FORMA SANCTITATIS

NeMoSanctI's conference

Book of Abstracts

6-8 September 2023

University of Turin
Sala Lauree, Palazzetto Aldo Moro

Wednesday 6 September

8:30 - 9:00 Greetings and opening of the works

Graziano Lingua (Università di Torino)

Alessandro Mengozzi (Università di Torino)

Jenny Ponzo (Università di Torino)

9:00 - 10:30 Interdisciplinary approaches for a scientific study of sanctity

Chair: Francesco Galofaro

Luigi Berzano (Università di Torino), *Saintly models and lifestyles in the sociological tradition*

This text intends to formulate a hypothesis of holiness as a daily lifestyle. The first point, *The transcendent sacred*, when introducing the three above-mentioned classics, is a common reference to the idea of the sacred as a transcendent reality of the individual at moments and during experiences of great religious intensity, albeit reserved exclusively to the administration of religious institutions. The second point, *The daily-life sacred*, refers to less-intense forms of the sacred, different for each individual, which are discovered and constructed through personal vicissitudes and therefore 'sustainable' by everyday life. The third point, *Transcendent holiness*, deals with heroic, exceptional models of holiness proposed to its faithful by the Church. The fourth point, *Holiness in daily life*, forms a model of holiness of all the faithful representing professions, jobs cultures and diverse sensibilities. The conclusion, *From heroic saints to sustainable models of holiness*, formulates two fields of future research: relations between models of sanctity and sociocultural, economic and ecclesiastical contexts; and the progressive power of the papacy in controlling and declaring holiness.

Lucia Galvagni (Fondazione Bruno Kessler), *Good and Righteous: A phenomenological perspective on different forms of sanctity*
Saints and persons deserving special attention and appreciation, because of their way of being and doing, and because of what they have said, thought and done, are attributed and associated with the characteristics of the 'good' and the 'righteous'. Alongside saints and righteous, cultures from the earliest times have also identified the figures of heroes as particularly relevant. What do saints, the righteous and heroes refer to, and what do they represent today? Starting with the identification of certain figures of saints, righteous and heroes and listening to their stories, an attempt will be made to consider the value that these models have and the role they play, from an ethical point of view. A 'phenomenological' approach will be considered with respect to these figures and the forms that sanctity can take today.

Paolo Bertetti (Università di Torino), *Figures of Sanctity. Semiotics, sacred texts and theory of culture*

In A.J. Greimas' generative semiotics an element in a text is considered figurative (i.e., it is a "figure") if it has a counterpart in the natural world. Greimas uses the expression 'natural

world' (taken, mutatis mutandis, from Merleau-Ponty) to refer to the world of sense experience, fully organized and culturalized, and therefore already significant and endowed with meaning. In fact, figures are not simply "objects" belonging to the world they refer to: they originate from perception but are elements of a cultural nature that are already semiotically organized. Our contribution aims to show how the analysis of the figurative component of meaning can contribute to the study of the religious discourse and in particular to the study of the imaginary and the model of Sanctity. To do this, we will first briefly present the semiotic concept of "figure", then we will see how the figurative analysis has been used in the study of biblical discourse by the scholars of the Centre pour l'Analyse du DIscours Religieux (CADIR) of the Catholic University of Lyon. Finally, we will present some examples of analysis that extend the figurative analysis to the more general study of religious imagery.

11:00 - 12:30 *Positiones* **and acts of canonization as sources for research**

Chair: Marco Papasidero

Paolo Cozzo (Università di Torino), *Inchieste per eventi miracolosi nei santuari italiani di prima età moderna: riflessioni su una tipologia di fonte [Investigations on miraculous events in Italian sanctuaries of the early Modern age: reflections on a type of source]*

L'intervento intende proporre una riflessione sulla documentazione prodotta dai processi testimoniali per eventi miracolosi organizzati in Italia fra i secoli XVI e XVIII. Si tratta di una fonte nota agli studiosi, che negli anni passati ne hanno messo in rilievo caratteristiche, ricchezza e potenzialità. Il recente sviluppo delle ricerche sulle dinamiche devozionali, i culti e i santuari consente tuttavia di fornire nuove e più articolate chiavi di lettura di questa fonte e dei suoi possibili impieghi.

Valentina Ciciliot (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), *Studying sanctity:* **positiones,** *homilies and hagiographies in comparison*

Sanctity is a phenomenon that can be studied through the lens of different disciplines and different types of sources. From a historical perspective, documentary sources such as positiones, hagiographies, and beatification and canonization homilies are indispensable tools. Homilies of beatification and canonization – delivered directly by the pope on the day of the ceremony – make it possible to study the interpretation and contextualization operated by the pontiff on the hagiographic model; blessed's and saints' hagiographies/biographies, on the other hand, show the detailed aspects of the hagiographic model and can help to detect possible gaps between the official papal reading and that instead behind the scene, coming from the ecclesiastical or lay "pressure groups" that firstly supported that model; finally, the positiones super virtutibus (or super martyrio) – that is the summary of the canonical process elaborated by the postulator and supervised by the relator which constitutes the reasoned demonstration of the heroic virtues or martyrdom of the hagiographic model – represent the image of blessed and saint offered by the legal system that has been elaborated by the Catholic Church over the centuries. Through several case studies, this methodological paper aims to illustrate the different relevance of these three historical sources and how they can be compared to restore the complexity of what is called sanctity.

