

# What is a Saint?

*A talk given by Fr Ian Graham at the Fellowship's 1998 Summer Conference*

Our word 'saint' derives from the Latin *sanctus*, meaning 'holy'. In Greek, the word *hagios*, or 'holy' is used as we use 'saint' in English.

If we turn to the Scriptures for an answer to the question, 'What is holiness / the holy?', we will find an uncompromising answer. For the authors and compilers of the biblical texts 'holy' is by definition what God is, and the realm of the holy is that which pertains to God. So, for example, for the poet of Isaiah 57:15 God is 'the high and lofty one... whose name is Holy' [note the capital H], who 'dwell[s] in the high and holy place' Similarly, the Psalmist of Psalm 98 (99) calls on the peoples: 'Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he!... Extol the LORD our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!... Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy.' And, of course, there is the hymn of the Seraphim in Isaiah 6:3 which is the basis of the hymn we still use in the Liturgy : 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts.'

This holiness is initially seen as a uniquely divine quality. In the song of Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel she says, 'There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you ; there is no one like our God (1 Sam. 2:2). God, however, is known in the human encounter with him, and so the concept of holiness extends its semantic field to include persons, places or things which promote this encounter, or through which the encounter can and does take place. 'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground' (Ex. 3:5). 'Do not let anyone enter the house of the LORD except the priests and ministering Levites; they may enter, for they are holy' (2 Chron. 23:6). 'Make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy' (Ex. 30:35). Time, too, can be holy - the word is used to describe the Sabbath ('the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD' [Ex. 31:15]) and the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:12).

It is clear from the sorts of things that can be described as holy that at this level of meaning the term is non-ethical, or perhaps pre-ethical. It has been suggested that the Hebrew term for 'holy' may be derived from a root with the basic meaning of to separate or to cut. Whether this etymology is correct or not the religious practices envisaged in the Old Testament, especially in the priestly literature, often involve some form of demarcation between the 'holy' and the 'not-holy' ( usually translated in English versions by the word 'common' or 'profane' ) with appropriate sanctions to preserve this separation. Thus the person who fails to keep the Sabbath must be put to death (Ex. 31:15) and the one who makes holy incense or anointing oil for personal use is to be 'cut off from the people' (Ex. 30:33,38). But these sanctions do not involve ethical judgement, any more than does the use of the word 'profane/common'. Ezekiel's vision of the city named 'The LORD is there' includes a wall around the temple area 'to make a separation between the holy and the common' (42:20), yet the whole city, as its name suggests, is indwelt by the LORD. Even clearer is the story of David in 1 Samuel 21. Fleeing from Saul, he comes to the sanctuary at Nob, where he asks Ahimelech the priest for five loaves of bread. Ahimelech replies, "I have no ordinary [sc. common/profane] bread at hand, but only holy bread' [i.e. as a later verse makes clear, the bread of the Presence] (v.4).

Thus when we read in Leviticus 10:10, 'You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean,' we should not see the pairs of antonyms as being in exact parallel. The first pair ('holy' and 'common') have as their primary referent the relation, positive or negative, of God to the world, while the second pair ('unclean' and 'clean') are concerned with the ritual or ceremonial status of human beings in the world. The effect of the chiasm holy-common-unclean-clean, however, which appears both here and in the same form twice in Ezekiel (22:26 in a

negative context, and 44:23 in a positive one) is to align the holy with the clean, and the profane with the unclean. In other words, the unclean is seen implicitly as opposed to, or detrimental to, the holy, and the clean as serving to promote or reinforce the encounter with holiness.

We should note, however, that we are still at the pre-ethical stage. Cleanness and uncleanness are first and foremost ritual concepts, and do not necessarily bring with them overtones of virtue and vice. In the story of David and Ahimelech already referred to, Ahimelech's offer of the holy bread is conditional upon the ritual purity of David's followers. 'I have... holy bread - provided that the young men have kept themselves from women' (1 Sam. 21:4). Sexual intercourse is not to be regarded as immoral per se, for it is commanded by God (Genesis 1:27-28: 'So God created humankind in his image... God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply"'). However, the act renders one ritually unclean for a space of time (cf. Lev. 15:18), and thus temporarily unable to participate in the holy encounter (compare also the prohibition of intercourse for three days before the giving of the Law at Sinai [Ex. 19:15]). In the Hebrew Old Testament David's response that "the vessels of the young men are holy" (v.5) shows an interesting overlap occurring between the categories of the holy and the clean.

