the inclusion of non-Christian saints, whom Christians perceive as saintly figures through the *vox populi* approach, into Christian practices. The goal is to incorporate non-Christian saints into the community of God's friends whose examples can be emulated by Christians.

Pilgrimage to the tomb or shrine of non-Christian saints becomes the first available venue. Here, I speak of pilgrimage to the tomb or shrine in the broader definition (place of commemoration), not limited only to the Catholic practice, which is comparable with the traditional Muslim practices of pilgrimage (*ziyāra*). Bagus Laksana conducted research on Javanese Muslims and Catholics in Indonesia who shared mutual sacred spaces of saints. He finds that the pilgrims there maintain their respective religious identity while being spiritually transformed by their experience of visiting a saint of different religious traditions.⁹⁷⁷ In the case of Protestants, who generally tend to dismiss the Catholic practice of pilgrimage, there are occasions in which they recollect the memories of a dead person through visitation to places. The fact that Indonesian Protestants visit the *Pesantren Tebuireng*, where Gus Dur's tomb is located, to learn and pay respect to the grave and even offer a prayer at the site, exemplifies my point. Haynes depicts the flow of pilgrims, including Protestants, to places in Germany and Poland that incite their memory of Bonhoeffer as one salient aspect of the cult of Bonhoeffer.⁹⁷⁸ In the United States, various organized trips and trails in commemoration of different events and leading figures of the

⁹⁷⁷ Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices*, chapter 6 and 7.

⁹⁷⁸ Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, 149-151.

civil rights movement, including Martin Luther King Jr., represent a contemporary form of pilgrimage.⁹⁷⁹ For instance, Southern Methodist University holds an annual program called “Civil Rights Pilgrimage” for their staff, faculty, and students to visit historical places related to the Civil Rights Movement and study the importance of racial justice.⁹⁸⁰ The last two examples illustrate my point on how contemporary Protestants are open to different forms of pilgrimage, which opens the possibility to conduct pilgrimages to places related to non-Christian saints.

Secondly is the calendar of saints, daily meditation, and sermons. I have mentioned Ellsberg’s book in which he includes non-Christian saints for daily meditation. In that book, he briefly exposes the saint’s writing and life narrative, which Christians can learn and imitate. Another example is Margot King’s “Calendar of Holy Women” that includes non-Christian figures, such as Sri Sarada Devi (July 20), a 19th century Hindu guru,⁹⁸¹ Rābi’a al-Adawiyya, a great Sufi (May 1),⁹⁸² and Supriya (February 28), an early follower of the Buddha.⁹⁸³ For Protestants, who are not familiar with a calendar of saints, it may be easier to employ daily meditation and magazine or other publications to present the life narrative of non-Christian saints to expand awareness of the wideness of God’s work. Furthermore, one can use the sermon to reference non-Christian saints for cultivating

⁹⁷⁹ For instance, the US Civil Rights Trail lists important places across the states with deep connection to the civil rights movement. “United States Civil Rights Trail,” <https://civilrightstrail.com/>, accessed November 4, 2019.

⁹⁸⁰ “Civil Rights Pilgrimage,” Southern Methodist University, Embrey Human Rights Program, <https://www.smu.edu/Dedman/Academics/InstitutesCenters/EmbreyHumanRights/travel/civilrights>, accessed November 4, 2019.

⁹⁸¹ Margot King, 1990 *Calendar of Holy Women* (Toronto: Peregrina Pub., 1989). I am indebted to Margot King’s children, Bernard King and Sarah Head King, who sent me the digital copies of these calendars, and to Mary Frances Coady, a fellow scholar at the Collegeville Institute, for introducing me to them.

⁹⁸² Margot King, 1992 *Calendar of Holy Women* (Toronto: Peregrina Pub., 1991).

⁹⁸³ Margot King, 1994 *Calendar of Holy Women* (Toronto: Peregrina Pub., 1993).

Christian spirituality and praxis. For instance, Indonesian Protestant preachers sometimes mention Gus Dur in their sermon to invoke the responsibility of Christians in a pluralistic society.

