

The Medieval Canonization Process: Reality and Politics. Vox Populi Vox Dei ?

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The canonization process is one of the most puzzling phenomena within the Catholic Church structure. The medieval canonization process is not only an anomaly when compared to the other great religions: its entire procedure, with its complex mechanism torn between theological and legal issues, is unusual. In fact, while it would make sense to examine the merit of an individual candidate for sanctity in open session and from the theologian point of view, the canonization is considered instead a legal case and discussed closed doors by a restricted circle of religious authorities, similarly to an inquisition process.

In 1201 with *Licet Apostolica Sedes* Pope Innocent III established strict requirements for the canonization process. But despite the published rules, at first the canonization process was rather a flexible tool in the hand of local bishops, who followed people's desire to worship a particular meritorious individual. Through time it changed from reflecting the religious need of local people to assuming the form of a rigidly judicial process controlled by few cardinals and, especially, by the Pope himself. We can justly say that at the beginning the canonization process followed the people's voice as expression of a divine will, *vox populi vox Dei*. However, this situation developed according to a different religious and political environment: *vox populi* became alienated from *vox Dei*, the latter representing exclusively the pope's material power to master particular circumstances that might evolve to undermine church's authority.