

Worldly Saint, Political Saint: Revisiting the Christian Notion of Holiness



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Abstract

Christians seem to have more difficulty imagining the interconnection between holiness and politics than Muslims, who largely accept involvement in worldly affairs, including politics, as part of their piety. As a result, a saint who is actively involved in politics would hardly be recognizable to Christians. This article utilizes a comparative lens to draw insights from Muslim and Christian perspectives on saints and sainthood. First, the case of Abdurrahman Wahid concretely illustrates the Muslim concept of a saint. Second, for the Christian part, Karl Rahner's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theologies of saints offer a more appreciative approach toward politics. Finally, the insights drawn from the comparison serve as theological rationales for revisiting the dominant Christian notion of holiness.

Keywords

Abdurrahman Wahid, saints, holiness, Karl Rahner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, politics, comparative theology

The most striking image of saints in the history of Christianity is their extraordinary intermediary power that energizes the practice of veneration of saints across the globe.¹ Similarly, the saints' intermediary power is at the core of the Muslim veneration of the Friends of God (*awliyā' Allāh*) from Morocco to Indonesia and even in the United States of America.² Another similarity between the two religious traditions is holiness as otherworldly spirituality. The *fuga mundi* (flight

¹ For a classic study of the emergence and development of the veneration of saints in Latin Christianity, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981). For exploration on contemporary practices, see Margaret Cormack, ed., *Saints and Their Cults in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007); Michael A. Di Giovine, "Re-Presenting a Contemporary Saint: Padre Pio of Pietrelcina," in *Saints: Faith without Borders*, eds. Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 309–20.

² Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998); Albertus Bagus Laksana, *Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices: Explorations Through Java* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014); Merin Shobhana Xavier, *Sacred Spaces and Transnational Networks in American Sufism: Bawa Muhiyyaddeen and Contemporary Shrine Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

from the world) has been a dominant spiritual tradition in Christianity since the Medieval era. However, its roots can be traced back to the emergence of monastic and eremitical traditions, focusing on solitude and ascetic life.³ In Islam, the pious rhetoric of the Sufi tradition often expresses the theme of renunciation of this world in order to embrace God's love.⁴

Regardless of the similarly negative view of the world, Christians seem to have more difficulty imagining the interconnection between holiness and politics than Muslims, who largely accept involvement in worldly affairs, including politics, as part of their piety.⁵ The paradigm of *fuga mundi* seems to persist in contemporary Christianity, both in Catholicism and Protestantism, despite the emphasis on the importance of doing service in the world. As a result, a saint actively involved in politics would be suspect at best or unthinkable at worst. The canonization process of Óscar Romero, who was martyred in 1980 and finally canonized by the Catholic church in 2018, illustrates the problematic relationship between holiness and politics in Christianity: was he killed because of political or religious reasons? The canonization of Romero serves as a testament to the openness to revisit the notion of holiness as one that includes political activities.

This article seeks to utilize a comparative theology lens to provide insights into revisiting the dominant Christian notion of holiness through a juxtaposition with an Islamic concept of a saint.⁶ As a Christian theologian from Indonesia, I will use the case of Abdurrahman Wahid, a Muslim saint from Indonesia, to illustrate the inextricable relationship between sanctity and politics in Islam. I then explore how holiness encompasses all aspects of life to delineate the theological reasoning for incorporating politics into the Christian notion of sanctity by drawing ideas from two prominent Christian theologians in the twentieth century, Karl Rahner and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Last, the comparison generates three insights to revisit the dominant paradigm of sainthood in Christianity: reconfigure the political dimension of Jesus's ministry and teaching, establish political saints as exemplars of new Christian modes of holiness, and rethink the meaning of miracles mediated by saints.

Worldly Saint in Islam: The Case of Abdurrahman Wahid

In Islam, saints are called “friends of God” (*awliyā' Allāh*; sing. *walī Allāh*). The Qur'an and hadith literature mention the special connection, or *walāya* (friendship), between saints and God, which becomes the primary reason for their extraordinary power (*karāmāt*).⁷ The Qur'an pronounces, “Verily, the Friends of God have no fear nor sorrow” (Q 10:62). Sufi commentators interpret the

³ Michael Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Oscar Romero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2017), xi. See also Lawrence Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 120–25.