Thirdly, the prayer of people, both within the church liturgy and outside the church, may provide a robust space for remembering non-Christian saints. This point intersects with the first point of pilgrimage to some extent. One Sunday in an Episcopal church, the name of Jamal Khashoggi was mentioned by the priest in the prayer of people. A dissident and audacious journalist from Saudi Arabia, who was brutally murdered on October 2, 2018, Khashoggi is remembered for his journalistic work for seeking the truth. In some churches in Indonesia, the prayer of people mentions Gus Dur as an instrument of God for Indonesian people. The prayer also urges Christians to follow his legacy in spreading peace, justice, and mercy for all people.

After demonstrating the plausibility of recognizing a non-Christian as a saint from a Christian theological perspective in chapters five to seven, this chapter investigates the *vox populi* approach to saints as a working method that is applicable to Catholics and Protestants. The *vox populi* emphasizes the role of the community, i.e., the sensibility of people when encountering saintly figures. Although the recognition of saints requires an encounter in space, thoughts, and ethics, as demonstrated by the two case studies above, it is the last aspect that plays the most significant role. Ethics correlates with the moral dimension of human interaction. People identify someone as a saint because his or her actions signify something important and meaningful: saints are “sign-events.” This is the answer to the second question I posed at the beginning of this chapter.

Regarding the third question on the connection between the recognition of a non-Christian saint and imitation, I suggest remembrance as the answer. As demonstrated in the cases of Father Frans and Gus Dur, keeping alive the memory of saintly figures generates imitation in various forms. Imitation can happen in many ways and does not necessarily appear in the same manner as demonstrated by the saint. Instead, the saint may become the source of inspiration for new forms of practice, as revealed in the figures mentioned in this chapter: St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Mohandas Gandhi, Father Frans, and Gus Dur. Each of these saintly figures has inspired a wide range of people after them to extend their work and legacy.

At this point, I need to clarify that even though I have used primarily public figures as examples, I do not underestimate the role of ordinary people whose influences might not be as visible as Gandhi or St. Thérèse. Anyone can potentially fit the definition of a saint I formulated and be part of the web of holiness. The reason for choosing more famous figures reflects my intention to draw the reader's attention to the web of holiness in which non-Christian people have participated, albeit invisibly and unnoticed by most Christians. The communion of God's friends comprises countless people, Christians and non-Christians. While it is essential to identify them through remembrance, many others are hidden, overlooked, and even forgotten, but continue to inspire the advancement of the multiple paths of holiness in the world.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, the phenomena of cross-veneration of saints among Muslims and Christians and their spiritual implications drew my interest as a Christian theologian to reflect further on the topic of theology of saints and sainthood. I believe that the comparative theology approach can bring fresh insights to the current theological discourse on saints as well as to the Christian practices related to saints, especially in the context of today's multi-faith world. The initial question that guides this dissertation is this: "Is it possible for Christians to acknowledge individuals of other traditions as saints?" I believe that at this point, after constructing an inclusive theology of saints and its features throughout the chapters, I can give an affirmative answer from a theological perspective. Moreover, my answer is resulted from a robust comparison with a non-Christian tradition that demonstrates the usefulness of a confessional comparative theology method. At the same time, I convey that affirmation in humility, because theology, in its essence, is humans' reflections and response to God's revelation, and those reflections are communal endeavors, although they might begin with individuals. In other words, I hope that my answer will stimulate discussions related to the topic, not only among professional theologians, but also among people of faith and even of different faith traditions.

I propose an inclusive theology of saints that has three main features: saints as manifestations and revealers of God's self-communication, the hiddenness of saints, and saints as companions. Each of those features is constructed through a comparison between Muslim and Christian thoughts on various aspects of sainthood, as well as some more

specific and personal illustrations. The primary Muslim interlocutor of this comparative endeavor is Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240) and his understanding of *walāya*. He represents the classical Sunni and Sufi perspectives primarily. For the Christian interlocutors, I draw theological insights mostly from three Catholic theologians: Karl Rahner, Jean-Luc Marion, and Elizabeth Johnson; and also from two Protestant theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Paul Tillich. The composition of these thinkers displays my approach as a constructive one.

