A Saint of Our Own

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To the relief of his long-suffering Redemptorist advocates, John Neumann became the next American canonized saint. The final phase of Neumann’s canonization process had also been marked by drama and difficulty. Neumann’s third miracle—the recovery of a young Philadelphia man from a rare cancer—had originally generated an inconclusive medical verdict in Rome. Postulator Nicola Ferrante advised submitting an entirely new case, but Cardinal John Krol overrode him, instead prevailing upon local Catholic doctors to review the file and soliciting additional medical experts to testify in support of a miraculous outcome. Though Ferrante seemed to have been appalled by the breach of tradition, the postulator had to concede that the strategy worked: the Holy See affirmed that miracle, dispensed Neumann from a fourth one, and canonized him on 19 July 1977.1

In the years to come Neumann’s devotees continued to report a flurry of miracles attributed to the intercession of the new saint, noting that many involved happy outcomes for dangerous pregnancies or premature deliveries. Neumann’s interventions on behalf of “unborn babies” were interpreted as a sign that he, from heaven, was teaching Americans “that human life is inviolable from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.”2 Like so many other saintly stories, Neumann’s reinvention as a “pro-life bishop” reveals far less about the age in which he had lived than it does about the age in which he was canonized. After the passage of Roe v. Wade in 1973, opponents of legalized abortion—or, as they would come to define themselves, members
of the “pro-life” movement—increasingly made the case that “the sanctity of life” was the most pressing moral issue of the day. U.S. Catholic bishops were at the forefront of efforts to recriminalize abortion: in 1973 alone, the Catholic Church spent $4 million in lobbying members of Congress for restrictions on abortion, and the following year Krol was one of four U.S. cardinals to testify before a Senate subcommittee in favor of a constitutional amendment banning abortion in all circumstances. In championing the pro-life movement, U.S. bishops had the full support and encouragement of Pope John Paul II, who throughout his long papacy urged Catholics to resist legalized abortion and other practices that contributed to a “culture of death.” As Neumann’s “pro-life” credentials suggest, saints were enlisted in efforts to defend the sanctity of life—and no one called upon them to greater effect than the man who would be known as the saint-making pope.

John Paul II canonized 482 people—more saints than all of his predecessors combined. He beatified almost three times that many, for a total of 1,341. The pontiff himself framed the proliferation of new saints and blesseds as a response to Vatican II, claiming that the council had affirmed that holiness was “the essential note of the church” and that the rising number of saints simply reflected an acknowledgment of the abundant and diverse channels through which that holiness flowed. Other interpreters, however, have attributed John Paul II’s fondness for canonization to his intuitive grasp of its symbolic power. This was certainly evident in 1994, when he beatified Gianna Molla, an Italian pediatrician diagnosed with a uterine tumor during her fourth pregnancy. Having forsworn treatment to protect the fetus, Molla died soon after delivering a healthy baby girl.

If John Paul II used the elevation of Molla to galvanize pro-life activists around the world, he also looked to prospective saints as an avenue to implement his vision of a Roman-centered global church. More than any of his predecessors, he sympathized with the longing that U.S. Catholics had first articulated in the 1880s: for the Holy See to acknowledge, first through beatification and finally through canonization, persons “who lived and labored and sanctified themselves in our land, among circumstances familiar.” Never before in history had a pontiff been more committed to extending to Catholics throughout the world the “joy and privilege” of encountering canonized saints in the places where they lived. In naming saints from among regions or nations that did not previously have one, he also bound those communities more closely to the universal church.
Causes introduced from the United States constituted only a fraction of those that succeeded during John Paul II’s papacy: he canonized two Americans and beatified an additional six (five of whom would be canonized by his two immediate successors). This relatively tiny contingent is nonetheless illuminating, especially when examined along with a sampling of the dozens of U.S. causes that were initiated during his papacy—as well as a few that, quite deliberately, were not.9

Many of John Paul II’s U.S. saints and blesseds had emerged as candidates for canonization in the early days of U.S. Catholics’ quest for a national patron. Some of these would reach the final stage having a much different meaning for believers than when they had first been proposed, while others arrived with virtually no meaning at all, at least beyond their immediate circle of supporters. John Paul II’s enthusiasm for naming saints did introduce a few fascinating twists into this story, but what really made this era a new chapter in American sanctity was not the saint-making pope but rather U.S. Catholics’ new perspectives on canonization. For nearly a century, they had sustained the search for a national patron, and it had sustained them. As they struggled to gain influence in their church and a comfortable place in their nation, saint-seeking had afforded them opportunities to defend, celebrate, assert, challenge, and understand their identities as Americans. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, the divisions among U.S. Catholics became much deeper than those that had once distanced them from Rome and from their fellow citizens. Canonization reflected those dynamics. In Rome, American allies and insiders at the Vatican increasingly determined which U.S. candidates would move forward. At home, the faithful would become less likely to project their American stories on their favorite saints and more inclined to use saints’ stories to express where they positioned themselves as Catholics, especially on divisive issues involving gender and sexuality.

John Paul II’s First U.S. Saint

Having “lost” to Elizabeth Ann Seton, Neumann’s promoters had also missed the next milestone on which they had set their sights. The U.S. bicentennial had passed in 1976 without offering Redemptorists a chance to celebrate Neumann’s canonization in tandem with national commemorations in Philadelphia.10 In October 1979, however, Pope John Paul II’s first pastoral visit to the United States afforded them a second opportunity to highlight their conferee
while the city and the nation watched. The pope’s American tour included a
day in Philadelphia, and the pontiff came to the shrine at St. Peter’s Church to
pray before Neumann’s tomb (figure 9).11

By the time of John Paul II’s visit, however, his Philadelphia host, Cardinal
Krol, cared less about the most recently canonized American than he did about
the person he believed should be the next one: Katharine Drexel. The cardinal
was delighted at the prospect of presiding over the only U.S. archdiocese with
both a male and a female saint and hoped Drexel’s cause would gather mo-
mentum from Neumann’s success.12 But the Redemptorist’s elevation would
indirectly slow Drexel’s progress when Francis Litz was reassigned to parish
ministry outside of Philadelphia and Monsignor James McGrath, Krol’s arch-
diocesan chancellor, replaced him as Drexel’s vice-postulator. Although the
cardinal assumed that McGrath’s involvement would bring Drexel’s cause more
solidly into his orbit and work in its favor, Krol had not taken into account

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**FIGURE 9**

Cardinal John Krol and Pope John Paul at St. John Neumann Shrine in
Philadelphia, 1979. (Courtesy of Redemptorist Archives of the Baltimore Province)
that it would further alienate Nicola Ferrante. Without Litz’s mediating influence, the relationship between McGrath and the Roman postulator grew even frostier, especially as both the chancellor and Krol blamed Ferrante for what they regarded as Drexel’s maddeningly slow progress.

For Krol, then, John Paul II’s 1979 visit offered an opportunity to work around Ferrante by enlisting the pontiff’s direct support. The Polish American cardinal shared ideological sympathies as well as an ethnic bond with the former cardinal-archbishop of Krakow. Hoping to use this friendship to Drexel’s advantage, Krol tried to interest the pope in her story and to convince him to intervene on her behalf. Even at this early stage of his papacy, John Paul II had proven himself amenable to nudges on causes for canonization, and it initially seemed that Krol’s effort had borne fruit; one month after his return to Rome, John Paul II authorized the “introduction” of Drexel’s cause. The apostolic phase, the Roman review of the ordinary process, took place during 1980 and 1981.

Drexel would be one of the last saints to undergo such a review. In January 1983, John Paul II promulgated the apostolic constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, the first comprehensive revision of the canonization process in centuries, and one that would have a momentous impact on causes introduced from the United States and elsewhere. As experienced postulators like Paolo Molinari observed, this reform “did not come down from Heaven in 1983” but rather had been inherited from Paul VI, who had appointed a commission charged with updating the canonization process to reflect innovations in historical scholarship—a trend that had begun in 1930 with Pius XI’s creation of the Historical Section. Members of the commission were also urged to consider how Vatican II’s teaching on collegiality might prompt the Holy See to share the responsibility for evaluating sanctity with the world’s bishops.13

Paul VI died before the commission completed its work, but decentralization and historical consciousness remained guiding principles of *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*. The reforms combined the ordinary and apostolic processes into a single diocesan phase in which testimony about the candidate’s virtues was gathered under the exclusive authority of the presiding bishop. The new system gave local bishops authority to introduce a cause. The reforms also created a new consultant within the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, a “relator” who, in collaboration with a person from the candidate’s local diocese, produced a detailed historical document (called a *positio*) that situated the prospective saint in his or her historical context.14
Divinus Perfectionis Magister also substantially reduced the role of the Promoter of the Faith, popularly known as the devil’s advocate. As a result, the promoter would raise objections only during the final stage, an adjustment consistent with the emphasis on a historical as opposed to an adversarial approach. This elimination of the multiple volleys between the advocate and the postulator, along with a number of other modifications, shortened the average length of the canonization process. In particular, the new procedure reduced the postmortem waiting period from fifty to five years. Even more significantly, the new constitution halved the number of required authenticated miracles: one for beatification (except in the case of martyrs, for whom no miracles were required at this stage) and one for canonization.15

