Many people think of a “saint” as someone who lived centuries ago, failing to consider the possibility that there may be among their contemporaries people who the Church will one day canonize as saints. Yet there are researchers who are charged with the difficult task of investigating the lives of contemporary candidates for sainthood. Little has been written about the research methods employed by these investigators and scholars. For the most part, authors have written about dealing with ancient or medieval sources, or have attempted to explain hagiography from the perspective of sociology or psychiatry. This paper will examine some of the issues facing the researcher and writer who is exploring the lives of contemporary candidates for canonization, and will raise for consideration some of the challenges they face.

The process of proclaiming saints is one of the more democratic processes in the Catholic Church. It is not from on high that such proclamations originate. Rather, the joyful task of identifying the holy men and women of God rests with the people of the Church.

The most striking recent example of the beginning of such a process was at the funeral of the beloved Pope John Paul II. As his body was laid to rest, thousands took up the cry of “Santo subito!” (“Sainthood now!).

It is rare for the Church to act as swiftly as it did in the case of Pope St. John Paul II, to grant the title of saint within just a few years of the candidate’s death. The process usually draws itself out over decades and involves an immense amount of research to create the positio, the documentation of a candidate’s life which is eventually sent to Rome. Combine this with the requirement\(^1\) that two miracles be documented and attributed to the intercession of the candidate and it could be said to be a miracle itself when any candidate’s cause survives the process. It takes a strong grassroots organization to support the cause, to keep alive the memory of the candidate’s good life. Without this, the cause will surely wither as time goes on and those who knew the candidate for sainthood pass away.

The primary means by which these memories are kept alive and passed along is through stories, specifically hagiography. Unlike a conventional
biography, a work of hagiography is written not just to relate details of a life, but to expand upon the virtues and acts of a person thought to be holy, to serve as an example and an inspiration of how one can live a good life, a life of heroic virtue. It serves to keep alive the memory of this person and to refute the common misperception that holiness is impossible to achieve.

Hagiography differs from straight biography in its focus and in its purpose. The same rigorous standards which are applied by any biographer or historian must be used by a hagiographer. A biography that is excessive in its praise, one which highlights its subject’s virtues and downplays his faults, is often sneeringly referred to as hagiography. The real thing, however, will ideally be nothing like that.

This paper highlights some of the pitfalls that may befall the researcher who is studying the lives of contemporary candidates for sainthood. By “contemporary,” we mean those candidates who died within the past one hundred years or so. These are men and women who may still have contemporaries alive, or whose stories have been relayed by someone who was a contemporary of the candidate. It is difficult enough to construct a proper story about anyone’s life, never mind someone who may one day be proclaimed a saint. The following is intended to outline some of the challenges of this kind of research, so as to assist those who may be involved in reconstructing and writing about the lives of such candidates.

Very little has been written about the research methods employed by investigators and scholars looking at the lives of contemporary candidates for sainthood. For the most part, authors have written about dealing with ancient or medieval sources, or have attempted to explain hagiography from the perspective of sociology or psychiatry. One exception is The Hagiography Circle, a group of scholars who maintain a website (http://newsaints.faithweb.com) which lists the decrees promulgated by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. The site also has a selection of news pertaining to those studying saints. While the site contains Church documents detailing the procedures the Church follows in the naming of saints, there is no practical information concerning how an investigator should pursue his research.

The Vatican’s website contains documentation from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints describing the process postulators should follow, but again, there is little practical guidance for conducting interviews or researching the life of a candidate for sainthood. For instance, “New Laws for the Causes of Saints,” which was promulgated in 1983, states “The first duty of the postulator is to conduct thorough investigations into the life of the Servant of God in question, in order to establish his reputation for sanctity and the importance of the cause for the Church, and then
to report his findings to the Bishop.” It does not, however, discuss specific techniques that may be used during interviews in the course of the investigation.