⁴ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 1–2.

⁵ The inseparable link between holiness and politics is evident even in Sufism. See the essays in Clinton Bennett and Sarwar Alam, eds., *Sufism, Pluralism, and Democracy* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2017).

⁶ I explore this topic more comprehensively in Hans A. Harmakaputra, *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints: The Community of God's Friends* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

⁷ In Sufi literature, the extraordinary power (*karāmāt*) of the saints differs from the evidentiary miracles (*mu'jiza*) that belong exclusively to prophets. Al-Hujwīrī, a famous 11th century sufi, states that the reason for this distinction lies in the inferior status of a *walī* to that of a prophet. See 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Hujwīrī, *The Kashf Al-Mahjūb: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Printed for the trustees of the “E. J.W. Gibb Memorial” and published by Messrs. Luzac and Co., 1970), 218–24.

verse to highlight the special status of saints. For instance, Sahl al-Tustarī denotes a saint as a symbol of God because whenever believers see them, they are reminded of God.⁸ At the same time, saints are often perceived as exemplary figures involved in the world, such as social reformers and leaders, which connotes a different understanding of power.⁹ An example of that is a Muslim saint from Indonesia: Abdurrahman Wahid.

Abdurrahman Wahid, or Gus Dur (1940–2009), was a charismatic figure from the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and was President of Indonesia from 1999 to 2001.¹⁰ He is known mostly for his leadership of the NU, as a great Muslim thinker, and as a consistent political figure who was involved in a movement that strongly opposed President Suharto’s authoritarian regime to promote democracy and human rights.¹¹ For instance, Wahid spoke very critically against the Suharto government on the issue of the Kedung Ombo Dam, which caused considerable controversy in the mid-1980s because the government relocated thousands of farmers from their land without appropriate compensation.¹² In 1991, he and forty-four other intellectuals of various religious backgrounds established the Democratic Forum, and became their leading spokesperson.¹³ In addition, many non-Muslims remember him for his relentless dedication to protecting minority communities, such as Chinese-Indonesians and Christians. 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. Wahid came to the town and apologized to the Christian communities for the violence that had been conducted by the people and spoke about reconciliation.¹⁴

During his presidency, he maintained his insistence on the message of tolerance, mutual understanding, and peace through controversial political moves: he visited East Timor to apologize for atrocities perpetrated by the Indonesian military, tried (unsuccessfully) to establish a truth commission, and engaged in negotiating peaceful solutions with the secessionist movement of Aceh (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or Free Aceh Movement). He also changed the name of the Irian Jaya province to West Papua in response to the demands of the Papuan indigenous secessionist movement, *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (Free Papua Movement), despite various criticisms from both the military and the public.¹⁵ Concerning Chinese Indonesians, he revoked the government’s policy from Suharto’s time that discriminated against Chinese cultures, such as allowing Chinese

⁸ 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), 89–90.

⁹ For a succinct historical overview, see Clinton Bennett, “Sufis, Saints and Politics in Islam: An Historical Survey,” in *Sufism, Pluralism, and Democracy*, eds. Clinton Bennett and Sarwar Alam (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2017), 25–49.

¹⁰ The Nahdlatul Ulama literally means “the revival of the ulama.” It is the largest civil organization of traditional Sunni Muslims in Indonesia with more than fifty million members.

¹¹ Suharto became the president of Indonesia in 1967 and abdicated his position in 1998 after a series of mass demonstrations.

¹² Robert W. Hefner, *Civil Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 155.

¹³ Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid: Muslim Democrat, Indonesian President* (Sydney: University of South Wales Press, 2002), 185.

¹⁴ Greg Barton, *Abdurrahman Wahid*, 55.

¹⁵ 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>.