Here again the revision did not arise spontaneously. By the late 1960s, members of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had been debating the necessity of the miracle requirement. Some had questioned it on theological grounds: were miracles strictly necessary to prove sainthood, once the virtues were established? Other considerations were more practical: as modern medicine reduced the realm of the medically inexplicable, was it even realistic to expect that a sufficient number would make it through such a stringent process?16 Reformers were also aware of the potential that new medical research could uncover scientific explanations for cures that the Holy See had already judged miraculous. (In 2015, this is exactly what happened with the miracle that had made Seton’s beatification possible. Advancements in immunotherapy suggested that Ann Theresa O’Neill’s 1952 recovery from leukemia may not have been medically inexplicable after all; it was possible that the onset of her chicken pox triggered a reaction that killed not only that infection but also the life-threatening disease.)17

In revising canonization procedures, John Paul II was also acting out of his vision of the global church—a reality the contemporary canon of the saints did not reflect. By streamlining the process, Divinus Perfectionis Magister made it more feasible for less wealthy and more distant “local churches” to sponsor and promote their own saints. In effect, John Paul II adopted a version of the strategy Father Edward McSweeny had recommended in 1890, when he urged the Holy See to make it easier to validate the “hidden saints” from countries “too poor to stand all the necessary expense.” By 1983, of course, the United States was no longer in that position, and its wealth and influence had helped to create a cozy relationship between the Holy See and U.S. Catholic leaders, even as the Cold War continued to strengthen the relationship between the Vatican
and the United States. In 1984, the two governments, both led by fervent anti-communists, established official diplomatic relations.

Soon after the promulgation of *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, Cardinal Krol traveled to Rome to ascertain what impact these reforms would have on Katherine Drexel’s cause. Krol directed his inquiries to two English-speakers at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints: Peter Gumpel, SJ, a German Jesuit who had been assisting Paolo Molinari in his duties as postulator since 1960, and Robert Sarno, a diocesan priest from Brooklyn who became the first American to work at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 1982. Sarno and Gumpel not only explained the new process to the impatient cardinal but also tried to temper his expectations; according to Gumpel, Krol demanded that Drexel be beatified within two years, an impossible task given the amount of work involved. Nevertheless, Gumpel promised Krol that he would work as quickly as he could and that the reforms in the process would “energize” Drexel’s cause.

Krol arranged for Peter Gumpel to serve as Drexel’s relator. In that capacity, Gumpel requested a collaborator from the United States, a “first-class historian” ideally based in Philadelphia, who would be charged with writing her *positio* under the new guidelines. Although many U.S. bishops, faced with increasing shortages of personnel, might have been reluctant to release priests for full-time work on a cause for canonization, Krol was not one of them. He and Gumpel selected one of Krol’s diocesan priests, Joseph Martino, who had written his doctoral dissertation at Rome’s Pontifical Gregorian University on Philadelphia’s Archbishop Patrick Ryan, who had been presiding over the archdiocese when Drexel had founded her congregation. By his own account, the diocesan priest had passed a miserable two years teaching at a local Catholic high school. When the cardinal asked him if he would like to go back to Rome, he could not say yes fast enough. The cardinal freed him from all duties, though as a diocesan priest he continued to earn a full salary, while the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament reimbursed him for travel and expenses.

Paolo Molinari replaced Nicola Ferrante as Drexel’s postulator upon the Redemptorist’s death in 1985. It was not a surprising choice, as Molinari and Peter Gumpel were close friends and worked well together, and it proved a fortuitous one for the advancement of Drexel’s cause. Molinari matched Ferrante in brilliance and experience, and he also had a gentle demeanor that did not lend itself to reproducing the fractious relationship between archdiocesan officials and his predecessor. Molinari, Gumpel, and Sarno made an effective triumvirate, and their cumulative experience helped compensate for considerable technical
mistakes that had already been made in Drexel’s cause. Gumpel, later admitting his “strong impression that Americans have never understood what was required for canonization,” cited the testimony gathered on Drexel’s virtues as a case in point, claiming that hers “was one of the poorest processes I have ever had the misfortune to examine.” Ninety years after officials at the Sacred Congregation had criticized the procedural errors, improperly formulated questions, and vague answers in John Neumann’s material, officials at the Holy See still marveled at the incompetence of U.S. saint-seekers.

Martino finished writing Drexel’s positio in 1986. A “hybrid” document containing elements of both the old and new procedures, it was the first of its kind to be submitted to the Holy See entirely in English; the 1983 reforms had eliminated the need for translation into Italian. Regarding the question of whether Drexel’s failure to accept African American women into the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament undermined her reputation for sanctity, Martino simply provided a historical overview of race relations in North America and portrayed Drexel as a woman constrained by the limits of her time: Drexel, he argued, had accepted the laws of segregation and admitted black sisters as soon as she was able.

Martino’s argument was buttressed by the fact that, by this point, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament had a tangible rebuttal of the alleged racism of their founder in the person of Sister Juliana Haynes, then president of the congregation. Haynes, a native of Roxbury, Massachusetts, entered the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in 1952 and became the first African American professed by the order. During those early years, Haynes and another novice, a Navajo, presented Mother Katharine with “spiritual bouquets” on her birthday and on Christmas. Their superiors had chosen them for this honor to make sure that Drexel, then in her nineties and bedridden, “knew she had a black novice and an Indian novice.” Sister Juliana taught at St. Peter Claver’s school in South Philadelphia before moving to Washington, D.C. It was only after joining the faculty of Xavier University, however, that Haynes began to appreciate the range of Drexel’s influence, especially on the U.S. South. She met “black professionals, principals, doctors—people who had gone to rural schools established by Mother Katharine” and who, Haynes believed, “started her cause [for canonization] long before the Church did.” In 1974, Sister Juliana left Xavier and returned to Philadelphia to serve on the congregational council. Ten years later, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament elected her president.
After Pope John Paul II proclaimed Drexel venerable in January 1986, Robert Sarno confided to his American contacts that he planned to work through his channels of influence to persuade the pope to mention Drexel during his second extended papal trip to the United States, scheduled for September 1987. The visit included a stop at New Orleans, where he would address representatives of Catholic colleges and universities at Xavier University, the college founded by Drexel and the perfect setting to reference her. Preparations for the pope’s 1987 visit did in fact prompt the next advancement in the history of American sanctity—though that development would most pointedly not involve Katharine Drexel.

Scholars who study John Paul II and canonization have focused on the ways he decentralized the process, viewing it as a mechanism to lift up local churches throughout the world. Less explored are the ways in which he also increased the Holy See’s involvement in the process. The case of the first U.S. saint challenges John Paul II’s own insistence that his approach to naming saints flowed from a desire to implement the teachings of Vatican II. Not only did his actions in this instance undermine collegiality through an extraordinary assertion of papal power, but they also controverted a decision one segment of the local church had made during the council era.

In October 1986, Anne O’Neill, RSCJ, provincial superior at the Sacred Heart house in St. Louis, Missouri, was nonplussed by a telephone conversation with the city’s Archbishop John May, who had recently returned from a visit to Rome with some startling news to share: the Vatican had approached him about the possibility of canonizing Philippine Duchesne. According to May, a person from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had told him “we need somebody, not from Philadelphia, to be canonized in the United States and a woman and a religious would be helpful.” This remarkable statement testified to the lengths John Paul II was willing to go to secure local saints. In 1925, when Pius XI had asked the prefect of the Sacred Congregation why he could not give him an American saint, the response had been, “I can’t give you one until they give me one.” By contrast, when John Paul wanted to canonize an American saint, he told the prefect to go out and find one.

Robert Sarno, Paolo Molinari, and Peter Gumpel all took part in the discussions about who the new American saint would be, and given their involvement in Drexel’s cause, the inclusion of the stipulation that the new saint not be from Philadelphia is fascinating. It very likely reflects a strategic decision on
the part of Drexel’s Rome-based promoters. Sarno, for example, later revealed that although he personally viewed Drexel’s cause as a “shoo-in,” he fretted that “people would say that we have a big lady from a big city with a big Cardinal and we are going to rush her right through.”30 It made sense to adhere scrupulously to the process and wait for Drexel to be canonized after her cause proceeded through normal channels, without asking for special favors. On the other hand, the qualification “not from Philadelphia” may also suggest that Cardinal Krol’s efforts to appeal directly to John Paul II’s support had, at best, failed and, at worst, backfired spectacularly. Material related to the Drexel cause suggests that Krol continued to make “unfavorable impressions” at the Holy See; one report cites fears that the cardinal would be “screaming up and down the hallway about it” as soon as he arrived in Rome.31 At the very least, the specification for a saint “not from Philadelphia” suggests a lack of enthusiasm for Drexel on John Paul II’s part. When it came to naming saints, he could, and in many cases did, accelerate the process in any manner he chose, and he evidently did not want to do so in Drexel’s case. Tellingly, he did not reference her in his formal comments during his visit to Xavier University.32

