

## CHAPTER VII

### Various Sayings on Sainthood

*I used to neglect my neighbor  
If his religion is not as mine  
My heart came to accept every image:  
A place of verdure or monks' monastery  
A pagan's temple or a wonderer of Ka'ba<sup>1</sup>  
The Torah's tablets or the Qur'an Book.  
I do believe in the religion of love wherever it might lead  
For love is my religion and my faith.<sup>2</sup>*

I am certain that Ibn Arabi, a Sufi Muslim, the author of the above quote, and most Sufis will follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and manifest love. They have experienced God's love but they did not find God's religion, although it was under their eyes. In order for them to understand God's books, they need a Philip<sup>3</sup> to open their minds. This is true for the Jews, Muslims and humanity as a whole.

Christianity is the religion of love as its Master is the Provider of Love. Alas, the Christian assembly is not living up to its motivation and function. They became integrated in creation with no fixed task. Their holy nation became unremarkable and not functional, and those like Ibn Arabi do not find in the Christian assembly the love that fulfills their thirst.

Sainthood in this assembly became unrecognizable and hidden; however, it always remained. The day-to-day saint-man was covered with many theories and philosophies that obliterated his initial calling, to be set aside by God for a holy purpose and an identification for God's glorification. After all, the saint-man did not recognize his potentiality either in him, or in the assembly. The living saint was dead (disappeared) in the eye of the assembly, and they only recognized sainthood after a man's death. They

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<sup>1</sup> Ka'aba is the pilgrimage place for Muslims. Every Muslim's dream is to make the pilgrimage "Hajj" to Ka'aba in Saudi Arabia. The faithful Muslim fulfills one of the five pillars of Islam by such pilgrimage.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Arabi, 1165AD-1240 AD, an Arab Sufi Muslim mystic and philosophers. Quotation is taken from the book "God is love" in Arabic p.10 George N. Rayes, Qulfat Press. My translation.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 8: 29-39.

recognized it through miracles and extraordinary visible power as recompense to a man's special ascetic endeavor. This has developed a distorted image of sainthood that is similar, to some extent, to the other views on sainthood from various religions.

The following is a little summary of the general view held by Jews and Sufi Muslims regarding sainthood. This is to ascertain that a man of any religion shares the same particles that can be polarized and directed to the right teachings when he/she wishes, and with Philip's guidance, become one of the members of Christ's body.

### ***Some Sayings about Sainthood***

Many Christians and theologians have obtained a false perception on sainthood. They have adopted the same view of individualistic and heroic endeavor. The Australian Anglican Ross Walker, a social worker in Canberra, says that saints *"are all inspiring, larger-than-life people."*<sup>4</sup> The Austrian Catholic Theologian Adolf Holl says: *"The saint must exhibit a heroic degree of virtue akin to the asceticism that ancient athletes and warriors strove to perfect. And the works of a saint must be out of the ordinary, almost unique. He or she should have a charisma or aura, the kind of radiance that was classically symbolized by a halo. The life of a saint should display a certain personal serenity."*<sup>5</sup>

Many also view the saints as idiots *"Majadeeb"* or as simple minded and naïve *"Daraweesh"* and as living on the edge. Father Carroll Stuhmueller of Chicago's Catholic Theological Union say of the saint: *"Saints tend to be on the outer edge, where the maniacs, the idiots and the geniuses are. They break the mold."*<sup>6</sup>

This is a distorted and incomplete image and definition of sainthood. Here is where the dilemma resides: people began to look at the saints as The Perfect and The Model. They tended to forget that the only Perfect One is God and that the saints were but trying to glorify and to thank Him. Their endeavors are but a manifested expression of their love to what is instilled in them from the beginning, and their yearning through their active life is but a becoming worthy members of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus showing God's grace, mercy and love. Metropolitan Philip notes: *"They are the special*

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<sup>4</sup> Quotation is from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,945463-3,00.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

people who made the presence of God a reality in this world.”<sup>7</sup> This presence is a reality in the Assembly and in its work as a reflection of “*Theurgy*.”