Professor Michael Plekon of CUNY’s Baruch College is the author of several books on contemporary saints and the idea of holiness. His tril-
ogy—Living Icons; Hidden Holiness; and Saints as They Really Are—explores the idea of holiness in modern society, and deals not just with Catholic or Christian saints, but with holy men and women from a variety of traditions. Another popular author who has explored the Church’s history of mak-
ing saints is Kenneth Woodward, whose Making Saints looks at the pro-
cess of just how the Vatican investigates each cause for sainthood. While Woodward offers a step by step look at the process of investigating saints, he has little to say about the specific methods of investigation employed by the different authorities involved with the investigations.

The contemporary author who comes closest to detailing specific investigative and interview techniques is Canadian Dr. Jacalyn Duffin, whose book, Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints and Healing in the Mod-
ern World, explores the methods used by the Vatican to determine which medical cures can be called miracles and which cannot. Her use of sources reaches back centuries and she discusses in great detail the history of the Church’s medical investigation of miracles.

Though these authors all explore the process by which saints are pro-
claimed by the Church, none of them delves into specific techniques pos-
tulators and investigators may use while researching their charge. Nor do they discuss the pitfalls and obstacles which can be encountered in the course of an investigation. Whether it’s interviewing a personal acquain-
tance or family member of a candidate for sainthood, or tracking down media reports about a candidate, the issues which the contemporary inves-
tigator faces are far different from those faced by scholars reading through medieval manuscripts or ancient Byzantine texts.

Properly written, hagiography will inspire and energize a reader to imitate the subject of the work, insofar as the love of God is concerned. The reader will be made to realize that it is possible for anyone to answer the universal call to holiness. The writer of a hagiography must make clear the subject of his work was inspired by love and trust of God.

This doesn’t mean the hagiographer will ignore or whitewash the flaws of her subject. The subject of a hagiography is, after all, human. All humans have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It does no good to create an idol, a marble statue with no human flaws, which can be nei-
ther imitated nor understood.
Those who are studying the more recent candidates for sainthood have a definite advantage here, as they are often in a position to speak with people who knew the candidate for sainthood, or knew people who knew the candidate. They have access to letters, diaries, personal recollection, media, and other recent reports and documents. All this can help to establish a sense of what kind of person the candidate was. The researcher can begin to build a picture, warts and all, of a human being who lived a life of heroic virtue.

The perspective of the husband of St. Gianna Molla provides an example for researchers to consider. When interviewers from the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, during their investigation of her life, came to speak to him, he told them that although they wanted to ask questions about the end of her life, he wanted to tell them *how she lived*. She was able to die in the manner she did only because of the habits of virtue that she had established through her manner of daily living.6

But this proximity to the subject is not always an advantage. Researchers must be aware that people will tend to hold biases, either positive or negative. A subject can be the victim of bias, whether in their favor or otherwise. Similar to the biographer, or a journalist conducting an interview, those interviewing subjects for a *positio* or a work of hagiography must be on the lookout for these distortions.7

**OFFICIAL INVESTIGATIONS**

**FOR CAUSES OF CANONIZATION**

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints has issued guidelines for those studying these recentior, or recent, cases.8 In *Sanctum Mater*, Paragraph Five, Title 1, we read, “The interrogators are to be prepared in such a way as to elicit the responses that show knowledge of concrete facts and the source of that knowledge on the part of the witness.” The guidelines indicate that the interviewers are enjoined to approach the candidates with a “just the facts” attitude. Speculation is discouraged and can render portions of one’s testimony null in the eyes of the investigators.

Among the officials appointed are the promoter of justice, episcopal delegates, and medical experts. Other officials are appointed to gather documentary evidence. Theological censors are appointed to examine the published and private writing of a candidate and to “delineate the personality and spirituality” of the candidate.9 They are assisted by experts in historical matters who help to gather documents and evidence.

All witnesses are asked to relate concrete facts and to reveal the source of that knowledge. Otherwise, the testimony is considered null. *Sanctum Mater* makes a point that witnesses contrary to the cause can and should be
called if possible. Other witnesses who have received information about the candidate “from those who have had direct and immediate knowledge (de audito a videntibus)” may be called.10

The work done to bring about the Beatification of Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich,11 which took place in October 2014, provides examples of how the investigators must approach their work.