A. The Three Theological Constructs and the Learning Types of Comparative Theology

In the first theological construct, I compared Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of the universality of *walāya* with Rahner's theology of grace as God's self-communication to all human beings. By emphasizing grace as inherently infused in a human's very being, all human beings are potentially saints, even non-Christians. As long as a human gives a positive response to God's self-communication by accepting his or her existence, that person partakes in the salvific inter-communicative mediations for other human beings in their own ways. Thus, from a Christian perspective, sanctity is always connected with Christ through grace, although the person is not always aware of that connection. Numerous hidden saints are Christians and non-Christians alike. The task of identifying the hidden saints requires an a posteriori method through a direct encounter. The phenomena of cross-veneration of saints exemplify that principle because people recognize saints through direct experience, even though it might be through indirect means such as narratives, memories, the feeling of serenity, or even the efficacy of their plea. Last, regarding the criteria of acknowledging the hidden saints, I provided some examples of

positive responses to God's grace by drawing from Rahner's notion of the mystics of everyday life and Morris' eight universal paths of *walāya*. This first theological construct displays a combination of the mode of intensification, recovery, and appropriation of the possible learning types in comparative theology according to Cornille. It is intensification because I draw on similarities between Christian and Muslim ideas of sainthood. Second, it is recovery because I am revalidating Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian in dialogue with Islam. Last, it presents an appropriation because I borrow new ideas from Morris' elaboration of Ibn 'Arabī's conception of *walāya*.

Next, in the second theological construct, I underline the notion of the hiddenness in sainthood. In both religious traditions, generally speaking, people perceive saints as something visible and recognizable by people because of their powerful presence even after their death. By delineating the aspect of hiddenness, which is often overlooked in the discussion of sainthood, I want to highlight the fact that the hidden saints are of the same importance as the other saints who are acknowledged by people. Furthermore, the notion of hiddenness is integral to the sanctity itself. Drawing insights from Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the *malāmiyya* and Marion's phenomenological account of holiness, I elucidate three types of interpretation of sainthood that correspond to the idea of hiddenness: hiddenness as a liminal space between banality and holiness, only saints are capable of recognizing other saints, and the transparency of saints as icons of God. Through these types of interpretation, I argue that a person becomes a saint when God's holiness grasps her. Yet, the deeper she is participating in the process of sanctification, the more profound her realization of imperfection and sinfulness. Despite the lack of self-awareness, the saint acts as an icon of God who mediates God's holiness to other human beings and enables other

people to partake in the journey of sanctification as well. This way, the web of holiness is always expanding through the saints who act as the inter-communicative mediations. Last, I explain the nature of the communion of saints through the interplay between hiddenness and visibility. Following the Islamic principle of “only a saint can recognize another saint,” I argue that people who have been captivated by God’s holiness through saints’ mediations are capable of recognizing their sanctity even if only to some extent precisely because they are all part of the communion of saints. Therefore, the paradox of sanctity explains the hiddenness of saints: the saint’s sanctity remains invisible to herself, yet other people might identify her as a bearer of God’s holiness. The theological construct of the hiddenness of saints exhibits mainly the intensification type of learning because it underlines how each religious tradition demonstrates its understanding of it, including the differences between the two. Besides the intensification, it represents the recovery type of learning because I made some modifications to Marion’s idea of saints through the comparison with the Islamic principle “only saints can recognize other saints” by emphasizing the importance of the community which perceives the sanctity of a saint. Saints, even non-Christian saints, are recognizable from these traits: modest life, selflessness, and willingness to serve others. This way of recognition illuminates the Christian understanding of the communion of saints as encompassing all faithful people, while at the same time each member might undergo a different process of sanctification. As a result, each can recognize varying degrees of holiness, even in people of different religious traditions.

