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## CANONICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARTYRDOM

### Introduction

“Martyrdom is death voluntarily accepted for the Christian faith or for the execution of other virtue connected to faith.”<sup>1</sup> It can therefore concern either faith in the whole Revelation or only a part of it, e.g. a certain dogma. We can, even should, speak about martyrdom, when a Christian due to his faith refuses to trespass one of the commandments, e.g. against justice or chastity. It is crucial from the side of a Christian for his love to God, and knowing the consequences that await him, not to be willing to do anything contrary to his faith. He who kills does not need to act directly and explicitly out of hatred for God, or Christ’s teaching, or the Church’s teaching. It is sufficient if he wants out of ideological or other reasons to force a Christian to commit acts by which he would sin. In this context if we talk about the hatred for faith – *odium fidei* in respect of he who kills a Christian, by this term we understand a hostile attitude towards Christianity as a religion, which prevents the torturer from achieving his goal, which the Christian does not want to accept. We can see this very clearly with ancient martyrs.

However, today it is not easy to determine all the aspects that arise in relation with martyrs. Often, especially nowadays, Christians who do not want to yield to dictators’ demands are not officially persecuted as Christians, but are charged with regular crimes, and labeled as traitors or subverters of public order etc.

Many times they are eliminated in secret, without any proper trial. Often death even does not come directly, but gradually, as it used to be, as a result of forced labour or incarceration in bad conditions. We have to keep in mind that the modern age has means to destroy a man without destroying his bodily

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<sup>1</sup> Benedictus PP. XIV, *Opus de Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione*, prae 1839-1841, nota 18, Lib. III, 11, no. 1.

life. It is therefore difficult to identify martyrdom today, as Christians have no longer the option to choose between faith and renouncing faith, but are immediately condemned to death, because they had showed with their lives the depth and strength of their faith, and the persecutor has given up hope of forcing them to abandon it.

## 1. Constitutional elements of martyrdom

In order to canonically prove martyrdom four constitutional elements must be identified in the process of beatification: persecutor, martyr, death, and its cause.

*Persecutor* is a personal entity or even a certain system or ideology different from the martyr. This means that the persecutor and the martyr cannot be the same person. It may sound banal, but a person who kills themselves due to religious reasons cannot be declared a martyr (e.g. a virgin who kills herself in defense of her virginity, not to be dishonoured).

*Martyr* is a person who suffered and died for Christ. It must be a Christian. After the Second Vatican Council it is accepted that other Christian churches also have the gift of martyrdom, but the Catholic Church only declares martyrs Catholics, which is obvious.

*The material element of martyrdom is the death* of the martyr. In the practice of the former Sacred Congregation of Rites, and of the current Congregation for the Causes of Saints, shedding of blood (lat. *effusio sanguinis*), i.e. physical death was consistently required until recently. It means that he was not considered a martyr who was tortured to death mentally, or survived the physical torture, and died later.

During the pontificate of John Paul II came a significant shift in the understanding of martyrdom: considered martyrs can be not only those who were materially killed for Christ, but also those who survived the physical and mental suffering, and died later. It is constitutive to prove the link between the suffering and death, meaning the martyr died as a consequence of the suffering caused to him.

*The formal element of martyrdom is the cause of death* based on the well-known thesis of Saint Augustine: *Martyrium non facit poena, sed causa*. It means that the reason for the persecutor's actions is explicitly or implicitly

his hatred for faith, and for the martyr's actions it is love for God and the Church. It is no less important that the persecutor's actions are aimed against the martyr, but after the Second Vatican Council this traditional concept of understanding of martyrdom was broadened as well [Lisowski 1992, 71-75].

## **2. Martyr's beatification**

The Church can never abandon the aspiration for sanctity of its members. It is a fundamental role of the Church to raise and guide people to the Kingdom of God, which is the same as raising saints, because only saints can enter Heaven. Canonized sanctity is an interesting phenomenon of the Church, based on which we declare that some people were acknowledged as saints by the Church, and we can render public cult to them.

The public cult of saints evolved from the natural reverence for the deceased, as we have explained in the previous chapter. The deceased were always objects of reverence in various forms. The deed of Christians who died as martyrs for their loyalty to Christ was considered as the "baptism of blood," as the highest manifestation of love for God. That is the reason why Christians were convinced that martyrs take their place in the Kingdom of God immediately, and therefore did not pray for their salvation, but invoked them to intercede to God. Gradually Christians started to write down their names, dates of death and means of martyrdom, and places where they were buried. Martyrologies and martyrs' calendars originate from these lists [Löw 1949, 371].