Another tantalizing element to Anne O’Neill’s conversation with Archbishop May was the preposition she used in recounting to the Society’s superior general: the Holy Father, O’Neill wrote, needed a person “to be canonized in the United States.” This hint that John Paul II wanted to canonize the next saint on American soil conforms to another of his innovations. During a visit to the Philippines early in his papacy, he had presided at the beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz, who became the first Filipino to be so recognized. In his homily on that occasion, John Paul II made clear that he saw naming saints as an instrument of evangelization and Ruiz’s entrance into the ranks of the blessed as signaling the “harmonious mingling of faith and culture” in the Philippines, the only predominantly Catholic nation in eastern Asia.33 The setting of the ceremony accentuated the pope’s message. Ruiz’s was the first beatification in church history to have occurred fuori sede or outside Vatican walls. By the end of his long papacy, John Paul would preside at a total of sixty-one fuori sede beatifications that were scheduled to coincide with his pastoral visits throughout the world. Three years after Ruiz’s beatification, another Asian nation became the site of the first canonization ceremony outside of the Vatican when, during a visit to Seoul, John Paul II canonized en masse 103 Korean victims of anti-Christian persecution in the nineteenth century. John Paul II ultimately presided at fourteen fuori sede canonizations.34
These *fuori sede* beatifications and canonizations also demonstrate that John Paul II’s saint-making initiatives both diminished and increased the role of the Roman center. Whereas a beatification or canonization that took place in situ allowed witnesses to see “heaven touching earth” on their own soil, the star of the show was not the new saint but the charismatic pope. In the case of beatifications, this dynamic obtained even at the ceremonies held at the Vatican. Traditionally, popes had not presided at beatifications, both to distinguish them from canonizations and to allow the local church to shine. Though Paul VI had made an exception to this rule in 1971 when he presided at the beatification of Maximilian Kolbe, during his time as pope John Paul II presided at beatifications as standard practice.

In a 1987 interview with Kenneth Woodward, Paolo Molinari confirmed that John Paul II had indeed hoped to schedule a canonization in the United States in conjunction with his U.S. visit, and he had asked the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to help him find an appropriate candidate. “The pope was going to the U.S.,” Molinari recalled, and “he asked the cardinal [Pietro Palazzini, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints from 1980 until 1988], are there any causes that could come to a head so that I could have the opportunity of presenting this person among the people?”

What prompted the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to suggest Philippine Duchesne in response to the pope’s request? The French missionary met all the specifications: she was a woman and a religious, and she had no real connection to Philadelphia. According to Molinari, a miracle-in-waiting was the decisive factor weighing in Duchesne’s favor. Molinari had reviewed documents related to the 1951 cure of Mother Marguerite Bernard, the RSCJ missionary to Japan whose recovery had elicited such optimism within the Society of the Sacred Heart on the eve of the council. Although a previous postulator had not believed the case had much merit, Molinari disagreed. Such a reversal itself was not unprecedented; Ferrante’s fresh perspective on one of John Neumann’s tabled miracles, after all, had paved the way for his beatification. The difference was that in Neumann’s case, the reviewer had been the postulator specifically assigned to his cause, whereas in this instance, Molinari agreed to review the Bernard miracle in response to the specific request of the prefect, by way of the Holy Father. According to Gumpel, the miracle of Mother Bernard “had been lying there,” simply waiting for an expert such as Molinari, who could “see at a glance” what could have been done years before. By that point, the Jesuit had been reviewing miracles for thirty years and could instantly spot ways that a
medical review could result in a different verdict. Molinari consulted with doctors with whom he had already worked and requested the proper documents from the San Francisco hospital where Bernard had recovered.37

While the miracle review was in the works, the only question was whether the RSCJs would agree to rededicate themselves to Duchesne’s cause. Moving forward without the congregation’s cooperation would have been counterproductive and may well have been impossible. Archbishop May informed the Society of the Sacred Heart that the new procedures ensured Duchesne could proceed to canonization with only one miracle and that Molinari, based on his review of the Bernard cure, was confident that it would pass medical and theological scrutiny. He also assured them that the remaining costs would not be onerous, which made the decision to proceed. The congregation believed its limited material resources should support its priorities, and the canonization of Duchesne had not been among those since the late 1960s, when the sisters had decided that pursuing her cause past beatification would drain valuable resources from their mission.38

By the 1980s, it had become increasingly evident that the Society of the Sacred Heart’s misgivings about pursuing Duchesne’s cause were also rooted in a second source: their feminist-based resistance to the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. Canonization always required direct and repeated engagement with the male hierarchy of the church, and for most American women religious during this period, relationships with church authorities at all levels had by then become increasingly fraught. Many of the seeds of conflict planted during the era of Vatican II had led to memorable clashes between American Catholic sisters and the hierarchy in the United States and Rome. During Pope John Paul’s visit to the United States in 1979, for example, Theresa Kane, RSM, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, welcomed him on behalf of all American Catholic sisters in a statement that included a controversial plea for the church to consider opening all of its ministries to women—including the ministerial priesthood. Throughout John Paul II’s papacy, the church often disciplined Catholic sisters for openly dissenting from church teaching, especially on issues relating to homosexuality and abortion. Feminism was becoming an increasingly divisive issue between the many American women religious who embraced it and the many church leaders who viewed it as a social evil on par with abortion.39

Although details about how the Society of the Sacred Heart came to terms with canonizing Duchesne are scant, Helen McLaughlin, then the congrega-
tion’s superior general, acknowledged to Anne O’Neill that she could see some “tremendous possibilities” in renewing Philippine’s cause. In a letter announcing the news to all the members of the Society, timed to arrive just before the feast of the founder, Madeleine Sophie Barat, herself a canonized saint and Philippine’s “much-loved friend,” McLaughlin claimed that the while the news “has come as a complete surprise to us,” she welcomed it as a joy and an invitation to self-examination:

I feel it is important for each one of us to take up Philippine’s life and to reflect on her message. She has surprised us now by stirring the surface of our immediate consciousness with extraordinary energy! What is she trying to communicate to us today? Who is she for us: a courageous, sensitive woman; a deeply prayerful religious; a lover of poverty and simplicity; a loyal, suffering daughter of the Church; a pioneer into the future who dared to go where few had gone before? She is saying something to us with urgency and insistence, and I am certain that during our preparation for her feast, Saint Madeleine Sophie will help us to be open to Philippine’s challenges and inspirations to be authentic Religious of the Sacred Heart. 40

In short, the RSCJ leadership decided to do what people had always done with their beloved saints: listen to the messages Duchesne might be sending them about their contemporary lives and ministries.

Sources are silent as to why Duchesne’s canonization did not take place in the United States during the pope’s visit in September 1987, as he had apparently wished. Yet many members of the congregation traveled to Rome for Duchesne’s canonization the following year, which was preceded by its General Chapter meeting. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that however cool they may have initially felt toward the prospect of the canonization, most of Duchesne’s spiritual daughters had resigned themselves to it and rejoiced at the chance to celebrate her life and mission on a grand scale.

In a biography of Duchesne published soon after the canonization, however, one RSCJ did go on the record with her feminist-based ambivalence about the event. Noting the uptick in the number of new female saints in the twentieth century, Catherine Mooney suggested that most of their stories reflected “traditional and sometimes antiquated assumptions about activities appropriate to women.” Mooney offered Elizabeth Ann Seton as an example: “Seton’s authority, and the perception of holiness her contemporaries formed about her,”
Mooney pointed out, “clearly derived from her admirable commitment to the womanly task of nurturing.” Seton continued to be revered for her traditionally feminine attributes; one assessment of Seton’s significance for “modern women” portrayed her as a source of inspiration for women “trying to raise a family while beset with illness and financial problems.” The same article also praised Seton as an accomplished pianist, who “saw not only to her children’s education but to their entertainment as well.”

A new moment for women demanded new models of womanhood. Where, Catherine Mooney asked, were the canonized female saints who “exercised religious leadership outside the bounds of the traditional cultural constraints? To what extent might the models of female holiness being chosen today by the papal curia subtly skew or constrict our notions of what constitutes women’s holiness?” Expressing her hope that the church would not shoehorn Duchesne into narrow models of womanhood, Mooney reimagined Duchesne as a feminist heroine: “Philippine was a woman in a world and a Church run largely by men.” While her life reflected the reality of women’s roles in the nineteenth century, Mooney wrote, Duchesne could speak to modern women struggling to overcome sexism and narrowly defined gender roles. “As a woman on the frontier,” she argued, Duchesne “has something to say to women who find themselves on frontiers of another sort.”