The third theological construct, saints as companions, expands the Christian concept of the communion of saints to include non-Christian people by utilizing the metaphor of the community of God’s friends. It is informed by Johnson’s idea of the

companionship paradigm that situates the saints as intermediaries because they mediate connections between human beings and other humans, both the living and the dead, and with God in the web of holiness. This understanding is similar to the idea of *walāya*, which according to Ibn ‘Arabī is friendship with God and people that are open to all people. Furthermore, the meaning of intermediary is transformed by memory as a catalyst for the ongoing relationship. Here, memory does not concern only with commemoration or veneration, but more of an anamnesis, i.e., making something past to be active in the present. In this regard, the memory may bring solidarity through multiple paths of holiness as the saints manifest and reveal new modes of holiness in the world. This theological construct indicates two types of learning in comparative theology, i.e., intensification and appropriation. Intensification because it compares Johnson’s companionship paradigm and Ibn ‘Arabī’s idea of the “Seal of the Muhammadan Saints.” The comparison clarifies that the hierarchy in the system of saints does not always impose hierarchical relations between saints and ordinary people because there is the interplay between the equal relationships of all believers and the hiddenness of saints. Next, it demonstrates the appropriation type of learning because the comparison with Ibn ‘Arabī’s elaboration on various types of saints inspires the possibility of the multiple paths of holiness, including paths that are exemplified by non-Christian saints.

B. Contribution to the Field of Comparative Theology

This dissertation uses the vantage point of a confessional comparative theology, i.e., a Christian perspective. I do not claim that an inclusive theology of saints with its three theological constructs will be compatible with non-Christian religions, including Islam, but

it is a good fit for the Christian theological discourse. More specifically, it is an example of comparative systematic theology, a field that has been emerging in the past few years. Through a comparison with Islam on the topic of saints and sainthood, it provides a Christian reflection on the same topic that contributes to not only the Christian idea of the communion of saints but also Christian practices related to saints. In this regard, the construction of an inclusive theology of saints serves its original purpose to provide a theological rationale to the practice of cross-venerations among Christians and Muslims to saintly figures.

Next, the dissertation contributes to the field of comparative theology between Islam and Christianity. In my humble awareness, it is still the least developed field in comparative theology compared to others such as Christianity and Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism, or Christianity and Judaism. In particular, the dissertation adds to the number of comparative works between Islam and Christianity on the topic related to saints and sainthood.

C. Beyond This Dissertation

Discussion on saints in Christian theology is closely related to the Christian understanding of the Church or ecclesiology. Consequently, my proposal of an inclusive theology of saints in this dissertation has implications for further discussions on contemporary ecclesiology from both Catholic and Protestant perspective, because it brings the question of the place of non-Christian people to the fore in the light of the primary Christian teaching of the communion of saints. In other words, further discussions on a similar topic will link the ecclesiology and theology of religions. Since I use the

confessional comparative theology as the approach of this dissertation, the discussions should concern primarily with Christian communities' understanding of themselves in relation to their non-Christian neighbors. It is not my intention to impose the theological constructs on other religious traditions, nor do I plan to include non-Christian people into the Christian realm arbitrarily. I believe that further discussions on ecclesiology and theology of religions must take the diversity of religious traditions seriously, and comparative theology can help that endeavor.

Beyond the theological discourse, I hope that the dissertation might also bring practical insights for interreligious relations, i.e., how the figures of holy people could pave a better relationship between people of different religions. Notably, the last chapter exemplifies a glimpse of those insights with the case studies of Frans van der Lugt and Abdurrahman Wahid and how their radiant presence still influences Muslims and Christians even after their own deaths. For example, both Father Frans and Gus Dur pointed out the ways in which Muslims, Christians, and people of other religious traditions can live in harmony in spite of their differences. The memory of each saintly figure continues to influence those who are still living to follow their example in different ways. This demonstrates the multiple paths of holiness created by people who respond positively to God's grace. In this regard, both figures have acted as mediations that connect people to God. Here, the notion of the saints' intermediary power as usually understood in the context of veneration of saints in Islam and Christianity receives a different connotation, because the transformation happened not in the context of a patron-petitioner mode of relationship, but within the community of friends of God. The saints are fellow companions and emulating their paths can be done in various ways. Similarly, other saints may bring

tremendous impact to their surroundings in other ways as they reveal different modes of holiness and continue to inspire other human beings. Some of them might be widely recognized as saintly figures, while many others will remain hidden. Yet, they are all part of the same community of God's friends.

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