A clearer instance, perhaps, of the pre-ethical dimension of the clean/unclean distinction (in that it avoids the murky topic of sexual purity) is found in the book of Tobit. Tobit himself is clearly intended to be seen as a virtuous man. 'I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life. I performed many acts of charity for my kindred and my people... I was mindful of God with all my heart' (Tob. 1:3,12). His works of mercy are described: 'I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it' (Tob. 1:17). But the last of these acts - the burial of the dead - though in itself clearly meritorious, rendered him ritually unclean. Indeed, it is one of the ironies of the story of Tobit that his good deeds and care to observe ritual purity laws initially create, and then exacerbate his distressed situation. The king punishes him for his burial of his fellow-Jews by confiscation of all his property and threatens him with death. Undaunted, Tobit continues his course of action under the next king. Had he not buried the murdered Israelite at the feast of Pentecost he would not have contracted uncleanness, would not have had to spend the night outside the house, and thus would not have been blinded by the sparrows' droppings. But Tobit, like Job, is vindicated by the act of God at the end of the story, and is thereby confirmed as a virtuous man.

This simple, almost mechanical, view of cultic cleanness or uncleanness, and of the an-ethical nature of God's holiness could never be the complete story. True, God is holy, but he is also good and righteous. Once again these are terms which are defined by reference to God himself (e.g. Job 4:17-19), but because he is good over against the evil that is in humankind, and righteous over against the unrighteousness of his creatures, these concepts also begin to overlap with the idea of holiness. Moreover, because Israel is the chosen nation of God and therefore 'holy' both by virtue of its separation and distinction from all other nations, and because there the encounter with God takes place more clearly and fully than anywhere else, it finds itself summoned to reflect the holiness of God. This distinctiveness will be shown both in the personal and corporate observation of the laws of cultic purity, and in the ethical life of righteousness which reveals the nature of God. 'The Holy God shows himself holy by righteousness' (Is. 5:16), and his chosen people are called to do the same. Thus in a basically priestly, cultic text such as Leviticus 19 we find that the 'motto' (as it were) 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy' (v.2) introduces legislation on inter alia the correct forms of sacrifice (vv.5-8); care for the poor and the alien (vv.9-10); and the prohibition of all forms of theft and dishonesty (vv.11-16). An important shift has taken place. 'Holiness' has become an ethical as well as a cultic quality, and its locus has been broadened to include the people of God, by derivation from God himself.

This leads to further developments. With the diaspora and the rise of the synagogues the focal point of holiness within the community gradually became the Scripture, at first alongside, and then eventually superseding, the Temple. As a result, we begin to find references to Scripture as 'holy' - in 1 Maccabees 12:9, for example, and in the New Testament in Romans 1:2 and 2 Timothy 3:15. In addition we begin to find references to a group of holy people - the saints - who in some ways seem to embody the holiness of the community, and also bear witness to that holiness by enduring tribulation. Thus in Daniel 7 'the holy ones (i.e. saints) of the Most High' are worn out by the little horn with eyes and a mouth which wars against them and 'was prevailing over them until the Ancient One came; then judgement was given for the holy ones of the Most High, and the time arrived when the holy ones gained possession of the kingdom' (vv.25; 21-22). And the righteous man of Wisdom 5 'will stand with great confidence in the presence of those who have afflicted him,' who will say, 'This is the man whom we once held in derision and made a byword of reproach. We thought... that his end was without honour. Why has he been numbered among the sons of God? And why is his lot among the saints?' (vv.1-5). The suffering servant of Isaiah 52 and 53, who is 'despised and rejected by others' (53:3) 'oppressed and afflicted' and 'taken away' 'by a perversion of justice' (vv.7-8) and yet will 'see light' and be allotted 'a portion with the great' (vv.11-12) may be another example, though he is nowhere called 'holy' and his vindication is not as clearly eschatological as is that of the other two cases.