The occasion of Duchesne’s canonization also demonstrated that gender was not the only category of identity that would make canonization much more complicated in the 1980s than it had been a century before. The first U.S. saint-seekers had not troubled themselves over the imbalance of power between European Catholic missionaries and indigenous people; neither had they considered the church’s complicity in suppressing native cultures and traditions. By the 1980s, however, Americans’ attitudes toward Catholic missionaries were increasingly inflected by an awareness of the oppressive legacy of European colonization. Among the RSCJs, a desire for racial inclusivity led them to welcome Native Americans to Duchesne’s canonization. A prominent guest was Bishop Charles Chaput, OFM, Cap., of Rapid City, South Dakota, who had become only the second Native American bishop when John Paul II had appointed him a bishop earlier that year. Chaput was a member of the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi tribe, and late in her life Philippine Duchesne had lived for a brief time at a Potawatomi mission in Sugar Creek, Kansas. As John Paul intimated in his homily, the presence of Chaput and other Native
American Catholics posthumously honored the desire that had led Duchesne across the Atlantic in the first place. The “nun who desperately wanted to give her life to the Native Americans” had not been able to do so during her life on earth, but Native Americans celebrated her at the most pivotal moment in her afterlife.44

Back at home in the United States, the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions Newsletter ended its coverage of Duchesne’s canonization with a plea to its readers to pray that the newly minted “St. Rose” would intercede on behalf of an intention even more dear to the hearts of Chaput and other native Catholics: that “Blessed Kateri” would soon be canonized. Tekakwitha has garnered more attention from scholars than any other of John Paul II’s U.S. saints or blesseds, largely because they interpret her beatification as an example of the pope’s commitment to inculturation, the idea that Catholic beliefs and rituals can find expression in native cultures throughout the world.45

More telling for our story, however, are the parallels between John Paul II’s first U.S. saint and his first U.S. blessed. Both the Rose of Missouri and the Lily of the Mohawks had blossomed as candidates for canonization in the late nineteenth century, nourished by U.S. Catholics’ desire to present the Holy See with a saint of their own. Ardor for both women had first wilted at home during the era of the nation saint and had been redirected in the wake of Vatican II. While Duchesne’s congregation had lost enthusiasm for pursuing her cause, Tekakwitha’s cause would increasingly be spearheaded by indigenous supporters. Though indigenous Americans had always supported Tekakwitha’s cause, it had been sponsored first by the Jesuits and, after 1939, by the Tekakwitha Conference, which was open only to missionary priests until the 1970s. As in Duchesne’s case, John Paul II had provided the stimulus to advance Tekakwitha to the next stage in the process. Though her promoters had not submitted a miracle to the Holy See since 1955, John Paul II waived this requirement and beatified Kateri in Rome in July 1980.46

As organizations such as the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions and the Tekakwitha Conference promoted devotion to Blessed Kateri among indigenous Catholics, these members of her primary constituency hoped and prayed that John Paul II, perhaps with prompting by a newly interpreted St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, would canonize her before too long. By the late 1980s, they certainly had reason for optimism in this regard, as new saints seemed to be emerging at unprecedented speed.
More Saints, New Meanings

Indeed, this was a pace that disturbed some Vatican leaders. During a conference held near Milan in 1989, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, raised eyebrows when he appeared to question the theological justification for the increase in canonizations and beatifications. Arguing that the recent saints and blesseds “may have some meaning for a limited group of people” but did not mean much to “the vast majority of believers,” he suggested that it was perhaps time to give priority to causes of people who offered the faithful “a truly universal message.”

Newspapers described Ratzinger’s statements as criticism of the “inflation” in saints, a term that seemed to apply to the situation in the United States. Within four months of Philippine Duchesne’s canonization, two more U.S. causes reached beatification. One of them, to Krol’s delight, was Katharine Drexel. The new norms required only one miracle for beatification, and, as had been the case with two of John Neumann’s three miracles, the new cure attributed to Drexel involved a young person from the Philadelphia area. In 1974, fourteen-year-old Robert Gutherman had developed a life-threatening ear infection that, even in the best-case scenario, was expected to result in complete hearing loss. The Guthermans had lived close to the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament’s convent in Bensalem and Robert had often served as altar boy for Masses held there. After his mother followed a sister’s advice to “pray directly to Mother Katharine and Mother Katharine alone,” Gutherman recovered from his illness, with “perfect hearing.” Under Molinari’s expert guidance, the miracle passed medical and theological scrutiny.

Gutherman, by then a grown man, joined a thousand other Americans who traveled to Rome for Drexel’s beatification in November 1988. Cardinal Krol led the group, though he was no longer presiding over the Archdiocese of Philadelphia; Anthony Bevilacqua had succeeded him the previous winter. New York’s Cardinal John O’Connor also attended, both in his capacity as the head of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions and as a former neighbor of the Drexel family in his native Philadelphia. O’Connor was poised to become as energetic a saint-seeker as Cardinal Francis Spellman had been. One of O’Connor’s first acts was to initiate the cause for canonization of his immediate predecessor as New York’s archbishop, Cardinal Terence Cooke.

Like the Sisters of Charity in Seton’s case, Sister Juliana Haynes and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament viewed Drexel’s beatification as an unparalleled
opportunity to further the congregation’s mission. “REMEMBER,” the sister in charge of public relations for the entire congregation wrote to sisters designated for that role in each convent, “WE COULD NEVER AFFORD TO PAY FOR THIS TYPE OF PUBLICITY. WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY NOW WE MIGHT NOT HAVE AGAIN FOR A LONG TIME.” Recommended responses to media inquiries included statements such as, “The reason the Church selects individuals to be canonized is to provide us with models we can imitate. Mother Katharine believed we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and for this reason was a civil rights activist long before this was popular.”49 Envisioning the event as a chance to advance social justice and to celebrate “the spirituality and culture of the Black and Native Americans,” Haynes authorized a gift of $10,000 to Pope John Paul II to be distributed among the poor, as well as an additional $15,000 to sponsor black and Native American participants in the celebrations in Rome.50

At the beatification Mass, the prayers of intercession were read in Navajo by Marie Tso Allen, who had been educated by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. This was the first time that language had been spoken in St. Peter’s. Eagle dancers from Laguna Pueblo, New Mexico, performed at a prayer service, and the day after the beatification a Mass of Thanksgiving took place at the Basilica of St. Mary Major. The Xavier University of Louisiana Choir sang “Mass for an American Saint,” composed especially for the occasion by a Xavier alumnus, and the call to worship included the Prayer of the Four Directions—a native prayer for peace, reconciliation, and thanksgiving—by Deacon Victor Bull Bear from South Dakota. Also present were Norman Francis, president of Xavier University; Ellen Tarry, the African American writer who had defended Drexel’s decisions on race; and members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the African American congregation to whom Drexel had directed many black vocations. Drexel’s official beatification portrait featured her superimposed on a map of the United States, standing next to an African American and a Native American. (figure 10).51

That Drexel’s beatification appears to have generated no protests from African Americans or Native American groups may have resulted from the sisters’ success in promoting Drexel as a model of inclusivity. On the other hand it may simply reflect that the event had not captured much attention at all. Whichever the reason, Drexel’s beatification stood in marked contrast to the other U.S. beatification of the autumn of 1988, which elevated Junípero Serra.

The cause of the Franciscan missionary, which been launched in 1931 in part as a Franciscan rejoinder to the North American Jesuits, had begun to move
forward during the late 1960s, when his promoters billed him as the perfect saint for the “space age” and the putative patron of ecologists. In the summer of 1987, Vatican officials attributed the recovery of a Franciscan sister in St. Louis from a mysterious and life-threatening illness to Serra’s intercession.52 The timing of this announcement raised expectations that John Paul II would sidestep the remaining hoops—a plenary session of cardinals of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints followed by official papal sanction—and beatify Serra on American soil the following September, when he would be in Monterey, California, during a visit to the United States. A month before the scheduled arrival, however, a Vatican spokesman announced that because the “normal procedures” had not yet been completed, the trip would not include the beatification. The pope did, however, visit Mission San Carlos in Carmel,
where Serra was buried, and hail the “Apostle of California” as the “defender and champion” of Native Americans.53

Native Americans themselves had begun to argue the opposite in the 1960s, accusing Serra of complicity in the extinction of native peoples and traditions. Writing at the time of beatification, Monsignor Paul Lenz, the executive director of the Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions, dismissed such criticism as “nonsense,” arguing that it was unfair to hold Serra accountable for the sins of California’s Spanish colonizers. Lenz allowed that the Spanish had done “much damage to the daily living, health, and culture of the California Indians.” But the fact that Serra was Spanish, Lenz argued, should not make him automatically guilty. Lenz hoped the “exhaustive study” undertaken to support Serra’s beatification would settle the matter.54

It did not. The year of the beatification, native activists protested at Serra’s burial site in Carmel, and vandals defaced a statue of Serra at the San Diego mission, scrawling phrases such as “genocidal maniac” and “enslaved Indians” at its base. Such demonstrations appalled Serra supporters, including Monsignor Francis Weber, a historian and an archivist who had published a book about Serra and believed that “the attempts to discredit Serra . . . constitute an attack on the whole mission of evangelization.”55

Faced with depictions of Serra as a “Killer Saint,” the Franciscans decided in the late 1990s not to comment on stories of native protests, perhaps believing that no publicity was better than the alternative, and by 2000 the congregation’s enthusiasm for actively pursuing the cause seemed to have wavered; a draft of a letter from U.S. bishops to John Paul II in support of Serra’s cause was never sent. Although the Franciscans certainly did not renounce Serra’s cause, they, much like the Society of the Sacred Heart had done in the council era with Duchesne, appeared to have resigned themselves to the probability that Serra would remain permanently a “blessed.”56

Promoters of the woman from Philadelphia took an opposite tack. Throughout the 1990s, Drexel’s supporters developed an “aggressive agenda” for marketing her cause in the United States and in Rome, seeking to capitalize on anniversaries such as the centennial of the founding of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the fortieth anniversary of Drexel’s death.57 Priests and bishops from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia remained heavily involved in her cause, and their partnership with Drexel’s congregation, though not without tension, continued to function relatively smoothly. Had Sister Juliana Haynes been less
willing to allow Monsignor McGrath to take credit for “carrying” the cause, and to compensate him handsomely for doing so, the relationship may well have been more strained.  