Sister Mary Canavan, S.C., began her work on the cause of Sr. Demjanovich about two years before the beatification. During the period when Sr. Demjanovich’s family, friends, and members of her order were being questioned, the interviewers found there were, as Sister Canavan, put it, “people who thought she was wonderful”; but also, that there were “people who thought she wasn’t so wonderful.” Sister Canavan pointed out that people also commonly find that it is not easy to live with a saint. “Wherever you find a saint,” she said, “you find the martyrs who have to live with her.”

People who knew Sr. Demjanovich reacted differently to her sanctity. “Some people resented that she was graced and that she accepted that grace,” Sister Canavan said. “Others recognized and admired her, her adherence to the rule, her piety and charity. They appreciated it and tried to imitate it.”

Sister Canavan and others involved in recent canonization causes emphasize the importance of objectivity and thoroughness in researching the lives of potential saints. Whatever evidence is gathered, Sister Canavan warned, the interviewer should make no conjecture as to whether or not the candidate under consideration is a saint. “Don’t presume the decision of the Church,” she said.12 When a diocesan tribunal is called, their task is to “Interview as many people as possible on both sides of the issue,”13 according to Msgr. Paul Burkard, the vice-postulator for the cause of Father Nelson Baker.14 Father Larry Weber, who is vice-postulator for the cause of Father Solanus Casey,15 said “When it’s time to inaugurate the case, you talk to people who knew him, see if there’s enough evidence.” Father Weber said that while a theologian will write the positio, it’s up to the interviewers to gather the evidence, both pro and con.

Sometimes those who knew the subject are opposed to sainthood because they have a hard time believing that they lived in the presence of a saint. Speaking of Fr. Casey’s fellow Franciscans, Fr. Weber said, “Some of the friars might be of the position we don’t want to be pushing one of our own,” especially if members of a particular order feel uncomfortable with the whole idea of promoting saints.

On the other side of the coin are those who exaggerate a candidate’s virtues. Usually, there is no intention to lie. Rather, they may suffer from
the “bias of affection.” This desire to be close to a saint is reflected in often inaccurate memories concerning personal interactions with the subject. “One of the interesting things you hear,” Father Weber said, “Is ‘I received my First Communion, I was baptized by Father Casey, he heard my confession.” However, he added “Father Casey is not listed in the books as ever having given Communion or as having baptized.”\(^{16}\)

These are types of stories people will tell, not out of malice, but because they truly believe them. Perhaps an older relative passed along wrong information, or maybe their own recollection is faulty. Whatever the reason, it is the task of the interviewer to verify, as well as possible, the veracity of such claims. Stories which can’t be verified are not to be accepted as evidence.

It is thus the task of the researcher to assess the reliability and character of the interviewees. Those who knew the subjects bring a variety of ideas about sanctity and sainthood, and these must be sifted by the interviewer. “Find everything,” Msgr. Burkard said. “People are aware of the humanness of saints,” he added. But there are also those who think of saints as “statues,” he said. The meaning of sainthood is “hard to pin down,” he added. “It’s what people think it is.” Sister Canavan said, “Every person who was interviewed, every person who brought this along, brought their own personality, own background and experience, their own personality and approach to God.”

For Msgr. Burkard, there was the danger of accepting unquestioningly what seemed to be the consensus view concerning his subject. “In Father Baker’s _positio_, the people who give this kind of testimony, the people say even when he was alive, we thought he was a saint. You could see holiness shining through his life,” Msgr. Burkard said. “Even the media would refer to him as ‘Saintly Father Baker.’” An interviewer who decides beforehand whether or not a candidate is worthy of sainthood can fall prey to ignoring testimony or evidence which disputes that supposition. This is not to say an interviewer would deliberately withhold or alter testimony, but rather that a personal bias on the part of the interviewer might flavor the questions asked and the importance given to the answers presented.