Although Jews and Sufi Muslims consider sainthood as a way of life required by God for those who believe in Him, their views on the topic remain in the scope of a personal perspective. Sanctity is for them: an endeavor for personal achievement, an award, and ultimately a seeking to please the far away God. In any research of the writings of Jews and Sufis, the person may detect the inclusivity of individualism and the exclusivity of the assembly efforts. Though they do not mention saints, the Jews praise the zaddik which is the “righteous person”, while the Sufis refers to them as the *Awliya*’. Furthermore, some of the Jews limit the number of their saints to 36, while the Sufis to 360, which cannot be compared to the countless number of saints found in Christianity. For the Jews there are few saints as seen in the following quote:

*Orthodox Rabbi Stephen Riskin of Manhattan's Lincoln Square Synagogue explains: the zaddic is "deeply pious, self-effacing, generous with everything he has, burning with a desire to serve God and serve mankind. One serves God by serving man and man by serving God. The two are intertwined." Besides recognized zaddikim, there is according to Jewish lore a group of hidden zaddikim in every generation, believed to number at least 36, upon whose merit the existence of the world depends. Only the virtue of these 36 hidden saints—lamed-vovniks in Yiddish—stays God's hand from destroying the world.*<sup>8</sup>

For the Sufis following the same principle, the number of their saints is 360 as is seen in Ruzbikhan Baqli.<sup>9</sup> The Sufis do not speak about *Qadasa*, Holiness or Sanctity, but their

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<sup>7</sup>Bishop Demetri (Matta) Khoury, *A Cloud of Witnesses, Saints and Martyrs from the Holy Land* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2008), p. xvii, from the forward by Metropolitan PHILIP, Primate, the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America.

<sup>8</sup> Quotation is from <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,945463-3,00.html>.

Jews call their distinguished people by their names with an epithet as “Hillel the great” or Saadia ben Yosef Gaon (Gaon means the glorious) or Gershom ben Yehoudah known as Meor ha-Golah, which means “the light of the exile”. And others were designated by an acronym like: **Rambam**” which is derived from the initials of the words **Rabbi Moses ben Maimon** (Jews use vowels between the consonant to help the pronunciation). It is interesting to note that they call Moses Moche Rabbenou “Moses our master” and Avraham avinou “our father Abraham”.

<sup>9</sup> Abu Muhammad Sheikh Ruzbehan Baqli (1128-1209) was a [poet](#), mystic, and [sufi](#) from [Fasa](#). Ruzbehan studied in Shiraz under famous Sufi masters and remained there until his final days. He composed verses in the Shirazi dialect of his time. He said: Three hundred people have a heart like Adam, 40 like Moses, 7 like Abraham, 5 similar to

so-called saints are the selected friends of God who lead His people. They are known as the righteous “Awliya”<sup>10</sup> and can be understood in this way:

*The word usually translated as "saint," wali, means "someone who is under special protection, friend;" it is the attribute given by the Shiites<sup>11</sup> to 'Ali, the wali Allah par excellence. The word is, as Qushayri<sup>12</sup> points out, both active and passive: a wali is one whose affairs are led (tawalla) by God and who performs (tawalla) worship and obedience. The awliya' Allah, the "friends of God," are mentioned in the Koran several times, the most famous occasion being Sura 10:63: "Verily, the friends of God, no fear is upon them nor are they sad."<sup>13</sup>*

The translation of the Arabic Awliya' to saints in English is very common. The following is the description of the Awliya':

*Thus, the Saints, the 'awliya' of Allah, are characterized to be people who follow through obedience Allah ta^ala's righteousness. They have therefore accomplished their duties, and have avoided what is forbidden and thus multiplied their supererogatory acts of obedience. It is those saints in which Allah ta^ala has favored, and those of whom Allah ta^ala honors in the heavens and the earth.<sup>14</sup>*

The above are but samples of an extensive literature on sainthood emphasizing the differences in the understandings of Orthodox Christian Theology and other religions, which were discovered in chapter IV and supported in chapter V. It seems that all religions except Christianity used the word saint in English as an adaptation of a known Western Christian term in order to be used as a tool to preach in a familiar and

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archangel Gabriel's, 3 like Michael's, and one of the *Qutb* added to the four Prophets who were lifted up: Idris (Enoch), Khidr, Ilyas and Jesus (Issa).

<sup>10</sup> Awlyia' is the plural of Wali.