New Year celebrations in public and recognizing Confucianism as one of Indonesia's official religions.¹⁶

For many Muslims, Wahid was known as a *walī* during his lifetime, not only after his death. In the dozens of stories and testimonies circulated about him, he was described as having similar *karāmāt* with Muslim saints depicted in hagiographies: the ability to read other people's minds, foresee the future, communicate with deceased saints, identify other *awliyā' Allāh*, and transcend time and space, such as bilocation. In addition, there are stories about his intermediary power of God's blessing (*baraka*). For instance, two people narrate that their houses were spared from a fire in the neighborhood because they had pictures of Wahid and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī on their walls.¹⁷

Following his death in December 2009, his tomb, located in Pesantren Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java, became a pilgrimage site for many people; their ongoing visits reflect their recognition of Gus Dur as a *walī Allāh*.¹⁸ The visits of thousands of Muslims can be considered normal because traditional Muslims perceive Gus Dur as a saint.¹⁹ Still, the sight of Christians, Buddhists, and Confucians, among others, in the vicinity of the tomb is extraordinary.²⁰ Apart from personal and spontaneous pilgrimages by Christians to the grave of Gus Dur, there are occasions when Christians come in groups to pay respect to Gus Dur's grave and to learn from the local Muslim community 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 earlier, 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 and to pay their respects at Gus Dur's tomb.²¹

A traditional Islamic way to remember a saint, in addition to conducting a pilgrimage to a saint's tomb, is the annual commemoration of the saint's death anniversary (Javanese: *Haul*). The *Haul* of Gus Dur has become an interfaith celebration at which people of different faiths assemble to celebrate Gus Dur's life and legacy. There are occasions when Christian churches host the ceremony. For instance, at the fifth *Haul* of Gus Dur, a Catholic Church in the city of Malang, East Java, acted as the host. A representative of each religion recognized in Indonesia

¹⁶ Fawthrop, "Abdurrahman Wahid Obituary."

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ In traditional Muslim communities, the power and authority of a *walī* does not cease, even after his or her death so people are still affected by the spiritual power of a deceased *walī*; the person is still functioning as an intermediary between God and humans.

¹⁹ The pilgrimage (*ziyāra*) to tombs and shrines of saints involves intricate rituals. For a study of 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* 91, no. 3/4 (2001): 325–53. For another study of a pilgrimage to the tomb of a 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).

²⁰ 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>.

²¹ Ayomi Amindoni, "Kisah Para Pelajar Non-Muslim yang Berkunjung ke Pesantren Tebuireng," *BBC Indonesia*, November 2, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/majalah-41827650>.

simultaneously led a prayer to open the event.²² The event celebrated the diversity of Indonesia through creative media, such as a musical performance, watching a documentary film, an interfaith discussion, and an interfaith declaration of faith.²³

Worldly Saints in Christianity: The Theologies of Saints of Karl Rahner and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In the history of Christianity, many acclaimed saints were persons who cultivated prayer and contemplative lives, sometimes even far from society. In the Roman Catholic tradition, there was a time when many canonized saints were priests and other members of religious orders. Indeed, this tendency poses a problem to the Christian notion of sanctity because the non-clerical people in the Catholic Church tend to be seen as living outside the boundary of sanctity.²⁴ Dorothy Day (d. 1980), co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement and considered a political and social activist, famously objected to people calling her a saint because of her criticism of the tendency to attribute holiness only to some people of particular professions.²⁵ The encounter with an Islamic account of saints prompts me to look beyond the paradigm of holiness as *fuga mundi*. As a result, Rahner's and Bonhoeffer's ideas of holiness are instrumental in revisiting the dominant Christian notion of holiness, particularly in incorporating the political aspect.

Karl Rahner understands saints as people who respond positively to the self-communication of God by accepting their own existence and by living daily with faith, hope, and love.²⁶ Holiness always corresponds to diverse paths in human history as the actualization of God's salvific will in history. As a result, there are and will always be various new modes of holiness, stemming from God's grace, and different kinds of saints who reveal those modes. The canonization of saints is a recognition of new modes of holiness, not as a way to appoint particular people to a more special position than others.²⁷ Holiness is understood through living in the world authentically as a human.

²² *Pancasila*, or the five principles, becomes the main foundational philosophy of the country since its independence in 1945 and is written in the Constitution since then. The interpretation of *Pancasila* as the state ideology varies from time to time depends on the regime's political ideology. However, its basic function to unite people of various cultures and religious identities remain unchanged until now. The first principle is the belief in one God, although the original language of "*Ketuhanan*" refers more to the Divine Essence beyond the monotheistic understanding. Thus, Indonesia accepts Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism as the official six religions while allowing other religions beyond the six to exist, including indigenous religions.