The exact relationship between these 'holy ones' or 'saints' and the people of Israel is not easy to determine. In Daniel the two would seem to be coterminous, while in Wisdom the direct address ('Do not invite death by the error of your life, or bring on destruction by the works of your hands') suggests that the ungodly spoken of are to be found within the Israelite community. The picture is further complicated by the fact that there is a second group of 'holy ones/saints' who are not members of Israel at all. These are beings who accompany God ('The LORD came from Sinai... with him were myriads of holy ones' [Deut. 33:2]), who form the members of his council (Ps. 88(89):5,7), who pass (and perhaps execute) judgement (Dan. 4:17), who live in glory (Sir. 45:2), and also sometimes appear in visions, possibly in an interpretative role, if Gabriel is one of their number (Dan. 8:13-14,16). If the figure of Michael in the book of Daniel is one of these 'holy ones' then we may deduce that some of them, at least, have a part to play in protecting the land of Israel (Dan. 12:1). But if this is the case it is a matter of spiritual warfare rather than intercession. This last seems to be a particularly human task, and is usually performed by the living on behalf of the living, as e.g. in the prophecy of Amos (7:1-6). There is, however, one late story which envisages an intercessory role for dead human saints. This is the vision recounted by Judas (Maccabaeus) in 2 Maccabees 15:12-14. 'What he saw was this: Onias, who had been high priest [and was murdered in 4:34]... was praying with outstretched hands for the whole body of the Jews. Then in the same fashion another appeared, distinguished by his grey hair and dignity, and of marvellous majesty and authority. And Onias spoke, saying, 'This is a man who loves the family of Israel and prays much for the people and the holy city - Jeremiah, the prophet of God.'

When we turn to New Testament concepts of the holy we find some significant developments. The word may still be used of places or objects which facilitate the holy encounter - the Temple, for example, which is sometimes referred to as 'the holy place' (Acts 6:13; 21:28), or, more generally, the city of Jerusalem, the 'holy city' (Matt. 27:53). The Law is holy according to St Paul (Rom. 7:12), as are the angels (Mark 8:38), the prophets (2 Pet. 3:2), the apostles (Eph. 3:5) and, as already mentioned, the Scriptures. So too are hands held in prayer (1 Tim. 2:8) and the kiss of peace between believers (1 Thess. 5:26).

The God who is met in these holy places, people and actions is himself holy. Jesus addresses him as 'Holy Father' (John 17:11) and teaches his disciples to pray 'hallowed be your name' (Matt.6:9).

Significantly for Christology, Jesus, too, is 'the Holy One' or 'the Holy One of God' (Acts 3:14; John 6:69).

But whatever the theological importance of these passages to New Testament thought, numerically they are insignificant. The word *hagios* in one form or another appears in the New Testament 235 times. On four occasions the reference is to God [sc. the Father], and on another eight it is Jesus who is referred to. There is one further reference (1 John 2:20) which might refer to either, making a total of thirteen references altogether to the Father and the Son. In contrast to this somewhat paltry figure ninety-one references, by far the largest single block, are to the Holy Spirit. This surely marks an important shift in thought. While 'holiness' is still defined by reference to God (since the Spirit is divine) it is no longer a static concept but a dynamic one, in keeping with the activity of the Spirit which, like the wind, 'blows where it chooses' (John 3:8). The cultic order has given place to a charismatic one, something that is clear from one of the earliest descriptions we possess of Christian worship: 'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation... If anyone speaks in a tongue let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret... Let two or three prophets speak... For you can all prophesy one by one' (1 Cor. 14:26-31). (We might note in passing that although a new institutional order soon developed in the liturgy of the Church, it was superimposed on and retained some of the elements of charismatic freedom - for instance, the eucharistic president's extemporisation of the anaphora, which survived in some places well into the 4th century.)

This new dynamism of sanctity carried with it important implications for the holy community. The Church, as the new Israel, inherited the task of revealing the holiness of God to the world. But since the primary locus of this holiness was now perceived to be the active, vivifying, gift-giving, anointing Spirit the form this revelation would take could no longer be simply that of a city set on a hill, which cannot be hidden. The light is to 'shine before others,' true, but 'so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven' (Matt. 5:16). Active mission is imperative for the early Church, and that mission has its source in the Holy Spirit (frequently in the book of Acts it is the Spirit who inaugurates a new stage of the Church's mission), and is carried on by the holy life of the Christian community. By this stage there is no doubt of the ethical content of the term 'holiness'. The holy life is the life of and in the Spirit which can be contrasted with the life of the flesh. The latter, according to St Paul, includes 'fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, etc.', while the former includes 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,' and an absence of conceit and competitiveness (Gal. 5:19-26). The cultic distinctions between clean and unclean, holy and common, have been condensed into a simple ethical antithesis - the holy is opposed to the (morally) unclean or impure, e.g. Revelation 21 & 22: 'nothing unclean will enter' the holy city (21:27); 'outside are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and everyone who loves and practises falsehood' (22:15).