<sup>11</sup> Islam has two major divisions: the “Sunna” and the “Shia”. Therefore, their followers are called Sunnites and Shiites.

<sup>12</sup> Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 465), (he) is known by his “Epistle on Sufism” and writings about AlHallaj.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from: <http://www.sufismjournal.org/history/history.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from : <http://www.apbif.org/connaitre/musulmans/embl%E8meDeLaSaintet%E9.htm> in French : « Ainsi, les saints, les 'awliya' de Allah ont pour caractéristiques d'être des gens qui ont suivi la droiture par obéissance à Allah ta^ala. Ils ont donc accompli les devoirs, ils ont évité les interdits et ils ont multiplié leurs actes surérogatoires d'obéissance. Ceux-là, les saints, sont ceux que Allah ta^ala aime, que Allah ta^ala honore dans le bas-monde et dans l'au-delà. »

understandable language. The term “saint” does not necessarily have the same meaning in those religions as the translated word.

### **Similarities in Sainthood’s Deeds**

The deeds and the stories of the Orthodox saints and the so-called saints are, to some extent, identical. The *Awliya’* were reported in Sufism’s hagiography as practitioners of “*Farasa*” (Soul-Readings) and possessors of unnatural power.

*The saint (wali) was able to disappear from sight, to become completely invisible, and to practice buruz, exteriorization, i.e., he could be present at different places at the same time. According to legend, Rumi<sup>15</sup> attended seventeen parties at one time and wrote a poem at each one. The saint was capable of coming to the aid of his disciples wherever they were through the faculty of tayy al-makan, of being beyond spatial restriction and in cases of danger he might suddenly appear in the midst of a band of robbers to drive them away in order to protect a disciple who called for help. He might appear, in spiritualized form, at a sick person's bed in order to cure him or at least relieve him temporarily from his pain.<sup>16</sup>*

Jews also recognize holy places and shrines of saints. They regard the latter as blessed holy places, where they receive answers to their needs or where their prayers are answered. They practice the *hiloula* in modern time which will give us a taste of similarities among the three religions.

*The main religious purpose of the hiloula is to pray for a good life and the resolution of problems. Jews light candles, touch the memorial stone, and pray at the tomb of the saint. By performing these actions, many Jews believe that these prayers will have more power than those performed in their synagogue or at home. Moroccan Jews will never admit that they are praying to the saint, however. Neither is the saint considered to be an intermediary between human beings and God. Yet, many Jews visit the saint's tomb with the hope that their prayers will be granted. Some saints*

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<sup>15</sup> Mawlānā Jalāl-ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (Persian: جلال الدين محمد رومی مولانا), also known as Mawlānā Jalāl-ad-Dīn Muhammad Balkhī (Persian: بلخی محمد), but known to the English-speaking world simply as Rumi, (30 September 1207–17 December 1273), was a 13th century Persian poet, Islamic jurist, and theologian. Rumi is a descriptive name meaning "the Roman" since he lived most parts of his life in Anatolia or 'Rum', now located in Turkey.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.sufismjournal.org/history/history.html>.

*are believed to be especially powerful, attracting men who would like to get married or women who wish to have children, for example.*<sup>17</sup>

Since my childhood I have known many of my neighbors who used to go to Jerusalem to visit the holy city, and to the Ka'aba for the *Hajj* and thus, receiving *Baraka* (blessing) from these holy places. And those who cannot afford to travel, used to go to *Sit Zaynab, the Hussein, Deir Saidnaya, Souk Al-Nouryeh* and many known shrines for intercessory prayers, and to pay tribute to their favorites. The common people (Jews, Muslims and Christians) were visiting each other's holy places in order to be blessed and find favoritism in God's eye because the relics of these saints were showed them a power that is above normal. They also used to go and visit a living holy man in a deserted place to ask for blessings.

Regardless of some similarities<sup>18</sup> and the usage of the term saint, a gulf of distinct theologies still exist between the works of the Orthodox Christian saints and the so-called saints, Martyrs and righteous of the other religions. Orthodox theology teaches that the works are done and accomplished by the Trinitarian God through a person and, in his turn, this person attributes all his efforts to God's glory. The Orthodox saint-man is but a transparent tool of God's epiphanies. His power, love, and ministry are but the fruits of God's grace and the saints ultimate goal is to glorify God who brought him out of nothing and bestowed on him his epiphanies. He is not only a window to the heavenly kingdom, but a living entrant into God's grace and a co-worker in His kingdom.