²³ Adrianus Adhi, "Di Malang, Puncak Haul Gus Dur Berlangsung di Gereja," *Tribunnews*, January 5, 2015, <https://www.tribunnews.com/regional/2015/01/05/di-malang-puncak-haul-gus-dur-berlangsung-di-gereja>.

²⁴ Lawrence Cunningham calls this problem "the bureaucratization of sainthood." Cunningham, *The Meaning of Saints*, 49–51.

²⁵ Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 110.

²⁶ See my elaboration on Karl Rahner's theology of saints in Hans A. Harmakaputra, *A Christian-Muslim Comparative Theology of Saints*, 119–45. See also, Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 126.

²⁷ Karl Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. III, trans. Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1967), 91–104. See also, Harvey D. Egan, *What Are They Saying about Mysticism?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 99.

The unveiling of new modes of holiness does not mean the old ones become obsolete or meaningless. Rather, the new modes signify the constancy of God's grace in the world, a grace that tangibly takes form to bring about the continuous transformation of Christians in their ongoing engagement with the changing world. There is no single standard of being a saint that works all the time because new situations trigger new ways of being followers of Christ. Rahner lauded the saints as follows:

[They] 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.²⁸

For Rahner, all people have access to the path of spiritual perfection through fidelity to daily life in faith, hope, and love. Saints are those who become part of inter-communicative mediations as they manifest and reveal God's self-communication to other human beings. Rahner states that in human beings, a "transcendental, mental, and supernatural relationship to God is always mediated by categorial realities of his life."²⁹ In other words, holiness manifests through the saint's involvement in the world. Each believer must be authentic in their way of following Christ, although people of their time might not necessarily recognize them as saints.³⁰

The canonization of Óscar Romero in 2018 is a compelling case. Romero has become an example of someone who shows a new mode of holiness, viz., 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 in their footsteps. Long before his canonization, he influenced not only Catholics but also other Christians, non-Christians, and non-religious people to partake in various efforts to transform structural injustice and oppression.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an influential Lutheran theologian who continues to inspire many, not only through his writings, but also through his life and death. When the Nazis rose to power, he refused to flee and instead stayed in Germany. He became part of the resistance movement and one of the leaders of the Confessing Church. He was imprisoned in 1943 and executed on April 8, 1945. Some Catholics think of him as a saintly figure and want him to be canonized for his resistance to the Nazi regime, which cost him his life.³¹ Not only that, as Stephen Haynes notes, Bonhoeffer is also commemorated in a fashion somewhat similar to that used for other Christian saints in contemporary Germany. His life is perceived and reconstructed

²⁸ Rahner, "The Church of the Saints," 100.

²⁹ Karl Rahner, "On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, Volume XVIII, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 293–94.

³⁰ Pope Francis's statement about Martin Luther might be the most recent example of this recognition. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/01/19/pope-francis-martin-luther-wanted-to-renew-the-church-not-divide-her/>.

³¹ Martin E. Marty, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 144.

in hagiographical terms and there are pilgrimages, dramatizations, and commemorations of him.³²

Bonhoeffer perceives sanctification as a process that is integral to justification by God's grace. There is a threefold significance to 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.³³ The first and second elements of significance demonstrate how holiness manifests through the banality of the world. Bonhoeffer asserts that sanctification encompasses the whole dimension of human life, including politics.