After the Edict of Milan in 313, which granted freedom to the Church, anniversaries of martyrs' deaths became openly celebrated, with abundant participation of the clergy and the faithful. During these assemblies *passiones martyrum* – the passion of martyrs – were being read, pilgrimages to their graves were being made, and their remains were displayed for paying homage. Churches dedicated to them were built.

The Edict of Milan brought also another change. Christians were no longer persecuted, and the number of martyrs therefore decreased. Over time *confessores* – confessors started to appear among the martyrs. Originally they were Christians who suffered greatly for their faith, but did not die as martyrs or simply survived the torture. Later we can find among the confessors in the

calendars people known for their exemplary religious life, penitential life; those possessing great wisdom, and authority, who were highly respected by the faithful; those who practiced ascetic life; or who founded an important monastery [Piacentini 1978, 107; Rodrigo 1991, 17].

Early on the important element for the cult of saints was only the reputation of sanctity, i.e. the conviction of the community of the faithful of the particular person's sanctity. Later bishops themselves started to visit graves of the people who died in the reputation of sanctity, where stories from their lives or miracles through their intercession were being told. Gradually bishops began to intervene in the cult of saints by authorizing public reverence of such persons, giving approval for exhumation, and removal of the remains to a more dignified place, it usually being a church devoted to them. In the Early Middle Ages the removal of the remains from a cemetery to a church or some other worthy place had the character of canonization [Misztal 1992, 76].

### 3. Historical overview

Some authors consider the papal decree of John IX of January 31, 993 at the Lateran Synod, authorizing public cult of Saint Ulderic, to be the first papal canonization.

But it was Pope Alexander III who decided by the papal letter *Aeterna et incommutabilis* of July 6, 1171, addressed to the Swedish king, that the canonization processes are to be reserved to the pope only.

Gregory IX imposed this to the whole Church in his decretales of 1234 promulgated by the bull *Rex pacificus* stating that "without papal approval no one can be venerated as saint." However, there were bishops who did not respect this papal instruction, and continued with their own canonizations. Rodrigo states that since the promulgation of the bull *Rex pacificus* until the foundation of the Congregation of Cult, assigned with canonization processes, bishops canonized or allowed public cult of more than 600 Servants of God without papal approval [Rodrigo 1991, 19].

With the bull *Immensa Aeterni Dei* of January 22, 1588, Pope Sixtus V created the Sacred Congregation of Rites and entrusted to its competence not only the exercise of divine worship, but also canonization cases.

Cardinal Prosper Lambertini, a lawyer, greatly influenced canonization processes with his work *De Servorum Dei beatificatione e Beatorum Canonizatione*. His conception of martyr, of confessor, and of the procedure with certain alterations remains current in modern times.

In August 15, 1967 Pope Paul VI reformed the Roman Curia with the bull *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*.<sup>2</sup> Within the Sacred Congregation of Rites he created two sections: *Sectio prima* with responsibility for rites (liturgical or non-liturgical), and *Sectio altera* with responsibility for canonizations.

With the bull *Sacra Rituum Congregatio* of May 8, 1969 Pope Paul VI divided the Sacred Congregation of Rites into two congregations: *Sacra Congregatio pro cultu divino* and *Sacra Congregatio pro causis sanctorum*.<sup>3</sup> According to this legislation the Congregation had three offices: those of the judiciary, the Promoter General of the Faith, and the historical-juridical. Shortly before that with the Apostolic Letter *Sanctitatis clarior* of March 19, 1969, the pope established the procedure for the beatification and canonization processes.<sup>4</sup>

The newest reform of the Roman Curia by the bull *Pastor bonus* of the Saint John Paul II of June 28, 1988 did not bring about substantial changes.<sup>5</sup>

Canonization processes at present follow the bull *Divinus perfectionis Magister*<sup>6</sup> of the Saint John Paul II of January 25, 1983, appended with *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopis faciendis in causis Sanctorum* of February 7, 1983, and with *Decretum generale de servorum Dei causis quarum iudicium in praesens apud Sacram Congregationem pendet* of February 7, 1983. Here we need to add the corresponding norms of the process law of

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<sup>2</sup> Paulus PP. VI, Constitutio apostolica de Romana Curia *Regimini Ecclesiae Universe* (15.08.1967), AAS 59 (1967), p. 885-928.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, Constitutio apostolica *Sacra Rituum Congregatio in duas Congregationes dividitur, alteram pro Cultu Divino, alteram pro Causis Sanctorum* (11.07.1969), AAS 61 (1969), p. 297-305.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, Litterae apostolicae motu proprio datae *Processus de Causis beatificationis et canonizationis aptius ordinantur Sanctitatis Clarior* (08.05.1969), AAS 61 (1969), p. 149-53.