Simona Serci (Archivio Generale Ordine Carmelitano), *I processi informativi come fonte per la storia: il caso del beato carmelitano Angelo Paoli (1642-1720) [The informative trials as a source for history: the case of the blessed carmelite Angelo Paoli].*

I processi informativi presso i tribunali diocesani costituiscono la fase preliminare di ogni processo di beatificazione e canonizzazione, nella quale si raccolgono le testimonianze orali e scritte sulla vita, le virtù, la fama di santità e i miracoli attribuiti al venerabile candidato alla santità. Specialmente le deposizioni dei testimoni oculari sono ricche di informazioni utili per ricostruire i vari aspetti del contesto storico, socio-economico e culturale nel quale si mosse il protagonista del processo. In questo intervento si utilizzerà il Processo informativo romano sul beato Angelo Paoli, carmelitano attivo nelle opere assistenziali della Roma barocca, per mostrare le possibili piste di ricerca, con particolare attenzione alla ricostruzione della rete sociale che il Paoli seppe costruire intorno a sé, col fine di sostenere economicamente e umanamente la propria attività verso infermi e indigenti.

14:30 - 16:00 The codification of sanctity: rituals, body and clothing

Chair: Eleonora Chiais

Eleonora Chiais (Università di Torino), *The dress code of holiness: the vestimentary iconography of contemporary saints*

In Catholic culture (but, indeed, in culture in general), saints represent models, models that are elaborated not only by the Church as an institution, but by a plurality of different subjects. These are, of course, priests and faithful, but also artists, writers, filmmakers and - last but not least - in contemporary times even social network users who, with their religiously inspired memes, play the role of hagiographers 2.0). The elaboration of the figures of the saints or blessed is therefore the result of a polyphonic operation, with several voices, which is expressed through a dense network of texts. These texts (and the exemplary figures that these texts themselves convey), reach a vast target audience (we are talking about millions of people worldwide) and often constitute not only objects of worship, but specific models of behavior. These models, being based on precise value systems, are primarily 'imitable'. A saint, however, is always a 'saint for other people' since holiness is never a private fact but, on the contrary, becomes such (is canonized) if and only if there is a community of people who recognize in someone's behavior and life something special. Something that is nothing other than, from the very first moment, the so-called reputation for holiness. Starting from these initial considerations, the presentation proposes to analyze, in the cultural construction of this model, what relevance is attributed to the dressing component. The objective will therefore be to draw a model of the *dress code of holiness* by examining, starting from the concrete case of some contemporary saints and blesseds, the vestimental iconography of such models.

Alberto Fabio Ambrosio (Luxembourg School of Religion & Society, Collège des Bernardins), *Sainthood in the Fashion System (Designers, Tailors, Brands)*

Because of its global nature, the fashion system is a social phenomenon that manifests itself as a system of beliefs. In fact, it can be said that fashion has its own saints, its own spiritual heroes, and even its own hagiography since the stories surrounding designers, tailors, and brands can be interpreted as a history of a secular sainthood of sorts. While the image draws a concrete comparison between designers, tailors, and brands on the one hand and holy people and institutions on the other, the intent of this contribution is to show how the idea of 'implicit

religion,' as formulated by Edward Bailey, is relevant to an immersive and global experience such as fashion and luxury.

Giampaolo Proni (Università di Bologna), *Heavenly Dresses: Unattainability, Fashion and Distance. A Semiotic Analysis of the 2018 MET Exhibit on Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*

The Costume Institute's spring 2018 exhibition at The Metropolitan museum in New York had the title Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination. The Met website presented the show with the following words: "a dialogue between fashion and medieval art from The Met collection to examine fashion's ongoing engagement with the devotional practices and traditions of Catholicism." The exhibit featured two categories of objects: a selection of religious vestments and accessories from the Vatican, all historical and precious; a large and wisely chosen collection of clothes by great fashion designers inspired by catholic symbols and iconography. All those items were placed in the MET Cloisters and The Medieval, Byzantine, and Lehman Galleries in the Met Fifth Avenue, two settings well suited to convey a medieval atmosphere, plus the Anna Wintour Costume Center. Following the tradition, on May 8th the Met gala saw the global celebrities pose on its red carpet and captured by the usual high density wall of cameras. The gala's theme was the same as the show's. Not all the celebs followed the suggestion but the most popular of them did, in order to get the best media coverage and social network rebound.

The exhibit was accompanied by a two volume hardcover catalogue including essays on catholic imagination and sacred vestments and a contribution by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, the Vatican's president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, who managed the collaboration between the Vatican and the MET. On February 26, 2018, the exhibit had been launched at the Galleria Colonna in Rome with Cardinal Ravasi as host and the presence of Andrew Bolton, curator in charge at the Met's Anna Wintour Costume Center, Stephen A. Schwarzman, the chairman, CEO, and cofounder of Blackstone, a financial supporter of the show, Christine Schwarzman, Anna Wintour, and Donatella Versace, another sample of the global fashion set, all engaged in different terms with the initiative.