When the interviewer is gathering evidence, it is imperative he not allow himself to be swayed by the enthusiasm of those answering questions. Likewise, an interviewer can’t allow herself to be influenced by the negative attitude of those giving evidence. She must strive to remain dispassionate as she collects evidence. While some might say this reduces the interviewer to little more than a stenographer, it is in line with the norms published in _Sanctorum Mater_.

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The interviewer should make every effort to ensure his personal feelings for the subject don’t color the questions asked or the weight he gives to responses. All possible subjects should be sought out and all possible sources of information explored. The evidence should be gathered fairly, then sent to the competent authorities for them to determine the status of the candidate.

The postulators and theologians who eventually write the positio rely on the investigators to provide good evidence. The investigators need to avoid the twin pitfalls of overly praising their subject and of being overly critical. If the evidence given to the writer of the positio is flawed, then that flawed document is what ends up being presented in Rome to defend a candidate’s cause.

WRITING LIVES OF THE SAINTS

For those who are not conducting an official Church investigation, the situation is different in some ways, but it also involves some of the same challenges. The author who writes hagiography is dealing with a person already known to be holy. Unlike those working to collect evidence for a cause, the hagiographer has little need to prove the virtue of his subject. The task for the hagiographer, as mentioned above, is to write a biography with a purpose—to inspire and encourage the reader to imitate the ways of a saint. In the Orthodox Church, it is said that an icon is not properly written unless it makes the viewer want to pray. Likewise, the goal of a work of hagiography should be to make the reader realize “I can live like that.”

When Greg Tobin set out to write a biography of Pope Saint John XXIII, he said he wanted to “examine the whole idea of holiness, what does it mean?” John XXIII was “the Pope of my childhood,” and he hoped to introduce this Pope “to a new generation through a pretty straightforward biography.”

“Some people rate him as the greatest pope,” Tobin said, “but there’s a lot of sentiment attached to that. I wanted to be skeptical … and looked for anything anyone said. The only negative stuff was from ultra-traditionalists.” Otherwise, “[N]o one had a negative opinion of him.”

“In the research, his character was sterling,” he added.

Dr. Dianne Traflet is the author of Saint Edith Stein: A Spiritual Portrait. As she began work on her book, “I went in thinking person, not saint,” she said. “I almost went in thinking, ‘Did they make a mistake when Edith Stein was canonized?’”

Stein was born in a Jewish family and was agnostic before she embraced Catholicism. Dr. Traflet said reading about Stein made her ask
“How did she get to this point?” Writing about a saint is “almost like being a postulator,” she said. “You’re saying ‘Let me tell you a story.’”

During her research, as she read letters written by Edith Stein, as she studied the books and other writing by Stein, Traflet said “I was blown away by the overall story.” She added “I wanted to understand her interior life.”

“Postulators are dealing with mystery, dealing with grace. That’s what you want in a saint. They’re doing things. Why are they doing things? The saint would say it’s all grace, God is propelling me out of myself to help others,” she added. The hagiographer wants to demonstrate how that grace, and the acceptance of that grace, led the subject to a create a life of heroic virtue. Traflet said a writer should examine her subject and “Look at what God did to their life.”

When Tobin started his work on John XXIII, he said “I tried to focus on telling the story. The events themselves are of such magnitude, that to show this person initiating Vatican II … really didn’t need any embellishment on my part. Let the story tell itself, and the message came through very clearly.”

The modern researcher must also deal with the fact that many candidates for sainthood have become very well-known, media figures in their own right. The age of the Internet has made it possible for even the most humble of candidate’s guilds to reach millions. And there are those who are recognized by millions, Catholic and non-Catholic, through the medium of television and film.

Take the example of Father Fulton Sheen. He was one of the most popular television personalities in the U.S. during the 1950s and sixties, authored dozens of books and is still remembered by generations of Catholics as a teacher and apologist for all things Catholic.

