

Approaching the *Martyrologium Romanum*

A semiotic perspective

GABRIELE MARINO*

ITALIAN TITLE: Avvicinarsi al *Martriologio Romano*. Una prospettiva semiotica

ABSTRACT: The article aims to outline a series of pathways leading towards a possible semiotic understanding of the *Martyrologium Romanum* (Roman Martyrology), an official liturgical book of the Roman Catholic tradition consisting of accounts of the saints — the eulogies (*elogia*, in Latin), a brief summary of their life and death — arranged in calendar order. Based on pre-existing martyrologies, this book was first issued in the second half of 1580s as a consequence of the centralisation promoted by the Council of Trent, and published in a completely revised edition in 2001 in light of the more inclusive and decentralising principles established by the Second Vatican Council. This article contextualises martyrologies as a genre as well as the textual history of the book and the way in which the concept of sanctity has been diachronically articulated and regulated over the centuries. A first attempt at semiotically framing the book is presented, with a focus on its genre, style, paratextual *apparata*, the different temporal dimensions it implies and its intended model reader. In the end, the article proposes the hypothesis that the *Martyrologium* is meant to be esoteric (in the etymological sense of “addressed to initiates”) and centrifugal (implying knowledge of other hagiographies), along with the idea that it might be fruitful to introduce a new, meditational use of this book.

KEY-WORDS: Roman Martyrology, Roman Catholic Church, saints, sanctity, semiotic analysis of texts.

* Università degli Studi di Torino.

1. Introduction: What the *Martyrologium Romanum* Is (Not)

Browsing the secondary literature in an effort to understand not so much what this book *is about* but rather what *it actually is* (namely, how it has been conceived, received, and concretely employed over the centuries), it cannot go unnoticed that the *Martyrologium Romanum* (*Roman Martyrology*, in English, *Martirologio Romano*, in Italian; hereinafter, MR) has always generated polarisation, with scholars regarding it as either a key, important text or neglecting it as a forgettable or, worse, dangerous one. The MR has been considered both *expendable* and *expandible*: many have argued for its removal from the canon of the liturgical books of the Roman Church while just as many have done everything possible to ensure it a long future of endless editions and countless reprints. Today, it is literally a one-thousand-page footnote in the history of sanctity and the haunting obsession of a few specialised scholars¹.

1. This paper is part of the NeMoSanctI project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement No. 757314). As such, it is the first instalment in a wider study of the *Martyrologium Romanum* aimed at detecting whether and to what extent the new conception of sanctity promoted by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) — an everyday, enlarged (“universal”), and even secular conception of the testimony of faith, to put it simply — has influenced the new edition of this liturgical book, issued in 2001. Despite being a “first instalment”, this article is by no means to be considered an overall introduction to the subject matter but, rather, a possible introduction “for the semiotician”. As a matter of fact, this article treats all the complex historical, philological, and theological issues it raises in a very concise manner, just to provide non-specialist readers — namely, semioticians — with sufficient context; on the contrary, all the semiotic terms and theories are explained in footnotes (with the very same concern for non-specialists; namely, non-semioticians). All of the online resources were last accessed on 26 June 2019; most URLs have been shortened via Bit.ly. I would like to thank Mons. Maurizio Barba and Roberto Fusco, who I had the pleasure to interview on 17 January 2019 in Vatican City. The former is a liturgist who has studied the *Martyrologium* extensively and who, moreover, teaches a monographic class about it — which is quite a unique case, globally — at the Pontificio Ateneo di S. Anselmo (Pontifical Atheneum of St. Anselm), in Rome (see bit.ly/anselmianum-classes); the latter is a historian and Byzantine philologist who has studied the *Martyrologium* extensively as well and who, moreover, actively participated in the editing process of the new postconciliar edition, mainly between 1984 and 2004. I would

The MR represents quite a peculiar presence in the traditional corpus of Catholic written textuality due to its twofold genre; that is, both a liturgical book and a “book about the martyrs”. The MR is syncretic and one of a kind; indeed, it is both and neither of these things. Occasional readers may happen to find a copy of the MR at the entrance to a Catholic church, usually the national edition (in Italian, for instance), and usually open on the lectern to the page for that day, which displays the *elogia* (eulogies) of a series of saints. Thumbing through its pages, they may imagine themselves face to face with something like — or something in-between — a calendar of the saints, a book about their lives, a complete list of all the saints, a book of prayers addressed to them or, simply, the “Catholic book of the martyrs”, as it is generally defined by scholars in keeping with its title and etymology². And such readers would be both wrong and right, at the same time; the MR is none of these things, being all of them, as it has arisen from historical dialectics intertwining all these elements together.

The MR is a liturgical book, but it is actually not frequently employed in liturgy. Having undergone an intense process of editing and revising, it should be a “living” book capable of keeping pace with changes in the liturgy and vision of the Church; however, it has been left substantially unchanged for centuries. As a liturgical book, its value should mainly be understood as theological; over time, however, it has increasingly acquired — it has been increasingly *injected with* — historical value as well. It is a liturgical book, but due to its brachylogical, neutral, and even dry style its prose is not

also like to thank Ugo Volli, Massimo Leone, Jenny Ponzo, and Francesco Galofaro (University of Turin), Pierluigi Giovannucci (University of Padua), Gianfranco Salvatore and Elisa Giacovelli (University of Salento, Lecce) for their useful insights. Obviously, any mistakes are mine alone. For what it is worth, this paper is dedicated to the memory of Nico Marino (1948–2010), actor, singer, and amateur researcher in local history who spent years of his life studying the documents in the library of the Episcopal seminary of Cefalù, Sicily.