I encountered the first informations on this event looking for an inspiration for this paper. And I was struck with a question: Why does the Catholic Church, which is not known for making hasty and careless decisions, mix with a milieu, that of fashion, which represents the most frivolous and transient that can be found in our society? In more correct terms: what kind of cultural effect such an event is supposed to produce on the audiences that can be involved in this kind of mediatic consumption? I will try to answer this question by considering the complex text composed of the web resources of MET, Vogue and other online publications, and the printed catalogue. The method employed will be that of semiotic media analysis.

16:30 - 18:00 Aesthetics and iconography of saints

Chair: Francesco Galofaro

Federico Vercellone (Università di Torino), *The iconographic profanation of the face in contemporary art.*

At the end of 18th century, during the French occupation and the secularization of religious property, there was an attempt to erase religious figurativeness in German culture. The

philosophical and poetical response is represented above all by W.H. Wachenroder, who in *Herzensergiessungen eines Klosterbrude*r sought to revaluate the fundamental religious inspiration behind art. Wackenroder's thought was very influential on the Nazarene painters.

Yuliia Khlystun (Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University), *Peculiarities of images of saints in Orthodox iconography*

The author examines the monumental painting of an Orthodox church from the point of view of semiotics, focusing on the features of the images of saints. According to the theory of Charles Pierce, there are three types of semiotic signs: iconic, indexical, and symbolic. In the semiotic analysis of images of saints, indexical signs are of the greatest interest. These are hand gestures, facial expressions, an object in the hand, different scales of figures, clothing, colors, as well as images of nature and buildings in an iconographic plot. As examples, images of Orthodox saints in the churches of Eastern Ukraine are considered. However, index signs are not specific to any particular region, they are universal for the entire church.

Anita Kłos (UMCS of Lublin), *Catholic Iconography in Contemporary Women's Art and Visual Activism in Poland*

Catholic imagery has been vastly adopted by contemporary visual artists, mainly for critical revisions of religiosity that vary from iconoclastic destruction or openly blasphemous manifestations against the (institutional) Church to intimate polemics with the faith traditions from the authors' upbringing (see Korte 2014, among others). For feminist women artists, especially those from Catholic backgrounds, religious codes, images, and rituals have been a privileged sphere of transgressive practices, or 'symbolic inversions' in which commonly held norms and values are overturned, abrogated, or contradicted (Babcock 1978, see also Papenburg and Zarzycka 2013, 5-6). On the other hand, as Eleanor Heartney (2003, 4) notes, what unites feminist theory and Catholicism is 'thinking through the body', a consciousness immersed in sensuality and sexuality. This corporeal common ground allows the artists to bring together contradictory visions of femininity and to create multilayered accounts of their own (female) identities (Heartney 2003, 11).

In Poland, as a consequence of the persistently strong position of the Catholic Church in public life and education, religious iconography is firmly rooted in the collective imagination, offering a valid point of reference even for non-religious authors. While the works by Katarzyna Kozyra (*Blood Ties*, 1995) and Dorota Nieznalska (*Passion,* 2001), considered sacrilegious, became emblems of the Polish critical art movement of the 1990s and early 2000s, over recent two decades one might observe diversified and, concurrently, more nuanced approaches to Catholic visual heritage. To give very few examples, Aleksandra Waliszewska highlights dark and surrealistic elements embedded in medieval Christian iconography (Gingeras and Sielewicz 2022); the painter and sculptor Magda Moskwa constantly revokes the memories of sacred images, ex-votos, and reliquaries from the parish church in her birthplace (Morzuch 2015, 42); Anna Orbaczewska adopts the iconography of *Pietà* and *Crucifixion* to reflect on (patriarchal) violence in her expressive paintings and drawings on ceramics (Rayzacher 2021).

It is thus important to note, that under the government of the right-wing Law and Justice Party which came to power in 2015, references to Catholic imagery in women's art and visual activism in Poland have acquired an increasingly political dimension both as an expression of protest against the far-right agenda as well as a declaration of the authors' feminist views or/and their support for the LGBTQ community. The fundamental role of the Polish Catholic Church

in backing the abortion ban and inspiring the violence against LGBTQ people gave rise to symbolic rebellion and 'hijacking' (von Flotow 1991, 78-80) Catholic visual codes in order to convey messages focused on the empowerment of women and minority groups. These new interpretations of Christian, and in particular Marian, iconography tend also to emphasise the bodily experience of maternity and present Virgin Mary as a universal symbol of motherhood, female strength, and freedom of reproductive choice. Such images, which are often created spontaneously by amateurs, have been widespread in social media and on the streets, during demonstrations held in support of women's and LGBTQ people's rights. Arguably, the most famous of them became so-called *The Rainbow Madonna*, created by the activist Elżbieta Podleśna, who modified the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa by replacing the golden halos of Mary and Jesus with the LGBTQ rainbow flag (Davies 2019).