However, despite his popularity, or because of it, he was shunted off to end his days as Bishop of Rochester, New York. And after he died, his cause for sainthood was held up due to fighting between the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, and the Archdiocese of New York over where his cause should be heard and where his mortal remains should be laid to rest. Were he not such a well-known personality, it’s doubtful that such a disagreement would have occurred. In this case, his popularity was actually a detriment to the cause for canonization.

Similarly, the cause of El Salvadorian Bishop Oscar Romero may have been slowed by his notoriety. He served in El Salvador at a time when the highly-charged politics of the hemisphere were splitting people along a severe left-right political divide. Those who were fighting communism felt it necessary to do whatever it took to stop the spread of the Moscow-backed
insurgencies. At the same time, those on the left went about their activities with a revolutionary fervor and the belief that the end justified the means.

Thrust into this milieu, and speaking against the repression carried out by El Salvador’s government, Romero “has often been seen as a sort of Che Guevara in a cassock, a progressive firebrand who challenged an oppressive U.S.-backed regime in El Salvador and paid the ultimate price, being shot to death while saying Mass on March 24, 1980.” The divisiveness of opinion on Romero can be amply demonstrated by a simple Internet search. Some observers are opposed to Romero’s beatification, accusing him of being, at best, soft on communism, while some even claim that the bishop was an outright Communist. Others argue that Romero’s opposition to the authoritarian government of El Salvador and the oligarchy which ran the country at the time was motivated by the teaching of Christ, and that his calls for the rich to give to the poor weren’t Communist but Christian.

During the 1980s and 1990s, when Pope St. John Paul II was alive, his strong anti-Communist leanings made it difficult for the cause of someone like Oscar Romero to proceed. Even though Romero wasn’t a proponent of Liberation Theology, as some suggest, he was still marked with the taint of someone who supported leftist causes against the right-wing government of El Salvador. He fell perilously close to being a fellow traveler in the eyes of some.

But with the election of Pope Francis, who was not a Cold Warrior like John Paul II, the cause saw new life and eventually Romero was beatified. During his beatification, he was called a martyr who died because of “hatred of the faith.”

The kind of notoriety attached to candidates such as Sheen and Romero can make it more difficult for investigators to adhere to an important principle: Whether a candidate was well-known during their life, or became well-known after death, should have no bearing at all on a case. A well-known candidate may draw more attention, more members to their guild and more donations (of both time and money) to a cause, but the candidate’s standing in the popular culture of their time should not determine the outcome of the candidate’s cause.

Sometimes the time isn’t right for a candidate’s cause to proceed. Saints can be of a certain time. That is not to say that once canonized a saint can be “un-canonized” or demoted, but rather that the spirit of the times might be more conducive to the heroic virtues demonstrated by one saint as opposed to those demonstrated by another. The popularity of saints, like most things, rises and falls. Therefore, the cause which seemed popular and ready to proceed at one point may, some years or decades
later, grind to a halt. Likewise, a cause which has languished for some time
might suddenly reemerge and enjoy renewed visibility and action.

The cause of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement,
is currently enjoying an upswing. Robert Ellsberg, the editor of Orbis Pub-
lishing, is deeply involved in promoting her cause. Although she died in
1980, her cause has only begun to move forward in the past few years. In
the year 2000, John Cardinal O’Connor officially initiated her canoniza-
tion process. In 2012, New York’s Timothy Cardinal Dolan asked a gather-
ing of the U.S. Catholic Bishops if Ms. Day was an appropriate candidate
for sainthood. The bishops endorsed her cause.

Ellsberg said “What’s interesting about her, she had a certain reputa-
tion when she was alive. Many people had negative feeling and posi-
tive feelings.” But, he added “I think what is probably of more interest is
that the negative feelings have waned. Positive feelings have grown as a
younger generation have learned about her.”