Paolo Molinari’s sensitivity to this issue seems also to have helped; on at least one occasion, the postulator reminded Philadelphia’s cardinal that, considering the sisters were the “Attori della Causa,” they should be kept informed of all developments related to it.

As it was, concerns over what author Bill Briggs would refer to as “men and money” were giving many other women’s religious communities pause about pursuing causes for canonization.  

Many members of such congregations, echoing Catherine Mooney’s concerns about Duchesne, were determined that their saints would not be co-opted by male church leaders who recognized only limited roles for women. In theory, this became marginally easier under the revised norms, which contained no provision that female petitioners could petition the Holy See only through male proxies. Isabel Toohey’s dream had technically been realized: women could at last represent their founders in causes for canonization. In 1982, Angela Bolster, an Irish Sister of Mercy working on the cause of congregational founder Catherine McAuley, became the first woman recognized as a vice-postulator by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

In the United States, the Sinsinawa Dominicans claimed another first with Sister Mary Nona McGreal, who, with the publication of Samuel Mazzuchelli’s positio in 1989, was the first woman to be acknowledged as the author of such a document.

Yet despite women’s increasing prominence in the process, canonization would effectively remain a male affair. The vast majority of people who worked at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, as in other Vatican dicasteries, were priests—by definition, men. According to Peter Gumpel, personal decisions made by women, rather than structural impediments, made female absence particularly glaring at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in the 1980s. Despite no formal prohibition against women serving as postulators, very few of them were interested in doing so. Successful postulators needed to acquire years of experience, and few qualified women religious from the United States, Gumpel explained, “were willing to spend the whole of their lives on this work.”  

There were obvious reasons why most sisters would be disinclined to enter the saint-making business full time. For many, their vows of poverty and commitment to social justice ministries made a posting in Rome seem an unjustifiable diversion of their labor from higher priorities at home, especially as an aging population and an overall decline in the membership created a
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massive personnel problem in sister-sponsored institutions. Most sisters may have been reluctant to accept even a short-time appointment for a cause, as had Father Martino from 1984 until 1986. As feminism increasingly influenced the choices of women religious, it was difficult for many of them to see the appeal of immersing themselves in the overwhelmingly clerical environment of the Holy See.

Male or female, U.S. vice-postulators needed the help of clerics working at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to move causes forward—or more precisely, they depended on Monsignor Sarno, who since his arrival in 1982 proved “extremely helpful” in determining which causes did so. Soon after Duchesne’s canonization, the Brooklyn priest made a key intervention in the cause of another French-born missionary to the Midwest, Mother Théodore Guérin. By 1989, Guérin’s cause was represented by a vice-postulator from within the Sisters of Providence, but she and other congregational leaders were frustrated with their postulator in Rome—Guérin’s eighth—who did not communicate often or well with them. When the Holy See pronounced Guérin venerable in 1992, the Indiana sisters learned of it only when Belgian-based members of their community read it in their local newspaper. After they turned to Sarno for help, he connected them to Andrea Ambrosi, an enterprising Italian who had established himself as a postulator after the revisions of 1983 opened that position to members of the laity. Ambrosi agreed to review a miracle that one of Guérin’s previous postulators had discarded: the apparently spontaneous cure of Mother Theodosia Mug, Guérin’s biographer, from stomach cancer in 1908. Much as Molinari had done for Mother Bernard’s miracle, Ambrosi’s experience and a practiced eye convinced him that the original judgment that it was not worthy of consideration was wrong.

When Vatican approval of the Mug miracle led to Guérin’s beatification in Rome in 1998, however, some Sisters of Providence expressed misgivings about pursuing her cause further. At a celebration of Guérin’s beatification held in Indiana, Sister Nancy Nolan acknowledged the “anti-cause” members of her community and tried to appease them by ruminating that all members of a group of highly educated women could hardly be expected to agree on everything. Nolan evoked the spirit of the congregation’s founder as she assured the naysayers that they were entitled to their opinion. As Mother Théodore had done in her lifetime, each of her spiritual daughters had to stand up for what she believed in, and all members of the community would respect her decision. Sisters who supported pursuing Guérin’s cause, such as Nolan and Sister Marie
Kevin Tighe, who served as Guérin’s vice-postulator between 1996 and 2006, reminded skeptics that “canonization merely called attention to the kind of woman [Mother Théodore] was—which is the kind of woman we are all striving to be.”

For other U.S. Catholic sisters, concerns over the costs of canonization, combined with reservations about the imbalance of power in their interactions with male church leaders, led them to resist pursuing processes altogether—especially when the request to do so came from an outsider to the community. Throughout this era, Andrea Ambrosi’s resourcefulness, like John Paul II’s activism, often reversed the initiative in canonization, which had historically flowed from periphery to center. After accumulating some notable saintly successes, the Roman postulator promoted not only his candidates but also his own services. In 2002, for example, he approached Anthony Pilla, bishop of Cleveland, Ohio, asking for more information about Sister Mary Ignatia Gavin, a Sister of Charity of St. Augustine who had died at the congregation’s motherhouse in 1966. Gavin, working as director of admissions at a Catholic hospital in Akron in the 1930s, had collaborated with Robert Smith and Bill Wilson to treat alcoholism as a medical condition and to develop the twelve-step program of recovery known as Alcoholics Anonymous. Ambrosi told the bishop he was “honestly very impressed” with Gavin, finding her uncommon moral qualities equal to “many other Servants of God that I brought to the altar as Postulator.” Ambrosi inquired whether the bishop had ever thought to “start a cause of Beatification and Canonization” on her behalf. Pilla forwarded the letter to Gavin’s congregation, but the sisters demurred. Though they encouraged people to honor her as a “saint” informally, they were not interested in opening an official cause. “Besides the issue of formal canonization for another nun,” one member of the congregation explained, “there is the very real $ issue.”

But Ambrosi’s overtures to other prospective petitioners in the United States met with more success, and he would go on to represent some of the most high-profile American causes, such as that of Knights of Columbus founder Rev. Michael McGivney and of Bishop Fulton Sheen, the radio and television star whom Nicola Ferrante had once engaged to speak about John Neumann. One U.S. cause that did not need Ambrosi’s assistance was Katharine Drexel’s, which continued to rest in Molinari’s capable hands. The Jesuit postulator repeatedly relied on his own prudence and familiarity with the process to temper the enthusiasm and ambition of Drexel’s Philadelphia-based supporters. When
Philadelphia archdiocesan officials, citing John Paul II’s interest in naming saints among the married laity, proposed initiating a cause for Drexel’s father, stepmother, and sister, Molinari concluded that none of them had enjoyed “an authentic and widespread fame of sanctity” required for canonization, and therefore it would not be worthwhile to carry the matter further.68 Similarly, when Drexel’s Philadelphia-based advocates proposed taking advantage of a liberal interpretation of the rules regarding miracles—they wanted to move forward with a potential miracle that had taken place after the pope announced Drexel’s beatification but before the elevation ceremony—Molinari advised patience. “Until and unless” a new prefect at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints developed a “greater familiarity with the intricate matters” about miracles, he cautioned, it was better to wait.69

Under Molinari’s tutelage, it appeared that Philadelphia saint-seekers had finally learned—a century after opening John Neumann’s cause—how not to make “unfavorable impressions” at the Holy See. In 1993, concerns that James McGrath “was not acting in accordance with the norms” of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints prompted his removal as Drexel’s vice-postulator.70 McGrath’s successor, another diocesan priest named Alexander Palmieri, adhered closely to procedure, although lapses occurred despite his scrupulousness. In 1998, for instance, the president of Philadelphia’s Drexel University (an institution founded by Katharine’s uncle) committed a public relations blunder when he mentioned in media interviews that he had used a recent audience with Pope John Paul II to “advocate” for Drexel’s canonization. Palmieri sent him a harsh rebuke: “No one can give the impression that anyone is ‘advocating’ with the Pope or with any Vatican official to have Blessed Katharine canonized a saint. The Vatican does not look kindly upon any semblance of outside pressure in what is an extremely objective process of canonization.”71

Inside pressure, of course, was another matter altogether, and when it came to causes introduced from the United States, much of that was applied by Sarno. He fielded correspondence from and offered detailed advice to many U.S. saint-seekers, including Cardinal John O’Connor. Soon after his return from Drexel’s beatification, O’Connor launched the cause of Haitian-born Pierre Toussaint, who had arrived in New York as an enslaved man in the early nineteenth century and died there in 1853. Toussaint’s owner—whose social set, incidentally, included the Seton family—had apprenticed him as a hairdresser. Working in what was then a lucrative field, Toussaint accumulated a great deal of wealth, and eventually he gained his freedom and became one of
Catholic New York’s most significant benefactors, supporting, among other institutions, an orphanage and school established by Elizabeth Ann Seton’s Sisters of Charity.

O’Connor, presiding over the exhumation of Toussaint’s body from the cemetery at Old St. Patrick’s Cathedral in 1990, suggested that the canonization of “this man, God’s reflection in ebony,” would be “a wonderful thing for the city of New York” that would “restore some pride in the city. It will be a great thing for the church. It will be a fine thing for the black community.” Ellen Tarry and other African American Catholics readily agreed. Rev. G. Augustus Stallings, president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, expressed the organization’s strong support for Toussaint, whom he called a “saint for our times and people.” Pointing out that the church “raises to her altars men and women who have specific importance at critical moments of history,” Stallings posited that Toussaint would be the perfect saint for a society plagued by racial divisions, poverty, and a decline in family values.