The aim of the present paper is to provide an overview of different modes and perspectives, from which selected Polish women artists and activists re-examine and invert symbolically religious visual schemes. The main focus will be on the period from 2016 when the first large-scale demonstrations against a near-total ban on abortion (so-called Black Protests) were organised. I will investigate how these 'hijacked' Catholic images challenge the ultra-conservative agenda of the Polish Church and government and how they reflect individual and collective emancipatory processes in contemporary Poland.

18:00 - 19:00 The encyclopedic organization of knowledge about saints

Daniele Menozzi (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa), *Presentation / dialog on the book* L'Italia e i santi, *Treccani.* Con Marco Papasidero (Università di Torino).

9:00 - 10:30 Non-stereotypical models of sanctity in fiction

Chair: Magdalena Maria Kubas

Cristiana Lardo (Università "Tor Vergata" di Roma), *Quando un Santo scrive ai Santi:* **Illustrissimi** *di Albino Luciani* [*From Blessed to Saints: the imaginary letters in* **Illustrissimi** *by Albino Luciani*]**.**

In 1976 Venice's patriarch Albino Luciani collects and prints some imaginary letters that he wrote for "Il Messaggero di Sant'Antonio" in the previous years (1971-1975). The title of this collection is Illustrissimi. Lettere ai Grandi del passato which will be reviewed and republished several times until 1978, when the author died. In 1978 Luciani became Pope Giovanni Paolo I and since last September Luciani has been beatified.
The addressee of these letters are several authors, literary characters, biblical figures and seven saints (Saint Bernardo abbot of Chiaravalle, Saint Bernardino from Siena, Saint Francesco from Sales, Santa Teresa from Lisieux, Saint Bonaventura, Saint Luca Evangelist, Saint Teresa from Avila). The last letter is "sent" to Jesus. Literature itself plays an important role in these letters, for its linked communication. Jean Guitton said that he found a "taste" in Luciani's Illustrissimi. This taste recalls the sense of wisdom, science and wittiness that belonged to the works and words of that incomparable pastor. His mix of humor and love is similar to the one of his favourite authors, Dickens and Mark Twain. My speech is about Pope Luciani's literary work and it will focus on the analysis of the letters sent to the Saints from a narrative perspective.

Davide Dalmas (Università di Torino), Blasphemy and sanctity: Opposed sacred models in the 'Scarrozzanti' by Giovanni *Testori (1972-1977)*

In the theatrical trilogy that Giovanni Testori (1923-1993) dedicated to the reinvention of fundamental characters such as Oedipus, Hamlet and Macbeth (1972-1977), there seems to be no room for holiness, so strong is the denunciation of the horror of Power, the lament of the suffering linked to birth and the tension to see in Nothingness the only possible positivity. Instead, the present work intends to show how it is possible to trace in the three plays the construction of two models of holiness, radically opposed but always conflictually co-present.

Magdalena Kowalska (Università "Niccolò Copernico" di Torun), *Women rulers and their saint models in the Polish culture.*

The Polish literature of the nineteenth century features an unprecedented number of female protagonists acting as rulers. This interest stems, among other things, from the increasing participation of women in public life, the reflection on the future shape of the Polish state, as well as the role played by the Polish nation in Europe, and it turns towards both ancient and recent, European, and specifically Polish history. There was a certain pattern that represented a socially acceptable model of a female ruler, in which she displayed the qualities of sainthood: caring not for the material state of the country, but for its moral state and the redress of grievances, she distinguished not only by physical beauty, but mostly that of intention and deeds, she represented charity, care for the weak. The paper will present literary images of 4 Polish female rulers: Wanda (legendary queen of Poles), Jadwiga (queen of Poland in 14th

century), Bona Sforza (queen of Poland, 16th century) and Elizabeth of Austria (queen of Poland by marriage, 16th century) and consider their different relationships with sanctity. In Cyprian Norwid's vision, Wanda is a heroine who anticipates the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, although she does not yet know the Christian religion, she foresees it for her people. Her sacrifice, therefore, has a more active dimension than being a victim of court intrigues, as in the case of other innocent, nearly saint, Polish queens, e.g. Elizabeth of Austria. In the 19th century, Bona Sforza was mainly viewed unfavorably and stands in contrast to the sanctity of other heroines. Jadwiga, a heroine illustrated in many works in the 19th century, whose popularity is also high in contemporary Polish culture, was canonised in the 20th century.

11:00 - 12:30 Sanctity and digital media

Chair: Marco Papasidero

François De Vriendt (Société des Bollandistes, Brussels), *NFTs as New Forms of Devotion? Relics and Other Religious Items Proposed as Non-Fungible Tokens*

On 3 December 2021, a small reliquary of St. Francis Xavier was offered for sale as an NFT by a Lisbon-based Catholic charity. Other religious objects, both artistic and non-artistic, have since been converted into NFTs, sometimes for commercial purposes. In addition to giving an overview of the emergence of NFTs in the religious sphere, the lecture aims to reflect on the possible impact of this technology on forms of devotion, particularly those related to the saints' relics. Will NFTs, as new media, contribute to making sacred objects, which have been confined until now, better known? Will the conversion of relics into NFTs change the nature of these relics? Will a process of authentication take place, as in the case of medieval relics? Paradoxically, if NFTs belong to the virtual world, they acquire a form of "materiality" through their appropriation or exchange. Can these NFTs respond to spiritual needs, such as the wish to hold an exclusive stamped piece of the sacred? The motivations of the developers and purchasers of NFTs will be explored in this way.