As time passed from her death, Day has become a less controversial
figure, Mr. Ellsberg said. She is recognized more and more as a devout
Catholic and thought of less as a political radical. Those who support her
peace message, for instance, see it as a “challenge that comes with her
devotion to Catholicism,” he said.23

In the time of Pope Francis, who is emphasizing mercy, concern with
the poor, and forgiveness, perhaps the time has arrived for the cause of
Dorothy Day to move forward. Ellsberg said that she understood that con-
cern with the poor and social justice are at the heart of the Gospel. “She
invented her own form of radical discipleship,” he added. “She is a real
universal saint for our time.”24

THE QUESTION OF MIRACLES

Whether telling the story of a saint’s life or conducting research for a po-
tential saint’s cause, the question of how to deal with miracles is inevi-
table. How much credence can be given to reports of supernatural hap-
penings brought about through the intercession of a mortal? Some saints
were reported to have performed miracles while they lived, and most have
had posthumous miracles attributed to their intercession. How does one
proceed when presented with such a case?

It’s important, when one is investigating a purported miracle, that ev-
ery avenue of inquiry be pursued. The investigator has a responsibility to
try to disprove the miracle, so that, should it survive such testing, it can
then be submitted to medical and theological experts working with the
Congregation for the Causes of Saints. As one doesn’t presume the judg-
ment of the Church when a cause for canonization is introduced, neither
should one presume that a purported miracle is or is not an act of God. The investigator attempts first to find a natural cause for the phenomenon to be explained; if no such cause can be identified, then the possibility of the miraculous becomes plausible.

Only after every other avenue of inquiry has been exhausted can we suggest that perhaps a miracle has taken place. Stanly L. Jaki, in _Miracles and Physics_, places great emphasis on this. He calls for eyewitnesses to be thoroughly scrutinized, their accounts put through rigorous analysis. In cases where a miraculous healing has been reported, for instance, a panel of medical doctors and scientists should examine the evidence, carefully and clinically, to ensure no medical reason exists for the supposed miracle.

In the end, Jaki concludes, “This is all a Christian can do about miracles. He has to reassert them as facts, in all their details and context, but he should under no circumstances confuse the skilful and honest presentation of facts with the art of convincing.”

Warren H. Carroll said of historians studying alleged miracles:

There are many more spurious apparitions and alleged miracles than genuine ones. Historians must apply all genuine historical standards of scholarship when dealing with these reports. But the arbitrary _a priori_ assumption that apparitions and miracles and the Incarnation itself could not have happened, that historical events never transcended the natural order, is not a critical standard. It is a flagrant bias which ought to be firmly rejected.

The standards to be applied to detailing supposed miracles must be rigorous. But investigators should not ignore the possibility of supernatural intervention. Obviously, when a miraculous event is reported, something has happened. A seemingly miraculous cure indicates that an illness has been cured. Whether the cure can be traced to natural causes, or whether it is an act of God, are both within the realm of possibility. But every mundane explanation must be counted out before the possibility of the supernatural can be entertained.

For those involved with investigating a cause, dealing with a purported miracle is relatively straightforward. They can gather the evidence, pro and con, about anything relating to the miraculous event in question and pass it on to the doctors and the theologians. It is not the investigator’s place to determine if an event is, in fact, miraculous. They are expected to only gather the facts, such as they are.

For an author writing hagiography, miracles can present more of a difficulty. Consider the fact that in our modern age there are many who believe that God, if He even exists, doesn’t intervene in the natural world. They have no place in their lives for mystery or miracle. Even in the case
of a medically unexplained cure, they will attempt to explain it away. The skeptic will say the patient suffered from an hysterical illness, or that the patient was healed through the power of suggestion. The best that can be done, it seems, is to present the facts as they stand, introduce the findings of the investigators, and let the reader draw their own conclusions regarding matters of divine intervention.27

There have been within our lifetimes hundreds of people whose causes have been presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. There are many whose causes are still being prepared. And there are those alive today who will someday be recognized as saints by the Church. Some in the modern world might think it was easier for people in the past to live a life of heroic virtue and become one of God’s saints. But the stories of the saints teach us that the universal call to holiness is, indeed, universal. The call goes out to all men, in all ages and in all circumstances. And there are those of our contemporaries who heeded the call and lived their lives centered on the love of God. Those who study the lives of contemporary saints are tasked with demonstrating how their virtues are relevant today. They must show that God’s grace can still transform lives. They must tell the stories which inspire those who hear to cooperate with the grace of God, and live their lives as their Creator intended them to be lived.