But we should note the corporate nature of all this. As Israel was a holy nation, so is the Church (1 Peter 2:9). 'Each is given the manifestation of the Spirit [the particular gift of the Spirit peculiar to himself/herself] for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7) 'for building up the body of Christ' (Eph. 4:13) - a metaphor on which all of us would do well to meditate. Thus, in the words of Metropolitan John of Pergamon: 'Individualism is incompatible with Christian spirituality. None can possess the Spirit as an individual, but only as a member of the community. When the Spirit blows the result is never to create good individual Christians but members of a community'. (Christian Spirituality I p.27) Unsurprisingly, then, we find the word *hagios* used only once in the New Testament to refer to a specific individual (Mark 6:20 - John the Baptist), but at least sixty-one (perhaps sixty-three) times in the plural to refer to the 'saints' of the Christian community. They are sanctified, as it were, en bloc.

Within this holy community, however, there are certain individuals who are called to exhibit the holy life in a particularly open and public way. Where the paths of the world and the Church cross, and cross they must if the Church is to be the Holy Spirit in action in the world, there will be times when members of the Body of Christ are required to testify to its holiness in the face of opposition from the forces arrayed against it. This testimony will include suffering, and perhaps even death, as the archetypal witness (Jesus himself) found. But faithful witnessing, even to the point of death, will be rewarded with a crown of life (Rev 2:10).

The faithful witness (i.e. martyr), then, is the representative Christian in the encounter between the Church and the world. As one who has been born again through the Spirit into the communion of love which is the life of the Spirit, he or she has 'crossed over from death into life' (1 Jn. 3:14) and no hardship, distress persecution... or peril" not even death itself, 'will be able to separate' [him or her] from this love - the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8: 35-39). Even after death the martyr remains a member of the holy community, linked to all the others by the love that is stronger than death. As with the 'saints' of the Old Testament, their ultimate vindication will be eschatological, when the whole of the holy community will be revealed in the body of Christ in its fullness and perfection. The great cloud of witnesses is waiting for us, for apart from us they will not be made perfect.

In one sense, however, they have already arrived. For us on this side of the River of Death membership of the holy community always involves a certain tension between the now and the not yet. We are saints, but we must also become saints. This duality is clear in many of the New Testament epistles, addressed as they are to the "saints", urging them to adopt 'holy' (i.e. ethical) ways of life (e.g. Col. 1:2 & Ch.3) But those who are on the further shore have passed beyond this tension - away from the body they are nonetheless at home with the Lord, walking by sight and not by faith ( cf. 2 Cor. 5:6-8). Just as the kingdom that is to come is already here, so too their vindication has already begun.

From some time in the 2nd century, therefore, the individual martyr began to be referred to as *hagios* (i.e. saint). This title was further extended, first to the confessors (i.e. those who had suffered for their faith but not to the point of death) and then to the ascetics (who in their own way bore witness to the fact that the values of the church were not the values of the world). Their tombs were preserved and the memorial of their 'birthday into eternity' began to be kept at first by the local community and then, in some cases, more widely. They were invoked more and more as intercessors and their lives were presented (and sometimes invented!) as models of holiness for emulation by the faithful. Gradually the fully developed cult of the saints made its appearance.