Marco Papasidero (Università di Palermo), *Supernatural apparitions, relics, and miraculous images in the "Christian Family TV" cartoons*

This paper aims to analyse the web-cartoon series hosted on the Catholic YouTube channel "Christian Family TV". It focuses in particular on the way in which supernatural apparitions (especially mariophanies), saints' relics, and miraculous images are described, commented, and depicted. I select several case studies and then compare them with hagiographic sources regarding the same objects or events. To date, more than 450 "Christian stories" have been published on the YouTube channel, offering a very useful repertoire for reflecting on the modalities and languages used by a Catholic entertainment channel with a mission to teach children and their families values and stories related to the Bible and saints.

Heidi Campbell (College of Arts and Sciences, Texas A&M University), *Studying Digital Religious Materiality: Thought on Theories and Methods from Digital Religion Studies for Researching Hybrid Materiality in a Digital Age*

This presentation will explore the opportunities and challenges offered by studying digital and digitized religious artifacts as a lens into the lived religious practice of the faithful in a digital age. First, a definitions of digital religious materiality is offered, highlighting the unique factors scholars must consider when engaging in the study of digital and how such an approach

contrasts with established practiced within the study of material religion. Second, there will be discussion about how research methods and theories from Digital Religion studies can help guide scholars collection and analysis of digital material culture and objects. Third, and finally, several concrete guidelines will be offered for considering on how to design studies of digital religious materiality, using the example of the debated sainthood of Carlo Acutis online as an example of formulating hybrid material religion scholarship.

14:30 - 16:00

Pop hagiographies

Chair: Jenny Ponzo

Simona Stano (Università di Torino), Just Believe *(in Yourself): Bodies, Objects, and Figures of the Contemporary "Cult of the Self"*

In order to save his B&B from bankruptcy, Massimo decides to transform it in a place of worship (where to host his "guests" — as opposed to his former "customers" —, in exchange for tax-free donations — instead of the taxed payments he used to collect). Rejected by the representatives of all the main religious communities in the city, he founds his own cult, the *Ionismo* (Italian for "Selfism"), namely "the first religion that puts the Self [*IO*, instead of *Dio*, "God"] at the centre of the universe" (*MYmovies* 2018, my translation). Drawing on the analysis of this case, sarcastically represented by director Alessandro Aronadio in the movie *Just Believe* (Italian original title *IO C'È*, 2018), I will investigate the "cult of the Self" pervading contemporary mediatised cultures, adopting a semiotic approach. To this purpose, I will deal with particularly relevant case studies, problematising the *bodies*, as well as the sacred *objects*, and more generally the *figures* of such a secularised cult, with specific reference to both the "generative model" ironically suggested by *Just Believe* and the patterns characterising more traditional religious systems.

Armando Fumagalli (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), T*v biographies of Catholic Saints: behind the success of the Italian miniseries from 2000 onward*

In the first decade of 2000 in Italy, both in the State channel RaiUno and in the most important private network Mediaset, there have been a good number of very successful miniseries about the lives of Saints: from ancient saints like St. Agustine and St. Rita, to modern saints like John Paul II and Paul VI. Is there a common understanding, a common formula for this success? How much this is due to the clever use of good rules of storytelling and how much to the attractiveness of spirituality and the phenomenon of sanctity itself? My intervention will try to deal with these questions, also using my experience as a script consultant of some of these Tv miniseries, the one produced by Lux vide, mainly for Rai.

Moritz Lampe (Universitaet Leipzig), *Photography and the fashioning of modern martyrs in the 19th century*

Since the 19th century, the history of religious images is not only characterised by altar pieces, panel paintings, and devotional prints, but also by photographs of religious figures, which served to promote faith and devotion. A particular case are photographs of Christian Martyrs, as the violent nature of their death often resulted in graphic and explicit images. The conference

paper presents two distinct cases for this kind of images: The example of Sister Agostina Pietrantoni, murdered in a Roman hospital in 1894, and the example of the Priest Victorin Delbrouck, murdered while doing missionary work in China in 1898. The paper discusses not only the different gender roles which become apparent in these examples of modern martyrdom, but also shows how these photographs were meant to convey traditional Christian values such as irrefutable faith and devotion in an age of secularization. Furthermore, the paper shows how these photographs refer to the counter-reformatory tradition of graphic depictions of wounds and mutilations, meant to activate the religious emotions of the beholders and common in the 16th and 17th centuries.