In a letter written from prison in May 1944, Bonhoeffer states that a saint must partake in worldly affairs, even if suffering becomes the cost of that involvement. There is no need to develop a particularly "pious" religious life or asceticism—one need only be as she is in the world as a human being.³⁴ Another letter written in July 1944 communicates how Bonhoeffer 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."³⁵ Thus the worldliness he meant is to take "life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, its successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness."³⁶ In Bonhoeffer's understanding, a saint must engage entirely with worldliness in 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 consequences of those decisions. Again, this approach reflects Bonhoeffer's decision to oppose the Nazis through espionage and even planning a coup against the Hitler regime. Bonhoeffer had taken a pacifist position, but the suffering of people and the moral responsibility towards his country motivated his audacious transition into radical resistance.³⁷

Revising the Christian Notion of Holiness

The case of Abdurrahman Wahid as a *wali* who combined religious and political roles is not unique in Islam. On the other hand, the separation between religion and politics in Christianity creates an unpleasant view of saints who are too involved in the world through politics, as in the case of Romero. One of the divergent points between Christianity and Islam on saints can be traced to the founding figures of both religions. The Prophet Muhammad was not only a pious man but also a capable politician, brave warrior, and skillful community leader, whereas Jesus Christ was often depicted as an apolitical religious leader. From an Islamic perspective, Ibn

³² Stephen Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), Chapters 6 and 7.

³³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 314.

³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 166.

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 168.

³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, 169.

³⁷ Raymond Mengus, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Decision to Resist," *The Journal of Modern History* 64, Suppl. (1992): 134–46.

‘Arabī (d. 1240), one of the most prominent Sufi authors, asserts that the saints are the heirs or inheritors of the prophets and messengers, reflecting sainthood’s links to prophethood and messengerhood. As a result, a saint inherits one or more gifts identical to those of the prophets. Ibn ‘Arabī differentiates types of saints, such as “Moses-like” or “Christ-like.” Each of these types may have miraculous signs similar to the spiritual reality of the prophet from whom the saint inherits.³⁸ From this perspective, Abdurrahman Wahid might inherit both from Christ and Muhammad, thereby becoming a “Christ-like” and “Muhammad-like” saint. This designation is because his compassion and relentless work for the rights of minorities in Indonesia have made him popular among Indonesian Christians. At the same time, his political acumen mirrors that of Prophet Muhammad.

Drawing from this link between sainthood and prophethood, one way to integrate politics and sainthood in Christianity is by redefining Jesus’ political role as demonstrated in his life and ministry. The crucifixion was a political punishment for those who were perceived as threats to the Roman government. Jesus’s ministry had a political significance that made the political and religious authorities restless. His message of the Kingdom of God was subversive, reminding people to give their true allegiance to God, not to political or religious leaders. The reason for the persecution of the early Christians was political and not only religious. Joerg Rieger states that the confession that “Jesus is Lord” put early Christians at odds with the Roman Empire and their propagation of the emperor’s divinity.³⁹

In contemporary Christianity, this political aspect of Jesus is demonstrated in the postcolonial hermeneutics of the Gospel, as well as various liberation theologies, including Black and Womanist theologies.⁴⁰ On the Catholic side, liberation theology emerged in Latin America in the mid-20th century and emphasized the political dimension of Christianity by connecting spirituality with justice. It is often suspected as a subversive movement that threatens the unity of the Catholic church. One of the practical implications was the delay in the canonization of Óscar Romero as a saint in 2018. Before his canonization, some argued that Romero’s death was not a martyrdom for Christ but, rather, was due to his political involvement that challenged the political authority. Michael Lee convincingly argues that Romero’s theology embodied the Catholic faith and liberation theology, reconciling the two seemingly contradictory positions.⁴¹ The foundation of liberation theology is not Marxism but the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which empowers people to strive for justice. Romero’s canonization recognizes that spirituality and politics are not two separate spheres but connected as Christians strive to follow Jesus’ example of standing with the marginalized and oppressed.⁴²

³⁸ Michel Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn ‘Arabī*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 75–76.

³⁹ Joerg Rieger, *Christ & Empire: From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 23–54.

⁴⁰ For an example of a postcolonial hermeneutic, see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003). For an example of Black theological work, see James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

⁴¹ Michael Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Oscar Romero* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2018).

⁴² It is worthy to note that many people recognized Romero as a saint long before the canonization, including Protestants. For instance, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Anglican Church include him in their Calendar of Saints (March 24).