Notes

1. This requirement can be waived by the pope—and recently was by Pope Francis for the cause of Pope St. John XXIII.
6. St. Gianna Molla refused an operation to remove a cancerous growth because she was pregnant at the time, and feared the procedure would lead to the death of her unborn child.
7. This is not to say that interview subjects will be deliberately lying. But the interviewer should ask himself if the person speaking has an axe to grind or if the person being interviewed would benefit from a candidate being raised to sainthood. Also, investigators must ensure they don’t fall victim to either a positive or negative bias when examining a candidate’s life.
8. A cause is “called recent if the martyrdom or virtues of the Servant of God can be proved by oral depositions or eyewitnesses [de visu].” *Normae Servandae*, 7.

9. *Sanctum Mater*, Part IV, Title 1

10. Ibid. According to the guidelines, a priest must not be admitted to testify about anything he has come to know through sacramental confession. Also, regular confessors or spiritual directors must not be admitted to testify concerning anything they have come to know about the candidate in the forum of conscience outside confession.

11. Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich was born in Bayonne, N.J., in 1901. She entered the Sisters of Charity in 1925. The author of several well-received meditations on union with God, (which were posthumously collected under the title *Greater Perfection*), she died in 1927.

12. Interview with Sister Mary Canavan, S.C., August 1, 2014.


14. Father Nelson Baker was born Henry Baker in Buffalo in 1842. He saw service in the Civil War, fighting at the Battle of Gettysburg. In 1869, he entered the seminary and was ordained in 1876. He spent years ministering to the poor, opened orphanages, and was the driving force behind the construction of Our Lady of Victory Basilica in Lackawanna, New York.

15. Fr. Solanus Casey was born Bernard Francis Casey in 1870 in Wisconsin. Ordained as a simplex priest in the Capuchin order in 1904, he spent time in New York City where he gained some repute as an inspiring speaker. In 1924, he was transferred to the St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit. Many pilgrims would come to visit the monastery just to speak with him, or to attend services he held for the sick.

16. Interview with Father Larry Weber, August 12, 2013. Father Casey was ordained a simplex priest, so he wouldn’t have carried out certain duties normally performed by priests.


20. Interview with Dr. Diane Traflet, 19 July 2013.

21. Canonization efforts for Msgr. Sheen were started in 2002 and were suspended in 2014. The cause remained suspended until November 2016, when the issue was resolved and it was announced Sheen’s remains would be moved to Peoria from New York City. The cause is expected to restart following the final burial of Sheen’s remains.


24. Ibid.
25. Stanley L. Jaki, *Miracles & Physics* (Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Press, 1989), 91. Fr. Jaki notes in his work that this sentiment echoes St. Bernadette Soubourious, who told a skeptic at Lourdes “Je suis chargée de vous le dire, je ne suis pas chargée de vous le faire croire.” (“It is my duty to tell it to you, it is not my duty to make you believe it.”)


27. To cite one recent example, in the case of Blessed Miriam Teresa Demjanovich, her intercession is credited with curing an eight-year-old boy’s macular degeneration in 1964. As many as eighteen doctors examined the case and could find no reason why the boy should be cured of this incurable disease. The seven-doctor panel assembled to examine the case for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declared it to be medically inexplicable. The cure happened shortly after the boy was given a prayer card and relic of Sister Demjanovich by the nun who taught his class. The nuns who taught at the boy’s school had been praying for Sister Demjanovich’s intercession prior to the cure taking place. While one can be dubious about the possibility of miracles, an insistence that such an occurrence is merely coincidence also strains credulity.