16:30 - 18:00

Faces. Between worship and iconoclasm

Chair: Gabriele Marino

Emily Cock (Cardiff University), *Cropped martyrs: faith and facial disfigurement in early modern England*

This paper utilises a disability history approach to facial disfigurement in early modern England. It focuses on seventeenth-century judicial disfigurements inflicted for sedition: a form of religious dissent that crossed into political dissent in this highly fraught period. My case study is the Scottish religious minister, unlicenced physician, and author, Alexander Leighton (c.1570–1649). Leighton was convicted of sedition in 1630 and whipped, pilloried, had one side of his face branded and nostril slit, and an ear cut off. He published stoic accounts of his punishment in the service of his political aims, but also offered further, melancholy reflection on his sentence and appearance in two private poems preserved in manuscript in the British Library (Sloane MS 346). As such, he offers a rare chance to read both public and private reflections on personal disfigurement and its relationship to faith in this period.

Ilaria Sabbatini (Università di Palermo, ARCVO - ArchivioDigitale del Volto Santo), *Ante Vultum. Contributi per uno studio sulla funzione liturgica del Volto Santo di Lucca in rapporto all'immagine di Beirut [Ante Vultum.Contributions for a study on the liturgical function of the Holy Face of Lucca].*

«Deo gubernante» è l'espressione che racconta il modo in cui ha attraversato il mare la famosa immagine acheropita conservata nella cattedrale di Lucca. La si rintraccia nella leggenda del Volto Santo, riferita dalla relatio di Leobinus, un'opera compilata nel XII secolo in ambiente canonicale (Frugoni). Quale che ne sia stata la genesi, la statua divenne oggetto di un intenso culto che è giunto fino a noi. Un elenco degli altari (cod. 124 Biblioteca Capitolare) databile tra 1071 e 1109, cita un altare «ante vultum» e un altare «ante crucem veterem», interpretata come una croce più antica (Caleca et al.) il cui culto dovette essere soppiantato da quello del Volto Santo. Da tale suggestione, nei primi anni 2000, nacque una vivace disputa intorno all'ipotesi che il Volto Santo conservato nel Duomo di Sansepolcro fosse l'antico crocifisso venerato dai lucchesi che lo avevano venduto ai frati biturgensi sostituendolo con una copia. Le recenti analisi al Carbonio14, presentate nel giugno 2020, hanno rimesso in discussione tutto. Se secondo l'analisi stilistica il crocifisso risale all'età ottoniana (XI sec.) l'esame al Carbonio 14 lo retrodata all'età carolingia (VIII - IX sec.). Questo permette di attestare l'originalità della statua che non sarebbe quindi la copia di un precedente esemplare. Tra tutte le valutazioni messe in campo rimane però un fattore importante ancora da considerare: la

trasformazione dell'uso liturgico (Bacci) di cui è stata protagonista la statua e che può contribuire a districare la vexata quaestio. L'intento del presente contributo è di analizzare la nuova datazione non solo in relazione agli elementi stilistici e scientifici ma anche in funzione dei processi che conferirono alla statua una vera e propria autonomia rispetto alla liturgia ordinaria, permettendo lo sviluppo di un culto specifico che fece della cattedrale un vero e proprio santuario,snodo di pellegrinaggi e di potere.

Milena Cordioli (IUSVE e Accademia Santa Giulia di Brescia),*"La profanazione iconografica del volto nell'arte contemporanea"*

The intervention on the theme of the iconographic profanation of the face in contemporary art starts from the analysis of the process of iconoclastic deformation and devastation that we find in some works of the second half of the twentieth century, which draw direct inspiration from "classical" subjects of sacred art or religious. The visual, emotional and spiritual transfiguration of Pope Innocent X, portrayed by Velázquez in 1650, made starting from the end of the 1940s by Francis Bacon is an essential starting point for introducing the theme of the iconographic profanation of a subject linked to the religious sphere. The need to overcome the physical limits of the face in its physiognomic description finds in the subsequent expressive experiments of Arnulf Rainer, who combine photography and painting, a further aesthetic development, in images that betray a profound iconoclastic desire. The complex link between life and death in these works refers us to the modern iconography of the *vanitas*. The intervention therefore ends in the identification of the face with the skull, which was previously configured simply as a symbol that accompanied the figure of the saint in meditation and which now moves into the dimension of the profane: the *Skulls* series by Andy Warhol is one example. The supporting structure of the discourse is the dialectic that is created between these two dimensions: the first, more linked to the pictorial deformation and the need to reflect on the very possibility of representing a principle that goes beyond life and the individual; the second in the exasperation of an individualism that leads to overcoming one's own identity. In any case, the face is profaned, or it appears deformed and distorted or it is no longer there.

9:00 - 10:30 Sanctity and gender

Chair: Ugo Volli

Lucetta Scaraffia (Università di Roma, "La Sapienza"), *Donne e uomini nella storia della santità* [*Women and man in the history of holiness*]**.**

Partendo da un esame della quota di donne all'interno del numero complessivo dei canonizzati nella chiesa cattolica – quota sempre minoritaria ma in forte crescita a partire del 900 – si esamineranno i meccanismi di produzione dei santi, attraverso i processi di beatificazione e di canonizzazione. La dialettica dei generi permette anche di analizzare le differenze fra uomini e donne nella definizione dei modelli di santità. I modelli femminili sono meno rigidi, si adattano di più alle trasformazioni sociali e sono capaci di riassorbire la potenza miracolosa necessaria per avere successo nella religiosità popolare. Perché i santi, e soprattutto le sante, sono anche frutto dell'invocazione e delle speranze di miracolo dei devoti. Si esamineranno in quest'ottica modelli particolarmente interessanti di santità femminile, in particolare Rita da Cascia, caratterizzata da una devozione di successo di lungo periodo, che ha puntato su aspetti sempre diversi della sua biografia leggendaria.