Second, Rahner's and Bonhoeffer's ideas provide a theological rationale for revisiting the Christian notion of holiness and suggesting a different kind of saint for contemporary times: a worldly and political saint. Rahner argues that saints are creators of new Christian modes of holiness revealed in a new time in history and that can be achieved through living in the world authentically as a human. They respond positively to the self-communication of God by accepting their own existence and by living daily with faith, hope, and love. Bonhoeffer's threefold significance to sanctification upholds the conviction that sanctification encompasses the whole dimension of human life. Politics are part and parcel of the complex matrix of human life and thus an integral part of holiness. In other words, sanctification cannot be limited to personal piety. Since there are different modes of holiness, there is a place for saints whose life and work demonstrate political struggle. Involvement in political realm is not disconnected from religious realm; sanctity encompasses all aspects of human lives.

Abdurrahman Wahid's example demonstrates the importance of relationships between people of different faiths. His legacy among Muslims and non-Muslims in Indonesia is rooted in his relentless efforts to cultivate personal connections to build peace and harmony. In 2020, Pope Francis wrote *Fratelli Tutti*, which also emphasizes this interpersonal dimension of social friendship to live together in today's diverse world.⁴³ I have written elsewhere that *Fratelli Tutti* challenges the dominant understanding of interfaith dialogue as an occasion for different religious leaders to convene and discuss a topic. Instead, interfaith dialogue's core is facilitating encounters that enable interreligious friendships to flourish.⁴⁴ Utilizing the lens of an Islamic theology of friendship (*walāya*), Axel Marc Oaks Takács interprets *Fratelli Tutti* as a call for solidarity, friendship, and co-resistance against any systems of domination. In other words, sanctity is political as much as spiritual, manifesting in all spheres of life.⁴⁵

Third, the comparison in this article suggests the redefinition of the meaning of "miracle" or the extraordinary power of saints. One theological implication of recognizing various modes of holiness is that the proof of a saint can no longer be measured exclusively by the appearance of miracles in the Roman Catholic canonization process—for example, the reversal of a life-threatening medical condition. Instead, saints can mediate God's grace through ordinary, worldly means to inspire people. Romero's miracle might not be divine healing but the ways in which people follow his exemplary legacy of standing with the poor and marginalized, even in a dangerous situation. Bonhoeffer may inspire people to maintain their prophetic voice amid threats and adversity. Similar to the ways in which *awliyā' Allāh* may belong to different types of saints that inherit various gifts of previous prophets and messengers, Christians today can remember and respect various manifestations of holiness as demonstrated by the departed people in accordance with their vocation. At the same time, living saints must also forge their own paths of holiness, perhaps even uncharted ones.

⁴³ Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (2020), no. 286, accessed October 7, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

⁴⁴ Hans A. Harmakaputra, "Fratelli Tutti and Interreligious Friendship: An Indonesian Christian Reflection," *The Journal of Social Encounters* 5, no. 1 (2021): 15–16, https://digitalcommons.csbju.edu/social_encounters/vol5/iss1/4.

⁴⁵ Axel Marc Oaks Takács, "Drawing Near to God, Drawing Near to Others: On Fratelli Tutti, Friendship (*Walāya*), and Muslim-Christian Co-Resistance," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 32, no. 1 (2022): 39–40.

Conclusion

Despite having a similarly negative view of the world, the connection between holiness and politics seems more apparent in Islam than in Christianity. However, through a comparison with an Islamic perspective of sainthood, this article highlights how a holistic understanding of sanctity that encompasses all dimensions exists in Christian thought, as exemplified in Rahner's and Bonhoeffer's theology of saints. Such a comparison yields three insights correlated to the task of revisiting the Christian notion of holiness. First, as Muslim saints shared the features of Prophet Muhammad, who was a prophet and a skillful political leader, the reconfiguration of Jesus's political role through teachings and ministry is consequential. Second, involvement in politics may not be traditionally considered as a positive quality of a saint in Christianity. Nonetheless, saints are revealers of new modes of holiness in history and the emergence of political saints should be seen as part of this development. The canonization of Óscar Romero in 2018 by the Catholic church is proof. Last, as Muslim saints might belong to different types of saints and inherit other gifts, the task of revisiting the Christian notion of holiness should reconsider the meaning of miracles mediated by saints. Miracles are not only about miraculous healing but anything that inspires people to experience God's grace in new ways.

RY

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