Not everyone thought that the creation of saints had much actual spiritual or social significance for contemporary Americans, however. Another New Yorker took exception to O’Connor’s grandiose claims about what Toussaint’s canonization would mean, writing angrily to the cardinal, “Would the average New Yorker care more or less if the Catholic Church canonizes another saint? I think not. Would the canonization of another saint be a source of New York City pride? My God, who even thinks of Mother Cabrini or Mother Seton who toiled through the streets of this city, except those in their congregations, and those close to those religious communities?” The increasingly circumscribed celebrations surrounding John Paul II’s U.S. blesseds suggested that O’Connor’s cranky correspondent had a point. The level of secular and Catholic media coverage of the beatifications of Tekakwitha, Drexel, and Guérin never came close to rivaling that of either Cabrini’s in 1938 or Seton’s in 1963, whereas Serra’s beatification had been notable primarily for the negative attention it captured.

John Paul II’s three remaining U.S. blesseds had even more limited national appeal. The saintly trajectory of Francis Xavier Seelos followed a recognizable pattern in the history of U.S. saint-seeking. Proposed in the early days of the quest, Seelos’s cause had originally been paired with that of John Neumann, with whom he had once lived. Archbishop Amleto Cicognani had been interested in it in the 1930s, but it had since languished for reasons that his biographers insisted were “not clear even to expert students of the canonization
process of Father Seelos.” In the context of this study, however, they become quite apparent. Seelos’s story, unlike that of his Redemptorist confrere, had not translated very well to the “new ideal of sainthood” of the 1930s. Yet congregational interest in Seelos’s cause had revived in the late 1960s, as the centennial of his death approached and as Neumann’s cause was inching toward completion. After the reforms of 1983, the congregation assigned one of its historians to the task of writing Seelos’s positio, which was finished in 1998 and approved the following year by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Seelos’s postulator had a miracle, dating back some thirty-odd years, ready to propose, and it, too, was approved quickly. John Paul II beatified Seelos in Rome in April 2000.

John Paul II’s next U.S. blessed, Marianne Cope, was also loosely connected to John Neumann, though in her case the link was established retroactively. German-born Marianne Cope had been a young child when her family settled in Syracuse, New York, where she entered a Franciscan community of sisters. By the time of her beatification, that community had merged with three other Franciscan congregations who traced their roots to the Philadelphia community founded under Neumann’s guidance in 1855. Many other women’s religious congregations were following suit, consolidating their resources by merging with other congregations that shared a similar charism. This was necessary as their membership continued its downward trend. The consortium that included Marianne Cope’s congregation named itself the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities.

As for Cope herself, she had worked in the community’s Syracuse hospital until 1883, when she had answered a call to minister to the lepers of Molokai, where she remained until her death in 1918. There are no signs that Cope’s community considered opening her cause until the 1970s. It is likely their decision to do so then stemmed from the publicity surrounding Father Damien de Veuster, a Belgian-born missionary who lived and worked among the leper colony of Molokai between 1873 and his own death from Hansen’s disease (leprosy) in 1889.

Though Hawaiians have long celebrated Damien’s legacy (the anniversary of his death is an unofficial state holiday), Damien has not yet entered this story, for a simple reason: just as he had bypassed the United States entirely in his lifetime, having died nine years before Hawaii was incorporated as U.S. territory, so, too, did his cause for canonization largely skirt the United States until its final stages. De Veuster’s cause was introduced from the Archdiocese of
Malines, Belgium, in 1938, where most of his remains currently lie. The church declared him venerable in 1977. Damien did not become widely identified as an American saint in the continental United States until the onset of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s. As Catholics and non-Catholics ministered to victims of another disease that led to societal and religious ostracism, they adopted Damien as a model of compassionate care. John Paul II beatified Damien in 1995, in a ceremony held in Brussels, Belgium.

Once Cope’s cause was introduced, Sarno took an avid interest in it, claiming to have been motivated by a quest for gender parity; he bristled that Cope had received so much less attention than Damien had. Gumpel, who served as Cope’s relator, testified in his affirmative report to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints that “in the work for the lepers, Father Damien did nothing that Mother Marianne did not do likewise.” The combination of Gumpel’s expertise and Sarno’s careful attention helped move Cope’s cause swiftly through the process.

When John Paul II declared Cope blessed in 2004, she became the first U.S. missionary sent from the United States so designated—though, of course, by the time of her death, Hawaii had become U.S. territory. Unlike Cope, who died of natural causes, most of the missionaries beatified and canonized by John Paul II had died as martyrs. In his efforts to create more models of holiness, the pope adopted a more generous definition of martyrdom than had been used in the past, which encompassed not only those who perished because of hatred of the faith but also those who died defending truth and human dignity. Of John Paul II’s saints, 83 percent were considered martyrs, as were 77 percent of his blessed.

Yet U.S. Catholics were conspicuously absent among this total, even though several likely candidates emerged during his papacy. Perhaps the best known of these are Maryknoll missionaries Maura Clarke and Ita Ford, lay Maryknoll missioner Jean Donovan, and Ursuline sister Dorothy Kazel, who have become collectively known as the “four churchwomen of El Salvador” since their murder in that country in December 1980. Although these women have been hailed as modern martyrs and considered unofficial saints, no steps have been taken to open formal causes on their behalf. Though the region in which the women died is surely a factor—John Paul II was far less attentive to candidates who died in Central American civil wars than he was to prospective saints who perished under communist regimes—it appears that gender has also played a part, given that by the end of John Paul’s papacy, the faithful were pursuing such
honors for many of the sisters’ male counterparts. These efforts led to the 2016 beatification of El Salvador’s Archbishop Oscar Romero, killed while celebrating Mass in March 1980, as well as the beatification the following year of Stanley Rother, an Oklahoma-born priest killed while on mission in Guatemala in July 1981. Most open causes of modern U.S. martyrs involve men: Bishop Francis Xavier Ford, a cousin of Ita Ford’s who was killed by Chinese communists in 1952; Emil Kapaun, a military chaplain who died as a Korean prisoner of war in 1953; and Vincent Capodanno, a priest and navy lieutenant who died serving with the marines on a Vietnam battlefield in 1967. The interest in martyrs has also breathed new life into a more geographically concentrated subset of the long-forgotten “Martyrs of the United States of America.” The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee has proposed 43 prospective saints, many of whom appeared on the list of the original 119 men championed by Bishop John Mark Gannon in the 1930s and 1940s, as the “Martyrs of La Florida.”

The lack of movement for martyred churchwomen suggests that the misgivings of the Society of the Sacred Heart about pursuing Duchesne’s cause, internal disagreements within the Sisters of Providence about Guérin’s canonization, and the disinclination of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine to propose Sister Mary Ignatia Gavin may reflect more than idiosyncratic decisions made by individual communities. Instead they appear to point to a more systematic and decisive shift in U.S. saint-seeking: an aversion to formal canonization among sisters who reevaluated their ministries and relationships to the hierarchy in the aftermath of Vatican II. When a group of Ursuline sisters were asked whether they planned to open a cause on Dorothy Kazel’s behalf, for example, one member of her congregation responded cagily, “I was at Romero’s beatification, and it was very male. That’s all I will say.” A similar wariness seems to be evident among the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, a religious order of women based in Ruma, Illinois, who lost five members on mission to Liberia during its civil war in 1992. Though the murdered sisters could easily fit the criteria for modern martyrs, their sisters have not asked that they be formally recognized as such, and at least one member expressed the opinion that the resources used to pursue a cause would be better spent on educating women.

As noted above, the unwillingness to pursue formal canonization is also fueled by feminists’ belief that doing so would force the candidates into clergy-defined gender roles. Such fears are not unfounded, as attested to by the most controversial cause launched by New York’s Cardinal O’Connor: that of Dorothy Day. Day’s singular achievement was founding the Catholic Worker
movement in 1933, and to many of her devotees and admirers, the case for her holiness rests on her fierce commitment to social justice. In announcing the opening of her cause for canonization, O’Connor, by contrast, foregrounded Day’s pre-conversion abortion, positing her as a model for women who had had or were considering abortions. “It is a well-known fact,” the cardinal said, “that Dorothy Day procured an abortion before her conversion to the faith. She regretted it every day of her life.” Day’s appropriation as a pro-life saint has outraged critics who claim that church leaders are attempting to tame Day’s message by recasting her in the familiar trope of the “fallen woman” rather than grappling with the radical challenge that her life and example pose to the Catholic Church. Echoing the concerns of many Catholic sisters, other admirers of Day object to her formal canonization on the grounds that resources would be better spent on helping the poor.