Sanja Kobilij (Università di Banja Luka), *(A mother's) Sacrifice in History: A novel by Elsa Morante*

History: A Novel by Elsa Morante has been defined by critics as the perfect example of maternal love and sacrifice, in which the mother Ida Ramundo has been interpreted as the incarnation of both Mary and Jesus. Although there are numerous elements in the novel that point to religion, I will use Kristeva's thought about the Religious to point out that this novel is not about sacrifice, but about awareness against the unreality of modern times which in Elsa Morante is the central element of her poetics and is achieved through representations of illness (epilepsy), madness (Ida's destiny after losing both of her sons) and poetic word (the task of the poet to avenge the marginalized ones). Basing her thought on the Freudian definition of the religious, according to which anyone who confesses the feeling of human insignificance is deeply religious, Julija Kristeva adds that the essence of religiosity lies in the reaction against that feeling, a reaction that seeks help to combat it and that a woman is more inclined to humbly accept that she plays a minimal role in the vast universe, that is, that she is irreligious in the strictly Freudian sense. This image perfectly reflects the position of Ida Ramundo inside the cathedral of the History: A Novel. Yet, as I will try to argue, there are exceptions guaranteed by the illness of the protagonist in which she feels as part of the collectivity and not, once again, outside History and the Symbolic. The nature of these exceptions is rather metaphysical than religious or political. The awareness of Ida becomes an invitation for the reader to seek and find the meaning of Reality outside political, biological, or religious, which would be based on altruism, on acting for others as Morante puts it talking about her definition of religion.

Magdalena Maria Kubas e Cristina Voto (Università di Torino), *St Wilgefort on the border of holiness and female identity*

Until the cancellation from the Roman Martyrology in 1969, the cult of St Wilgefort can be considered as pan-European, but after the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church decided

that her historical existence could not be ascertained. According to the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* the memory of this past cult is preserved – it also persists as a "cultural existence" (Ponzo, Marino 2021). In the official discourse on sanctity (Kubas 2022) Wilgefort is a forgotten figure, but she is present in literary works and both fine and performative arts. She is an object of gender studies. This figure of a crucified bearded woman became a model that works at the borders of sexual and spiritual identity. Contemporary narratives about Wilgefort raise the question of violence and that of the power to exert it on specific categories of cultural identity. The latter portion of our presentation will delve into a detailed analysis of the visage of St. Wilgefortis and the semiotic masks that her history invokes. Notably, St. Wilgefortis is depicted engaging in an exchange of her own visage with that of Christ. This exchange is apparent in the figurative dimension that characterizes the diverse expressive forms through which the saint has been embodied. Within this context, the act of swapping visages with Christ serves to rewrite and challenge the hypothesis proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in their work "A Thousand Plateaus." This transformation of the saint's visage into a deterritorialization of the abstract machine of the Christ icon will be a focal point of our examination.

11:00 - 13:30 Sanctity across religions

Chair: Jenny Ponzo

Stefania Palmisano and Nicola Pannofino, *The other virtuosos. Life stories of new spiritual seekers in Italy*

More and more are describing themselves as "spiritual but not religious", an expression used by those who take personal and eclectic paths of seeking the sacred outside of traditional and majority religions. This is a spirituality centered on the authority of the inner self, which personally engages the experiencer without the mediation of institutions, dogmas or ecclesiastical hierarchies. Starting from the data collected during an ethnographic research conducted in Italy, this paper aims to analyze the profile of these spiritual but non religious, delving in particular into the figure of the virtuoso, the seeker who puts at the center of his biography the spiritual practices and beliefs to which s/he adheres. Some exemplary cases of virtuosi, belonging to three spiritual currents widespread in the Italian context, based on the themes of nature, well-being and mystery, will be examined.

Ugo Volli (Università di Torino), *Sanctity, difference, justice*

Can we speak of the same Catholic concept of holiness in cultural contexts other than that of Christianity? It is not obvious and the Jewish case proves it. The original word that the Vulgate translates as *sanctus* is *kadòsh* (literally "separate, distinct") which applies to divinity as a fact, to the Jewish people as an obligation, but generally not to single people before the last few centuries. Highly spiritual Jews are first called *neviìm* (prophets), then *khakhamìm* (wise, learned), then *hasidìm* (pious) and *tzadikìm* (righteous). All these qualifications do not necessarily join together but constitute a historical typology (and in turn have a history). In general, both for the biblical characters and for the protagonists of the subsequent history, a hagiography is not cultivated: the even radical defects of the patriarchs, kings, priests and rabbis are never hidden. In the Jewish tradition there have been great masters, as Shimon Ben Yochai or Nachman of Braclaw, to whom miracles have also been attributed, and who are the object of pilgrimages and special reverence. But at least since Ezra, what matters most is the study of the Torah and on this they too are evaluated. So not only in the Jewish tradition there not exist

lists of saints and methodologies for proclaiming them, but the very existence of a separate category of "saints" is also questionable.