This brief analysis of some of the significance of the word 'saint' has taken us a long way from the current general misconception about sanctity - misconceptions neatly summarised last year in Earl Spencer's apostrophe to his sister at her funeral:

*There is a temptation to rush to canonise your memory, there is no need to do so. You stand tall enough as a human being of unique qualities not to need to be seen as a saint. Indeed to sanctify your memory would be to miss out on the very core of your being, your wonderfully mischievous sense of humour with a laugh that bent you double.*

*Your joy for life transmitted wherever you took your smile and the sparkle in those unforgettable eyes. Your boundless energy which you could barely contain.*

*But your greatest gift was your intuition and it was a gift you used wisely. This is what underpinned all your other wonderful attributes and if we look to analyse what it was about you that had such a wide appeal we find it in your instinctive feel for what was really important in all our lives.*

What has caused this emasculation? Sadly it must be admitted that some of the blame must be placed at the Church's door. We have been too ready to see holiness in individualistic and purely ethical terms. To this end we have created plaster lives for plaster saints. Rather than accept that, in the words of Constantine Tsirpanlis, 'Sanctity has as many forms as there are human individualities' and that the saints 'are the proof ... that holiness and Theosis can be achieved by any man, already in this earthly life' we have too often attempted to squeeze the saints into a single mould labelled 'holiness' and have ignored the distortions thus produced.

At times, of course, this may spring from a good motive - the desire to see and show only the best in those one admires, and wishes others to admire. This has an honourable pedigree. St John Chrysostom himself claimed that Sts Peter and Paul did not really have a disagreement about sharing table-fellowship with gentiles (Gal.2:11 ff.) but were both play-acting to drive the point home to those of lower faith. In more modern times Fr Nomikos Vaporis in his translation of the life and works of St Kosmas, the hieromartyr and equal to the apostles, admits he has deliberately suppressed 'some rather uncharitable remarks and characterisations of Jews,' because they would be 'unedifying and destructive' and 'detract from the otherwise very positive and uplifting ideas Kosmas has to offer'. No doubt he was correct in thinking that the publication of the passages would lead to discussion well away from the important topic of the saint's life and teachings but it might also be edifying one day to read an account of someone who became a saint in spite of blemishes as well as because of a pious life

At other times there is no such excuse. An absence of information has become an excuse for the creation of what at times amounts to no more than pious fiction. Where the Anglo Saxon homilist Aelfric in his 'life' (actually a catalogue of posthumous miracles) of St Swithin was content to complain, 'we have not found how the Bishop lived in this world recorded in any book... It was the carelessness of those who knew him in his lifetime that they would not record his life and work for those who came after', others have been less reticent. I remember some years ago The Orthodox Word promising an article on the holy childhood of St Herman of Alaska. Being aware that not even the saint's name in the world (i.e. before his tonsuring) is known with any certainty, I looked forward to it with some interest. The resulting article which also forms Chapter XII of Volume III of the Little Russian Philokalia consists in equal parts of the general religious and social history of St Herman's native town and pious speculation. But this is a model of restraint compared with the stories of the infancy of other saints. (Perhaps the best known example is that of the infant St Nicholas refusing his mother's breast on Wednesdays and Fridays! ).

There are times when this zeal has even led to the creation of new saints. Father Hippolyte Delehaye, the great Bollandist, at the beginning of this century traced the steps whereby the Martyr Procopius the Reader and exorcist of the church at Jerusalem, martyred at Caesarea in Palestine (22 November) is metamorphosed into the Great Martyr Procopius the Soldier (born Neanias) former Duke of Alexandria and persecutor of the Christians (8 July). Similar motives presumably underlie the attempts to name all of the seventy apostles by lifting names from other sections of the New Testament, especially the Pauline greetings. Thus we have such 'apostles' as Silas and Silvanus (30 July) counted as two, though probably originally the same person; Cephas better known as Peter (30 March; 8 December), under which name he appears in the list of the Twelve; and Caesar (30 March; 8 December), better known as the Emperor Nero, who appears by virtue of Philippians 4:22: 'All the saints greet you, especially those from Caesar's household.' Having once been entered in the calendar, all of these saints are provided with episcopal sees and edifying lives.

We must be careful here not to condemn too harshly. Zeal created these saints, and although it may have been 'zeal not according to knowledge' the elaborate edifice is built on a small foundation of

fact. The Lord did appoint seventy (or seventy-two) apostles, even if none of their names or fates are known, and there really was a martyr Procopius, who deserves to be honoured for his courageous faith and for his holiness. While we should certainly purge our calendar of the grosser fictions (Sts Barlaam, Iosaph and Abenner (19 November)- characters in a fictional Christianisation of the story of the Buddha- and St Caesar of the seventy are my own pet peeves ), we should exercise a certain cautious restraint in our activity. God is a God of truth, and he is no more served by denying what is true than he is by affirming what is false.