<sup>5</sup> Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Constitutio apostolica de Curia Romana *Pastor bonus* (28.06.1988), AAS 80 (1988), p. 841-930.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, Constitutio apostolica *Modus procedendi in Causarum canonizationis instructione recognoscitur et Sacrae Congregationis pro Causis Sanctorum nova datur ordinatio Divinus perfectionis Magister* (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), p. 349-55.

the 1983 Code of Canon Law,<sup>7</sup> and the Inner Order of the Congregation of March 21, 1983, issued for the causes of saints [Esser 1990, 310]. Today the work of 1983 of Veraja, the Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, is considered to be the classic commentary to these canonization norms. Veraja also participated personally in preparation of these norms [Veraja 1983, 17].

#### **4. The juridical institute of beatification**

The juridical institute of beatification developed gradually. When the remains of a person who died in the reputation of sanctity were exhumed and placed to a new, more dignified place, the local bishop or the diocesan synod of the synod of the Church province would decide to grant approval for the public veneration of the person, despite the person not yet being canonized. Even though the church authority did not legally limit such an approval, it was only practiced locally or in some religious communities. Such was the practice up until the 15th century, which is considered by some to be already the institute of beatification, or its germ. However, the juridical institute of beatification, just about the same, as we know it nowadays, started to develop in the 15th century [Rodrigo 1991, 23].

Then popes got involved. Pope Leo X declared beatification to be reserved to the pope in 1515 [Veraja 1983, 18-19].

The first such beatification was that of the Saint Francis of Sales in January 8, 1662, which the pope celebrated in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

As of the 17th century beatification was considered as a separate juridical institute, not necessarily followed by canonization; but beatification being a necessary prerequisite for canonization. Prosper Lambertini as the Promoter General of the Faith of the Congregation of Rites posed a question to Pope Clement IX (1700-1721) about the necessity of beatification prior to canonization, which the pope affirmed, thus confirming the practice of beatification as the first step towards canonization.

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<sup>7</sup> *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), pars II, p. 1-317.

The first type is the formal beatification, announced by the pope after the proper beatification process, after martyrdom or heroic virtues and a miracle have been preliminarily juridically proved. However, there was a problem with those to whom public cult was rendered without being preceded by the proper procedure. Hence Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644) issued a decree of March 13, 1625, and later a bull *Caelestis Hierusalem* of July 5, 1634,<sup>8</sup> instructing that only those can be considered blessed that are considered blessed by the Church; or that obtained formal approval for public cult from the Congregation of Rites; or if their public cult has been a centenary or immemorial custom [Misztal 2001, 87]. Such beatification was called *beatificatio aequipolens* – equivalent beatification. Although it was not a formal beatification, the pope granted it the juridical equivalence of the formal beatification. These beatifications, which were not formally results of a proper process of beatification, but only approved by the Congregation, continued also after the bull of Urban VIII. Therefore with the decree *Cum agendis* of November 11, 1912<sup>9</sup> Pope Pius X established that the approval for public cult can only be granted after a proper beatification process, and after the decree *super martyrio* or *super virtutibus* has been issued.

## 5. Difference between canonization and beatification

From the theological perspective beatification is not an infallible statement of the pope, but the act of inscribing a person on the list of blessed, and approving public cult. This public cult can be rendered on a demarcated territory of a place, a town, a country, or a religious order, and only certain acts of cult are permitted, such as special prayers of the Mass and Divine Office. Canonization, on the other hand, is considered to be an infallible statement of the pope, and is not permission for public cult, but its order for the whole Church [ibid., 71].

Here is the beatification formula, by which the pope declares a servant of God blessed:

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<sup>8</sup> Urban PP. VIII, Constitutio apostolica *Caelestis Hierusalem* (05.07.1634).

<sup>9</sup> Sacra Congregatio Rituum, Decretum de iudiciali ordine servando in causis servorum dei procedentibus per viam casus excepti (11.11.1912), AAS 4 (1912), p. 705-707.