Dorothy Day had been inspired to establish the Catholic Worker movement when she was reading the life of Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, daughter of author Nathaniel Hawthorne and founder of a congregation of Dominican sisters dedicated to Rose of Lima. In her autobiography, Day recounted reading that Hawthorne had started “a chain of cancer hospitals in a four room tenement such as the one I was living in” and wondering, “Why not start a newspaper the same way?” Lathrop and Day, linked by a common mission in their lifetimes, are also bound in their afterlives as prospective pro-life saints. While Lathrop’s spiritual daughters—known since her death as the Hawthorne Dominicans—had for decades disavowed any interest in opening a cause on her behalf, they changed their minds in the era of John Paul II. Lathrop’s cause, they believed, would help advance “the dignity and sanctity of human life” by promoting the value of keeping the incurable comfortable in their final days rather than advocating euthanasia or assisted suicide. Hawthorne’s care for “the most untouchable terminally ill of her day,” her supporters argued, would provide a strong witness in an age when “human life is often ignored or denied.” Such a platform marks an interesting divergence between Lathrop and Elizabeth Ann Seton, the woman to whom she had been so often compared in life. As converts from elite American families, Seton and Lathrop both had stories tailor-made to underscore Catholic compatibility with U.S. citizenship. While Seton’s supporters made the most of such claims, Hawthorne’s devotees have not emphasized this angle, a difference explainable by the time frames in which they emerged as candidates. Seton had become a holy hero during a period in which U.S. Catholics were seeking to affirm their place in the nation’s
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history, whereas Lathrop’s cause was opened at a time when Catholics were secure in their sense of national belonging but often criticized American culture from a faith perspective.

Gender and feminism have shaped Lathrop’s cause as well. The Hawthorne Dominicans belong to the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, the smaller and more traditionally minded of the two umbrella organizations that represent Catholic sisters in the United States. The CMSWR developed from Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, the group that had splintered from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in the early 1970s. Members of the CMSWR are more likely to wear habits, engage in traditional female ministries of teaching and nursing, and have less charged relationships with members of the male hierarchy than the members of congregations that belong to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Like these general characteristics, a willingness to pursue causes for canonization is not an absolute differentiator between the two organizations, but it is a useful one.96

In eschewing canonization processes, Catholic sisters who identify as feminists may be inadvertently ensuring that the holy women who lived among them will be lost to history. However tedious and costly, canonization does lead to permanent memorialization. A century after her death, will Dorothy Kazel be as unfamiliar to Catholic believers as Leo Heinrichs, the Denver priest killed at the altar in 1908, or other long-defunct candidates for canonization? Will future U.S. Catholic parishes honor only St. Stanley Rother, St. Emil Kapaun, or St. Francis Xavier Ford? Will photographs of future female American saints feature only habited nuns, performing traditionally female tasks?

Abdication also runs the risk of appropriation. In the case of Sister Mary Ignatia Gavin, for instance, Alcoholics Anonymous has presented itself as the sponsor of her cause.97 In a less benign example, an organization that calls itself the Father Mazzuchelli Society has proposed wresting control of the sponsorship of Father Samuel’s cause from the Sinsinawa Dominicans, maintaining that the sisters’ “estrangement” from the church after Vatican II and their adoption of “beliefs quite at odds with the Catholic faith” are a betrayal of their founder’s legacy.98 While this particular fringe group stands little chance of pushing the Sinsinawa Dominicans out of the process, as the community’s enthusiasm for Mazzuchelli’s cause continues unabated, the potential of similar groups to usurp other founders’ causes is a warning to those familiar with the decades-long struggle of Seton’s spiritual daughters to gain control over her life and legacy. Women who forswear canonization entirely may be transforming a
hard-won victory into a hollow one, neglecting an opportunity to reshape canonization as a vehicle for creating models of Catholic womanhood that fully reflect the broadened roles of women in modern life.

Yet even Seton’s canonization could be considered a hollow victory itself. Developments in the decades that followed suggested that U.S. Catholics had found their all-American saint at the precise moment it ceased to matter. Admittedly, the symbols that had united U.S. Catholics to Rome and to their fellow citizens at Seton’s canonization in 1975—the enthusiastic Protestant presence, Pope Paul extolling the American spirit in his homily, and the banner that emphasized Seton’s dual citizenship in heaven and in the United States—had indeed been powerful. The cooler reception of John Paul II’s U.S. saints and blessed, however, suggested that U.S. Catholics would attach far less meaning to such symbols in the decades that followed. This dynamic is particularly well illustrated by a reversal in the afterlife of the only American to be both beatified and canonized by John Paul II.

Katharine Drexel was canonized on 1 October 2000. Drexel’s second authenticated miracle, like her first, involved a local child’s recovery from hearing loss.99 When asked to explain the significance of this coincidence—elements of a saint’s miracles often correspond to aspects of his or her life or ministry, and ears had not figured prominently in either of Drexel’s—Drexel’s supporters speculated that she might be advising Americans to listen more carefully to what she was telling them about how to be holy.100 Whatever message Drexel might have been sending about holiness, however, it had little to do with the unique ways it had manifested itself in America. While a few devotees implied that Drexel, who had been born a U.S. citizen, had a slight patriotic edge over Seton, who had been born a British subject, these isolated and half-hearted attempts to present Drexel as a quintessential American were a far cry from the ambitious national claims her supporters had made on her behalf when she had emerged as a candidate in the 1960s. Claims that Drexel had been “unmistakably American” or the founder of the first Head Start program did not resonate in an era when U.S. Catholics no longer needed their saints either to stake their claim in American culture or to remind the Vatican of their unique national “brand.” Instead, Drexel’s devotees celebrated her canonization as a spark for the “new evangelization,” John Paul’s call to renew Catholics’ missionary fervor throughout the world, especially among peoples who had heard the gospel proclaimed but had forgotten its message.101
From an American Brand to a Catholic Brand

No other U.S. causes for canonization had reached either their penultimate or final stage by the time John Paul II died in April 2005. Crowds at his funeral chanted “santo subito,” a phrase that roughly translates into “sainthood immediately,” and invoked an early practice of the church—long before there was such a procedure as a canonization process—when saints were proclaimed by popular acclamation. The new pope, the former cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, decided not to forgo the entire process, perhaps subscribing to the same philosophy Cicognani had embraced with regard to Seton about the importance of maintaining the integrity of the process. Pope Benedict did waive the five-year waiting period, however, and opened his predecessor’s cause for canonization just days after his death. It would succeed in record time: John Paul II was beatified in May 2011 and canonized in April 2014.102

Meanwhile, many Vatican watchers wondered whether Benedict would modify his predecessor’s canonization practices, especially after he reiterated his concerns about the inflation in the number of saints in a 2006 interview on Vatican Radio. “The large number of beatifications was almost overwhelming,” he had said, and perhaps it was time to be “more selective, choosing figures that entered our consciousness more clearly.”103 Nonetheless, Pope Benedict did not substantially adjust the canonization process, though he did reverse one innovation made by John Paul II: except in unusual circumstances, the pope would not preside at beatifications.104

Whatever Benedict’s reservations about the increasing number of saints, there was little he could do to stop momentum that had been building during John Paul II’s papacy on a number of causes, including those of several Americans. Three weeks after his interview on Vatican Radio, he canonized Mother Théodore Guérin as the next U.S. saint. Celebrations of Guérin’s canonization were clustered in the state of Indiana, where representatives of both church and state commemorated the first Hoosier saint. When Mitch Daniels, then Indiana’s governor, unveiled a sign dedicating a section of U.S. 150 to Guérin, he observed, “We’ve named roads, bridges and other facilities for sports heroes, military heroes and politicians. . . . That’s all well and good, but we’ve had many of those and only one saint.”105

On a national scale, Guérin did gain some traction as a model of independent womanhood in the face of entrenched male authority. In a New York Times
op-ed published on the Catholic Feast of All Saints, Catholic commentator James Martin, SJ, recounted Guérin’s struggles with the bishop of Vincennes and saucily wondered what the bishop made of her recent canonization as he watched “from his post in heaven—or wherever he is today.” Martin linked Guérin’s story to those of Joan of Arc and Mary MacKillop, the latter another of John Paul II’s blesseds who had founded a religious community in Australia and had often been at odds with local bishops—and unlike Guérin had actually been excommunicated. All three of them, according to Martin, were independent women who offered proof that saints were not models of compliance but occasionally “noisy prophets” who spoke truth to power and examples of “faithful dissent” from church authority.106

Three years after Guérin’s canonization, the church declared Damien of Molokai a saint. U.S. celebrations were largely contained to the fiftieth state, though the event did register briefly in the nation’s capital, albeit through the efforts of a non-Catholic. President Barack Obama, then in his first year in the White House, issued a public statement expressing his deep admiration for the saint who “had earned a special place in hearts of Hawaiians.”107

In October 2012, the canonization of Damien’s female counterpart, Mari-anne Cope, received marginally more attention, if only because the event marked a double triumph for North Americans: Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized on the same day. Although John Paul II had beatified Tekakwitha in 1980 without an authenticated miracle, his more discriminating successor waited until one materialized. It arrived with poignancy. In 2006, Jake Finkbonner, a five-year-old member of the Lummi tribe, had incurred a facial injury that led to a serious bacterial infection that left him close to death. After his parents placed a relic of Kateri’s on his pillow, he recovered rapidly. The case easily passed Vatican scrutiny and to some seemed especially heaven-sent. Unlike Katharine Drexel’s auditory miracles, Jake’s cure connected petitioner and intercessor: like Tekakwitha, Jake was both young and native, and his permanent facial scarring evoked her smallpox-scared countenance.108

Jake Finkbonner was an honored guest at a reception sponsored by the Canadian Embassy to the Holy See after Tekakwitha’s canonization Mass. Also attending was Phil Fontaine, the former chief of the Canadian Assembly of First Nations, who had been an outspoken critic of the church’s complicity in abuse of native children in Canadian residential schools. Three years earlier, Fontaine had led a delegation to Rome to receive an official apology from Pope Benedict, and in his speech at the post-canonization reception, he described his
two visits to the Vatican as bookends in a journey of healing and reconciliation between church leaders and indigenous people. “They have acknowledged their sins,” he said, “and we have forgiven them. Today, they canonize one of our daughters, and we walk forward together into the future.” At the time of the two women’s canonizations, the church in the United States was also grappling with the consequences of a devastating clergy sexual abuse crisis. Tekakwitha’s elevation, in fact, represented a bright spot in a bleak year for her longtime devotee Charles Chaput, who in 2011 had become Philadelphia’s thirteenth bishop and the first Native American to preside over a U.S. archdiocese. Attempting to deal with the moral, legal, and financial implications of the crisis, Chaput announced in January 2012 his plans to close dozens of archdiocesan institutions that faced declining enrollments and crumbling infrastructures. The optimism of Joseph Kerins and others who had hoped that John Neumann’s canonization would inspire enough vocations to shore up a crumbling school system had been misplaced.