### ***Few Quotations from the Holy Fathers on Sainthood***

To give a clearer sense of the difference of an Orthodox Christian Saint, we will look now at some of their own words.

*"Our human nature is essentially good, and sanctify is nothing else than return through grace to our natural state. The material world is likewise intrinsically good and beautiful, and forms a sacrament of God's presence."*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hiloulot are events where Jews can return to their native villages or regions and visit with others who have also moved away, either to the major cities of Morocco, or overseas. Each saint has its own followers, who take care of the grave and perhaps a nearby synagogue and arrange the festival. Copied from [http://rickgold.home.mindspring.com/pilgrimage\\_to\\_tombs\\_of\\_jewish\\_sa.htm](http://rickgold.home.mindspring.com/pilgrimage_to_tombs_of_jewish_sa.htm).

<sup>18</sup> I believe that all the miracles and indescribable deeds of the righteous of God are the works performed by the Trinitarian God, although these miracle doers do not believe in the One God of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is not in the benefit of this thesis to discuss this view and to prove it.

<sup>19</sup> Nikitas Stithatos, copied from *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p.78.

*“Even now, living in our midst, there are people who are dispassionate and saintly, filled with divine light; who have so whatever in them pertains to earth (cf. Col. 3:5), freeing it from all impurity...”<sup>20</sup>*

*“There is a single energy of God and the saints...they are living ikons of Christ, being the same as He is, by grace rather than by assimilation.”<sup>21</sup>*

*“Through grace God in His entirety penetrates the saints in their entirety, and the saints in their entirety penetrate God entirely, exchanging the whole of Him for themselves, and acquiring Him alone as the reward of their ascent towards Him.”<sup>22</sup>*

*“We should regard all as saints.”<sup>23</sup>*

*“But just as God makes the rain fall and the sun shine equally on the just and the unjust, on the evil and the good (Cf. Matt. 5:45), so you irradiate love and diffuse its rays to all men.”<sup>24</sup>*

Wendy Mayer in her introduction to the homilies that St John Chrysostom delivered on the Feast Days of the saints describes beautifully the acts of the saints in these words: *“Death for the martyr is indeed a powerful love act framed in ecstatic language, just as in Lucian’s martyrdom, the classic declaration I am a Christian is located at the centre of events. The martyr can scarcely wait to die out of love for God and embraces both tortures and death with great enthusiasm (On Sts Juventinus and Maximus 1, On the holy martyrs 2, On St Drosis). In the case of Romanus, however the love that is expressed in his martyr act moves beyond love for God; he dies as much out of love for his fellow human beings. Martyrdom without love, John declares in his homily, is empty (On St Romanus 3).”<sup>25</sup>*

These are but drops of water picked up from the ocean of our Philips expressing the experience of sainthood, and the view of the Christian assembly on sainthood. From these words one can learn that these saints were recognized as saints even before their deaths. Their followers followed them to their tombs and expressed their love towards them with veneration and respect because they were vessels of love. They manifested

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<sup>20</sup> St Symeon the New Theologian, copied from *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p.47.

<sup>21</sup> St Maximos the Confessor, copied from *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p.397 (notes 5 & 6).

<sup>22</sup> St Gregory Palamas, copied from *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p.421 (note 2).

<sup>23</sup> St Symeon the New Theologian, copied from *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p.53.

<sup>24</sup> Nikitas Stithatos, copied from *The Philokalia*, Vol. IV, p.119.

<sup>25</sup> Wendy Mayer with Bronwen Neil, *The Cult of the Saints, St John Chrysostom*, (Crestwood, N.Y: SVS Press, 2006), p.

in their acts God's love towards humanity and, at the same time, humanity's love towards God.

Is there any better expression of love than the giving of one's self for the other? The Incarnate God not only expressed love by words but he also translated these words into agapetical actions. This is what lacking in Ibn Arabi and those who believe in the religion of love but did not recognize it in Christianity.