“We, welcoming the desire of Our Brother Bishop (here he says the name of the bishop asking for beatification), of many other Brothers in the Episcopate and of many of the faithful, after having had the review of Congregation of the Causes of the Saints, with Our Apostolic Authority we grant that the Venerable Servant of (here he says the name of the candidate for beatification), from now on will be called Blessed and that his feast might be celebrated in the places according to the rules established by law, every year (here he appoints the feast day of the blessed). In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

In the current legislation beatification is not so strictly separated from canonization, but we are talking about one canonization process, although the traditional procedure is still being followed.

The starting point for the canonization process is always the reputation of sanctity. It is nothing else but the conviction, which started spontaneously, of the majority of the faithful in the local church about the martyrdom or heroic virtues of a particular person, and of miracles through their intercession.

The reputation of sanctity is a prerequisite for so-called canonized sanctity, i.e. beatification and canonization, which narrows the concept of sanctity down to martyrdom or heroic virtues. But the concept of sanctity is a broader and more complex phenomenon.

We can only say that sanctity is an attribute exclusive to God. At the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer II the priest prays: *Vere Sanctus es*. This means that a man can only be saint to the extent that he lives with God, i.e. to the extent that God is present in his life. A man is only the image of God's sanctity. The most perfect image of God's sanctity is Jesus Christ, for He is the Incarnate God, the true God and true man. Not only is He the most exact image of God's sanctity, but He's the sanctity itself. That is why Jesus Christ is the inexhaustible spring and image of sanctity for men.

Saints are not only those who were beatified or canonized, but every person living in the sanctifying grace on this Earth, and also all the people, who were not canonized, but who live with God in Heaven. Nevertheless, it is not humanly possible to canonize all the saints living in Heaven, even less so all the people in the sanctifying grace still living on this Earth. For this reason,

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<sup>10</sup> See beatification of bishop V. Hopko and Z. Schelingova in Bratislava – 14.09.2004.

apart from evidence of martyrdom or heroic virtues, one of the deciding criteria is also the suitability of beatification or canonization of a certain person in a certain period of time. This suitability or unsuitability to beatify or canonize a certain person is in fact the expression of the will of the Holy See concerning beatification or canonization of a particular person in a certain period of time. Even though it is not stated in the official documents of the Church, the Holy See practically executes this will, not through the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, but through the Secretariat of State. In practice this means that even if a certain person meets the juridical requirements for martyrdom or heroic virtues, examined by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, the Secretariat of State can nevertheless decide that for the time being it is not suitable to proceed with beatification or canonization. The final decision always belongs to the pope.

The legislation of the canonization process does not give the definition of a confessor. It neither states what virtues should the person practice to be possibly considered a confessor, nor specify what the practice of virtues on the heroic level mean. The practice in this respect was based on the teachings of theologians. Up to this time we consider adequate the definition of virtue designed by the lawyer Prosper Lambertini, who adopted the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and translated it into canonical language. Theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are fundamental, followed by moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude; and both these can be further followed by other virtues. The first list of virtues in the canonization process was the list written by a lawyer Francis of Pavia as part of the beatification process of Saint Bonaventure, who was canonized in 1482 [Misztal 1987, 48].

Some Church Fathers taught, and Prosper Lambertini agreed to an extent, that “virtues are interconnected,” and hence he who owns one owns the others as well. However, if we were to follow this thesis, it would be sufficient to prove one virtue, and the others could be presumed. This is not sufficient in the current canonization procedure, where practicing of all the theological and moral virtues must be proved, even though with a particular person a particular virtue might remarkably come to the forefront, for a person does not practice all the virtues on the same level. The definition of a heroic virtue by Prosper Lambertini is important: it must be practiced *expedite* – willingly,

*prompte* – immediately, *delectabiliter* – joyfully, and *supra humanum modum* – heroically, even superhumanly. This definition was in a certain sense being precised by popes: e.g. Pius XI accented that sanctity does not lie in exceptional deeds, but in exceptional practice of mundane, everyday deeds [Idem 2001, 63]; Pius XII, on his part, stressed the role of the virtue of love.<sup>11</sup>

Saint John Paul II emphasized the virtue of exemplary fulfillment of duties belonging to a person's state of life. We can assume emphasizing certain virtues in the future too, because times change, and every era tries the sanctity of a person in particular virtues.

Miracles were always a part of canonization. In canonization processes miracles are considered as Heavens' confirmation of the particular person's sanctity. Miracle collections were very popular and widespread in the Middle Ages.