Chaput attended the canonizations of Cope and Tekakwitha in October 2012, and the following January he presided at a Mass for the two new American saints, held at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. In his homily, Chaput spoke of his common ethnic heritage with Tekakwitha but also reminded the congregation that he felt a double affinity with Cope. Not only were they both Franciscans, but they were also linked through John Neumann: Chaput as one of Neumann’s successors as Philadelphia’s bishop, and Cope as a member of a community that had traced its roots to the congregation he had founded.

Less than three years after Chaput delivered that homily, he would gather with his fellow U.S. bishops at the same basilica for a momentous event: the first fuori sede canonization celebrated on American soil. And a new pope would preside. In a move that astonished the Catholic world, Benedict had resigned three months after Cope’s and Tekakwitha’s canonizations. Equally surprising, to some, was the honoree at the 2015 canonization. Pope Francis, Benedict’s successor, had announced aboard a flight from Sri Lanka to the Philippines that he planned to canonize Junípero Serra during his upcoming visit to the United States. The vice-postulator for Blessed Serra’s sainthood cause, Franciscan father John Vaughn, told the Catholic News Service that he had been taken completely by surprise by the pope’s announcement. “I was the last to know,” Vaughn said.

Though the Franciscan friars had not anticipated the papal decision, they
made the most of it and, as the RSCJs had done with Duchesne in 1988, celebrated their new saint. An earlier generation of their confreres, who had nominated Serra in part out of a desire to give Franciscans their due in the aftermath of the North American martyrs’ canonization, might have appreciated the irony: the “Apostle of California” was canonized by a Jesuit. Francis’s unilateral decision to elevate Serra, though not in keeping with his image as a populist pope, underscores that canonization remains a papal prerogative.

As had been the case with his beatification in 1988, Serra’s canonization elicited fierce protests from Native Americans. One wonders whether the pope was at all familiar with the story of Francis Xavier Seelos, or if he had even discussed open causes with the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints as John Paul II had done in advance of his second U.S. visit. Had Francis chosen to elevate the Redemptorist missionary instead of Serra, he would have forfeited the opportunity to call attention to holy heroes of the West and Southwest—admittedly a welcome development, as U.S. canonized and prospective saints remain concentrated in the Northeast. Nevertheless, canonizing Seelos would have allowed Francis to emphasize the same themes of evangelization without accentuating the harsh legacy of colonialism to the extent Serra’s canonization had done.112

Pope Francis gave U.S. Redemptorists a more obvious reason to feel affronted during his U.S. trip. It was very plausible that Francis would visit John Neumann’s shrine while he was in Philadelphia, the final leg of his U.S. trip. Not only had John Paul II visited St. Peter’s in 1979, but Benedict XVI had also done so in 2008. Moreover, Neumann’s reputation for humility seemed to make it even more likely that he would attract notice from a pontiff who deliberately shunned the luxurious trappings of the papal office. Nevertheless Francis’s Philadelphia sojourn passed without either a scheduled or spontaneous stop at St. Peter’s, despite his appearance at nearby Independence Hall.

Frances Cabrini’s sisters in Upper Manhattan also had grounds for disappointment. When the papal visit was announced, they had expressed their hopes that the pope would visit their newly restored shrine in honor of Cabrini, and there were reasons enough to suppose he might. The shrine was in a neighborhood filled with immigrants, a population especially dear to Francis’s heart. Moreover, the former cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was already familiar with the Cabrini sisters, attributing his own vocation to the congregation’s work around his native Buenos Aires. Finally, for the Argentinian-born grandson of Italian
immigrants making his first visit to the United States, it would be hard to imagine a more relevant figure than Cabrini, whose life had revolved around the same geographical triangle. Yet Francis did not stop by, even though he was in the vicinity, and he did not mention Cabrini at all. This omission should not be interpreted as a slight but instead as another instance of how American exceptionalism has shaped the way U.S. Catholics tell Cabrini’s story. For Pope Francis, as for most of Cabrini’s admirers born outside the United States, her holiness derived from her multiple border crossings, not from the time she spent within U.S. boundaries.

Aside from Serra, the American saint whose star shone most brightly during Pope Francis’s visit was Elizabeth Ann Seton. Not only did President Obama single Seton out as an iconic American during the visit by presenting the pope with the key to her Emmitsburg home, but the pontiff himself recalled Seton’s heroic charity and extraordinary sacrifice as part of his prepared remarks at New York’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Seton’s holiness, he observed, had helped Catholicism and its institutions—particularly schools—to flourish in the nation’s founding period and beyond.

Elizabeth Ann Seton had remained a “wholly American saint” in the sense that a viable challenger for that title had not emerged in the four decades that followed her canonization. But while U.S. Catholics would not suggest that another candidate could better embody homegrown holiness, as earlier generations had done in the case of both the North American martyrs in 1930 and Frances Cabrini in 1946, there is no evidence that Seton’s devotees ever took the additional step of petitioning the Holy See that she be named patron of the United States. The only geographical area under her patronage is the state of Maryland—a designation that surely would have disappointed those who had championed her as “Elizabeth of New York.” By any measure, U.S. Catholics certainly had not “hitched their wagon to Mother Seton’s star,” as the priest had advised them to do after her canonization.

For almost a century, the story of canonization in the United States had skewed heavily toward the pursuit of an American brand of holiness. By the time Seton was elevated in 1975, however, the narrative had begun to tilt in the opposite direction, becoming a function of intra-Catholic debates that only intensified throughout John Paul II’s papacy. In 1998, journalist Paul Elie wrote about this dynamic in reference to the divisiveness surrounding the cause of Dorothy Day. Elie paraphrased a lament by Jesuit Thomas Reese that “conflicts
among Catholics often seem like quarrels over a brand-name, with the players so worked up over what it means to be Catholic that they lose sight of the holy." This accusation is a serious one to levy against Catholics, whose religious practices and sensibilities testify to a palpable sense of the sacred, to an acute awareness of the ways heaven touches earth through objects, sacraments, and saints.

Reese's criticism misses the larger point: U.S. Catholics have not so much lost sight of the holy but rather have become far less likely to rely on saints to define holiness for them. In part this is a theological phenomenon, rooted in a greater emphasis on saints' human qualities. Robert Ellsberg, an expert on saints and a supporter of Dorothy Day's cause, made this point dramatically in his 2017 cover story in America magazine, which appeared under the headline "SAINTS NOT SUPERHEROES."

The more important takeaway for our narrative is that U.S. Catholics no longer rely on saints to define their place in America. Once again, where U.S. Catholics went, they took their saints with them. As polarization within the church supplanted marginalization in America as the keynote of U.S. Catholicism, the faithful became less inclined to view prospective saints as they had once viewed the Jesuit martyrs, Cabrini, Seton, Neumann, and others. No longer outward expressions of a deep yearning for holy heroes who sprang from their own time and place, favorite—or relentlessly "informal"—saints have become signifiers of where Catholic individuals and groups position themselves within the church, often on issues related to gender, sexuality, and social and racial justice. The search for a holy American hero had begun as an effort to define and articulate an American Catholic identity to outsiders to the faith and to the United States. It ended when canonization evolved into one of the most telling wedge issues, if not necessarily the most obvious, among U.S. Catholics.

American saints are now anything but rare, and considering the plethora of open U.S. causes, they will be even less so in the future. But holy heroes have become far less meaningful than they once were, not only theologically but also culturally, as U.S. saint-seekers, influenced by papal initiatives, globalization, and the nation's culture wars, have abandoned their pursuit of an American brand of holiness in favor of fragmented efforts to define what they envision as an authentically Catholic one. And thus we arrive at what may be the most revealing aspect of U.S. Catholics' search for a saint of their own: it was not the outcome of the search that showed that Catholics, despite their ties to the
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Holy See, were an essential part of the American story but rather the pattern in which that search ran its course. Launched just as the United States announced its intention to become one of the world’s most powerful nations, the quest for a wholly American saint reached it apex just as those aspirations were attained, and unraveled as social and cultural change prompted all Americans to question whether they could be said to share one common identity.
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