Luca Patrizi (Università di Torino), *"Proximity" (walāya,qurba) as a paradigm of sanctity in Sunni Islam*

La nozione di santità nel mondo islamico sunnita si declina in maniera peculiare già a partire dalla sua terminologia, incentrata sulla "prossimità" piuttosto che sulla "santità". Questa prossimità del santo musulmano al mondo divino si misura tramite la sua ascesa, graduale o subitanea, attraverso differenti stazioni, a immagine dell'ascensione dei profeti e in particolare di Muḥammad, paradigma supremo di santità. La stazione finale è infatti definita "Stazione della prossimità" (*maqām al-qurba*), anch'essa ad immagine della stazione suprema del Profeta, nota sotto differenti denominazioni. L'accesso a tale stazione concede anche al santo musulmano (*walī*), come al Profeta, la possibilità di esercitare la mediazione e l'intercessione nei confronti dei credenti, e di elevare, a sua volta, i loro gradi spirituali.

14:30 - 16:00 Semiotic approaches to sanctity

Chair: Paolo Bertetti

Massimo Leone (University of Turin; Bruno Kessler Foundation; Shanghai University; University of Cambridge), Saints and Signs: A Reconsideration

In 2010, I concluded *Saints and Signs*, my book on the semiotics of sanctity in early modern Catholicism, by pointing out that the Council of Trent had systematized some important ideological changes in the Catholic meaning-making involving saints: a change in the concept of exceptionality; a change in the concept of agency; a change in the concept of change. In this lecture of mine, I would like to reflect on how the development of an increasingly digitalized semiosphere is currently affecting the way in which saintly mediation is shaped in present-day religious cultures and communities. Are we facing new watersheds in the ways in which exceptionality, agency, and change are conceptualized, narrativized, and imagined in the rhetorical assemblages that convey the idea of inspired meaning in contemporary societies? Are new forms of digital both hagiography and iconography reshaping the semiotic ideologies of sanctity? Is this taking a new "forma sanctitatis", so as to both manifest and inflect the relation that present-day individuals have with the sacred? The keynote conference will try to answer these questions by re-actualizing some of the analyses conducted in *Saints and Signs* in relation to the contemporary digital re-enchantment of the saints.

Maria Luisa Solis Zepeda (Universidad de Puebla, Mexico), A*bout Normative Sanctities and Dissident Spiritualities*

From the period of time of the New Spain to the present day, Mexican culture has been characterized by being syncretic and totally mixed. Thus, this culture has always existed between: purity and mixture, tradition and novelty, the norm and the anomalous, and this seesawing that has constantly crossed social life has of course been present in spirituality and religion. A clear example is the case of the beatas of the seventeenth century who in the middle of standardized practices and texts of the Spanish mystics of the previous century, expressed a

singular religiosity qualified as heterodox, dissident, even heretic (or under other penal denominations). A lot of this, from a careful semiotic analysis, reveals a general discursive problem. Two clear examples of this are the canonical text of M. Godínez (1681) Práctica de la teología mística and its counterpart, the polemical text Las cuarenta y cinco estaciones de Josepha de San Luis Beltrán by Joseph Bruñón de Bertiz (1646). These mestizations and spiritual anomalies that germinated since that century grew exponentially towards the 20th century, so much that today religious practices and spiritualities in Mexico often seem to be made "a la carte". In this way, there are cults such as that of the "holy man" Jesus Malverde, the Holy Death or Nazario Moreno (founder of the Templars of Michoacan) that reflect the marginal, illicit and even criminal ways of life, and of course opposed to any religious institution. These problems, as mentioned above, can be the object of study of semiotics and, from this discipline, they can be redefined as discursive, textual, semantic, symbolic problems, finally, problems of signification. Although semiotics has proved its effectiveness in the study of texts within a well-defined domain, today, by expanding the levels of pertinence of analysis, we are facing new challenges. In the case in point, we are faced with at least two: on the one hand, the analysis of non-written texts (some practices, for example), and on the other hand, the analysis of texts that break with religious norms. That is, if semiotics had proved its heuristic character in the analysis of texts such as sacred (point from where we will start and point to be emphasized), semiotics is questioned again in the face of dissident, non-institutional spiritualities and even marginal religious practices.

Jenny Ponzo (Università di Torino), *Saintly people: final remarks on NeMoSancti.*

In the Christian-Catholic tradition, animals are connected to saints and to the concept of sanctity in several respects. This talk explores different facets of this relationship, mainly on the basis of the criterion constituted by the degrees of agency attributed to animals. The study of iconographic themes, hagiographic legends, and literary works connecting animals and saints also leads to a reflection on the thresholds of the concept of personhood. Such a perspective is coherent with the research carried out in the framework of the project NeMoSanctI, which has mainly focused on the borders of the concept of sanctity, which shift across time. The variations in the concepts of sanctity as well as of personhood provide useful touchstones to understand how the culture under consideration conceives the human being in their relationship with their neighbor and more in general with the other living beings.