Yet a miracle is a theological phenomenon, and the Church is very careful nowadays, rigorously examining events aspiring for a miracle. From a professional, e.g. medical perspective, it is an acknowledgement that a certain act or event cannot be explained. During beatification or canonization miracles are examined by a separate process,<sup>12</sup> while distinguishing between *miraculum quoad substantiam* – a miracle absolutely surpassing natural possibilities, and *miraculum quoad modum* – surpassing natural possibilities, but only in its own way, e.g. immediate healing.

During the pontificate of Benedict XIV two miracles evidenced by the process were required for beatification. Two more miracles that happened after beatification were required for canonization. The 1917 Code of Canon Law<sup>13</sup> allowed for a papal dispensation from a miracle in cases of proved martyrdom, or of equivalent beatification that has lasted immemorially.

For beatification of confessors two miracles were required if the virtues were evidenced by eyewitnesses; four miracles were required if the virtues were evidenced by earwitnesses or based on documents.

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<sup>11</sup> Pius PP. XII, *Allocutiones*, AAS 38 (1946), p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, *Novae leges pro Causis Sanctorum A.D. 1983 promulgatae*, Città del Vaticano 1995, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Codex Iuris Canonici Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus Benedicti Papae XV auctoritate promulgatus* (27.05.1917), AAS 9 (1917), pars II, p. 1-593.

Two miracles that happened after beatification were required for canonization. As per the current legislation, in case of proved martyrdom the Holy Father can grant a dispensation from a miracle. In case of proved heroic virtues at least one miracle is required for beatification, and another one that happened after beatification is required for canonization, although the number of miracles is not specified in the current legislation.

Particular attention should be paid to decrees of Pope Urban VIII, as to these days they are an important part of the beatification and canonization processes in terms of the practice of veneration of candidates for beatification and canonization. Up until his pontificate beatification and canonization of a person who died in the reputation of sanctity often happened through the cult. Private cult simply gradually became public, which meant factual beatification. Up until then it was the ordinary way to beatification and canonization. If there was no cult a person could hardly become a blessed or a saint; it only happened rarely. Pope Urban VIII turned this around: *via non cultus* became the ordinary way to beatification, and *via cultus* became the extraordinary way. On March 13, 1625 Congregation of the Inquisition issued a decree prohibiting public cult of persons who were not yet beatified or canonized. Followed the encyclical of Pope Urban VIII *De processibus rite conficiendis* in 1631, and the bull *Caelestis Hierusalem cives* of the same pope in 1634.

The bull of 1634 was a radical intervention to public cult rendered to persons who were not beatified or canonized, as it introduced the evidence process within the process of canonization, so that public cult of sanctity cannot be rendered to a candidate for beatification or canonization [Misztal 2001, 127-30].

There were five exceptions allowing public cult to persons not beatified: 1) if their public cult has been a centenary or immemorial custom; 2) if their public cult has been generally agreed to in the Church; 3) if their cult resulted from the writings of Church Fathers or other saint authors; 4) if their public cult was tolerated by the Holy See; 5) if their public cult was tolerated by the local ordinary.

In the current canonization legislation the process to prove the absence of public cult is not required so strictly, but a declaration of a diocesan bishop about the adherence to Urban VIII's decrees is sufficient. Here we can exa-

mine what is at present considered to be private cult, and what is considered to be public cult of persons not yet raised to the altar. This is not a place for deeper analysis; we will therefore confine ourselves to stating that nowadays it is not considered a breach of Urban VIII's decrees if the postulator spreads or cares for spreading private cult of persons who died in the reputation of sanctity. It is not considered public cult if the servant of God is buried under the altar at church; if people put flowers on their grave, burn candles, place a photograph with a beatification prayer, or a short biography; if books, articles, or publications are issued about their life and virtues; if conferences and discussion forums about their life and work are held; if a commemorative room is set up, etc. There are even many of the opinion that doing such things is needed and desirable.

However, it is forbidden to portray a servant of God as already blessed or saint with a halo, place their statues on the altar among the saints, insert their name to the litanies, and so on.

Although certain authors, and even the official Church structures avoid calling beatification or canonization a process, and prefer the name *inquisitio diocesana* – diocesan inquiry, yet it has to be said that it is a whole sequence of successive legal acts, which contain many typical attributes of the Church procedural law [Arroba Conde 1992].

Diocesan inquiry begins with the person who has an interest in the canonization process of a particular person. The person with an interest, who bears the expenses needed for the process, is called actor.<sup>14</sup> It can be a personal entity, but it is better if it is a legal entity, e.g. a diocese, or a religious order etc.