There is another form of saint creation which is a little more complex, but which has also at times brought the Church dishonour. As we know, the canonisation process in Orthodoxy is far less formal than it is in Roman Catholicism. One is declared a saint by being officially regarded as a saint, which can happen usually in two ways:

1. the episcopally sanctioned opening or translation of the saint's relics and/or
2. the episcopally sanctioned entry of the saint's name into the calendar, which permits the composition of a full service in the saint's honour. When this service is celebrated by the relevant hierarchs on the appointed day for the first time, the saint is said to have been 'glorified' (a term which some Orthodox prefer to 'canonisation').

There can be no doubt that this system has been shown to be less than perfect at times. Those who have wished to discredit the Orthodox Church and faith have pointed out gleefully that there have been periods in Church history when to have been an Emperor or a Patriarch has been sufficient to place someone on the fast track to sanctity, regardless of the actual quality of one's life. (Fortescue, for example, derives some amusement from the fact that between 535 and 610 all the patriarchs of Constantinople, bar one, were included in the calendar of saints.) But here again one must be cautious. The appearance of these people among the sanctified may not be evidence of corruption in the church, nor of ecclesiastical subservience to the civil power. Other explanations are possible. For instance, it could be that the original entry was made as a mnemonic, perhaps for the purpose of celebrating memorial services, or as an annalistic matter of record, and that inattentive or inept copying has led to the recording of a saint where none was originally intended. To give a modern instance, the St Herman Calendar includes among its saints under 30 May 'Blessed Constantine XII, last of the Byzantine emperors, martyred by the Turks', though the fact that Constantine died as an adherent of the Union of Florence would normally be more than sufficient to disqualify him from the ranks of the saints in the eyes of those who compiled this work. If the underlying original entry was a note of the date of the fall of the Great City, the apparent anomaly could find a relatively straightforward explanation. Of course, it is also possible that Constantine is a saint - he would not be the first person who died in another communion to find his way on to the Orthodox calendar (St Isaac the Syrian is an obvious example) - and it would be presumptuous in the extreme to suggest that one knows better than the mind of the Church who are and are not among the holy ones of God.

We should also remember that in the Orthodox tradition we can discern three classes of saint

- (i) the local (e.g. St Frideswide of Oxford)
- (ii) the national (e.g. St Seraphim of Sarov; St Nektarios of Pentapolis)
- (iii) the international (e.g. St Nicolas of Myra in Lycia)

With the printing and wide circulation of "universal" calendars which try to function as 'catch-alls' an impression may be given of a more widespread devotion to a particular figure than has ever truly been

the case - a point that British Orthodox should be particularly aware of as we begin to re-incorporate the previously neglected saints of these islands into our calendars.

And, of course, we should remind ourselves first that it is always God, not the church, who 'makes saints', and second that the corporate concept of sanctity which I have outlined earlier means that the saint is first recognised as such within the consciousness of the Body of Christ, and that therefore 'canonisation' by the hierarchy is really no more than a confirmation of what is already known there. Historically, 'whenever the bishop or clergy rushed to proclaim a person as a saint, without taking into account the general witness and the common conscience of the Church, such a "proclamation" was doomed to failure and was meaningless!' (Tsirpanlis, p.149). I refuse to declare any real person entered in the Church calendars to be a 'non-saint', but I recognise clearly that there are many to whom I feel no particular devotion.

But this is surely as it should be, even with saints over whom no question ever has, or ever could be raised. If we view the saints first and foremost as members of the holy community to which we too belong, as fellow living stones with whom we are also being built into the one Temple of God - the place where the true encounter with the holy God can and will happen - then we shall not find it surprising if we are drawn more to some than to others. After all, we all have our own particular friends, those who are 'on our wavelength', among the living. If the saints are real persons, rather than identical plastercast models, we may expect the same to hold true in our relationship with them. If we and they are together experiencing the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit it may not be too fanciful to see the development and maturation of these friendships, heavenly and earthly, as building the sinews of the Body of Christ. Playing our part in the cultivation of this love, developing our own personal relationships among the living and the departed, creating our own personal calendar of saints within the corporate life of the Church, will teach us experientially the true answer to the question 'What is a saint?' And that task gives each of us plenty to do for a time, and maybe even for an eternity.