Actor can only act through a postulator, whom he appoints, and who is approved by the diocesan bishop. The process can begin in the diocese where the candidate died. If someone else has an interest in the canonization process, they need permission of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Normally the process can start five years after the candidate's death at the earliest, and 30 years at the latest. If it is outside of this time range, reasons need to be given to the Congregation. Postulator submits petition for beatification to the competent diocesan bishop, who requests the opinion of other bishops,

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<sup>14</sup> *Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum, Normae servandae in Inquisitionibus ab Episcopis faciendis in Causis Sanctorum*, 1a.

and *nihil obstat* from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Then he appoints his delegate, a notary, and a promotor of justice, and the process can begin. The postulator submits evidence to the bishop's delegate, who carefully records and archives them, hears witnesses, and collects documents. Then there is a commission of historians and theologians, and eventually of physicians, to help as necessary. Postulator has to choose whether to attempt to evidence martyrdom or heroic virtues. Promotor of justice monitors following the law in the process, and has to be invited to every piece of evidence, which he reviews, e.g. he has to be invited for examinations of witnesses. The process of proving a miracle is separate from the process of proving martyrdom or heroic virtues. Here witnesses *de visu* – eyewitnesses have the greatest weight; or witnesses who heard it from eyewitnesses. When the process has been finished all the collected materials need to be translated to the language used by the Congregation, and send them sealed, in two copies, with accompanying letters of the diocesan bishop, and the promotor of justice, and certified by a notary to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Under the lead of the Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints competent employees review if the diocesan phase of the process was done properly. If they find any shortfalls, they request additional diocesan inquiry. The cause is then forwarded to the Ordinary Congress of the Congregation, which appoints a relator from the group of relators of the Congregation. The directions of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints assume nine relators under the lead of Relator General [Esser 1990, 316]. Postulator in this phase at the latest appoints an assistant to the relator (even though this can be the postulator himself), who will cooperate with him on elaborating a so-called *positio*.

*Positio* consists of two parts. The first is Information on the Proceedings of the Cause; and the second is *Summarium testimonium et documentorum* – the summary of the testimonies and documents. During this phase all the shortfalls and ambiguities are addressed in regards to martyrdom, heroic virtues, or miracles. Finally *Positio* is forwarded to the Ordinary Congress of the Congregation, which assigns the file to nine theologians, presided by the Promoter of the Faith. Their task is to compose an expert report and provide answer to the question regarding martyrdom, heroic virtues, or miracles. There

can be only three answers: *affirmative* – was proved; *negative* – was not proved; *suspensive* – suspended with the request for more evidence.

If two thirds of nine theologians give *affirmative* statement, the cause proceeds for reviewing to cardinals and bishops, who give definitive recommendation to the Holy Father, who makes the final decision [ibid., 309-29].

## Conclusion

Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and of Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude. “Let me become the food of the beasts, through whom it will be given me to reach God.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1997, no. 2473.

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### **Canonical Understanding of Martyrdom**

#### Summary

By martyrdom a disciple takes likeness to his Master, who voluntarily accepted death for the salvation of the world, and follows Him right until the shedding of blood. For this reason the Church values martyrs as excellent gifts and greatest proofs of love. Martyrdom and the calling to martyrdom are not results of human decision and effort, but answers to God's initiative and calling. When God calls a person to give this testimony of love, He enables him for this calling, and gives him the ability to live in this loving way of life, and bear witness to faith. This creates a live communion between Christ and the martyr, where the martyr can draw strength for his decision.

**Key words:** martyrdom, beatification, confessor, miracle, postulator

### **Kanoniczne pojmowanie męczeństwa**

#### Streszczenie

Przez męczeństwo uczeń upodabnia się do swego Mistrza, który dobrowolnie przyjął śmierć za zbawienie świata i podąża za Nim aż do przelania krwi. Z tego względu Kościół ceni męczeństwo jako wspaniały dar i największy dowód miłości. Męczeństwo i powołanie do męczeństwa nie są owocem ludzkiej decyzji i wysiłku, ale jest odpowiedzią na inicjatywę i wezwanie Boga. Kiedy Bóg zaprasza kogoś do tego świadectwa miłości, dostosowuje go do tego powołania i daje mu możliwość życia w taki sposób, aby dawać świadectwo wierze. Tworzy to żywą wspólnotę między Chrystusem a męczennikiem, w której męczennik może czerpać siłę do swojej decyzji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** męczeństwo, beatyfikacja, wierny, cud, postulator

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