2. From the Medieval Latin *martyrologium*; coming, in turn, from the Ancient Greek μάρτυς (martyr, witness) and λόγος (speech, treatise).

solemn, poetic, or evocative *stricto sensu*. It is a book issued for the Universal Roman Church, but it has always featured a strong air of particularism, concerning both local communities and specific figures of interest.

The MR can be positioned in the macro-genre of hagiography³, since the martyrs were the first saints of Christianity, those who sacrificed their own lives as a testimony of their faith in Christ. However, the book actually says very little — just a few lines of limited, standardised information — about the martyrs. The occasional reader would not find the stories of their lives, nor an account of their admirable actions, a theological interpretation of their figures, an outline of their patronage (the category of those the saints are meant to protect, their specific fields of intercession); rather, an occasional reader would find a short recapitulation focusing on the circumstances of their deaths. For information about all those other aspects, all that “missing” information and detail, one would resort to other hagiographical texts such as the *Vitae*, *Acta*, *Miracula*, *Passiones*, and *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*. Furthermore, the most recent edition of the MR includes figures who may hardly be defined as proper martyrs or, at least, are quite different from the early martyrs of Christianity.

Given all these considerations, in the end what do we have? A liturgical book that has a very limited role in liturgy. A book about the martyrs that tells us very little about them. A book with blanks, spaces from which something is missing, that leads its reader to question its meaning and seek more information. The MR is interesting precisely due to its apparent uselessness and, thus, meaninglessness. It

3. Hippolyte Delehaye (cf. *infra*), one of the greatest hagiographic scholars and an expert of the martyrologies, would disagree; he puts calendars of local churches and martyrologies in a category of their own, defining them “not strictly hagiographical” due to their practical and liturgical functions and their “non strictly literary nature” (see Scorza Barcellona 2007, p. 28). Jesuit and anthropologist Michel de Certeau (1968) reports that hagiography was actually “born with the liturgical calendars and the commemoration of the martyrs in the places of their tombs” (my transl.); a tradition that would be later formalised by the constitution of martyrologies as a proper genre.

is exactly this kind of contradiction, this ambiguity, that constitutes the true lifeblood of the book, today, in that such ambiguity paradoxically makes it possible to turn it from an ostensibly reticent (if not altogether mute) text poor in semiotic stimuli, into something genuinely mysterious, intriguing and, thus, fascinating. Being such a problematic book for so many reasons and from so many points of view, the MR is quite interesting to not only religion scholars but also semioticians⁴.

In the next section (2) I present the historical part of my review of the MR; in the following three sections (3–5) I present my notes for a semiotic analysis of it.

2. A Brief History of the *Martyrologium Romanum*

2.1. Pre-History: From the Calendars to the “Historical” Martyrologies

Discovered in 1866, the so-called *Syriac Martyrology* is currently regarded as one of the first attested (if not the first) texts of this kind, being the abridged translation of a lost Greek martyrology dating back to c. 360 AD (Wright 1866). Martyrologies such as this were nothing but calendars filled with the names of the saints worshipped

4. The best contemporary introductory texts to the *Martyrologium Romanum*, both from a historical and theoretical point of view — all written in Italian — are: Bugnini (1952), Fusco and Sodi (2005), Congregazione (2005), and Sodi (2006a). The monographic issue of “Notiziario — Ufficio Liturgico Nazionale” 28 (September 2007, 66 pages), dedicated to the *Traduzione e pubblicazione per la Chiesa italiana del Martirologio Romano* (Translation and publication of the Roman Martyrology for the Italian Church) is an important introductory source as well. Moroni (1847) is important for historical reasons. Evenou and Tarruell (1992) provides an important outline of the work carried out for the new 2001 edition. Guazzelli (2005) is probably the best study about Baronio, the author of the first edition of the MR (cf. *infra*). Quentin (1908; in French) and Delehaye (1940; in Latin) are two important references concerning historical and philological issues. There are no proper dedicated semiotic studies to date, although the MR is fleetingly referenced in Leone (2004, 2010).

in the local community; the more each community was able to fill in all the dates with names, the more prestigious it became.

The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (legendarily attributed to Saint Jerome, 347–420; actually written in the 6th century), partially based on the *Depositio Martyrum* and the *Depositio Episcoporum* (respectively, a list of martyrs and Popes worshipped in Rome, compiled around 354) as well as the *Syriac*, is generally regarded as the most important example in the Dark Ages. Also known as the “Latin martyrology”, it was the first and main “universal” one, as it included saints from all over the Christian communities (Godding 2005b).

A key turning point in the history of the martyrological genre is marked by the work of Saint Bede the Venerable (672–735). His martyrology included, for the first time, not only the name of the saint and the place of his/her death, arranged in calendar order, but also some information — a very short history, one might say — about him or her. In this way, Bede inaugurated the so-called historical martyrologies; in his own words, he had

diligently striven to note down all those [saints] whom I was able to find, not only on what day but also through what kind of struggle and under which judge they vanquished the world⁵.

As part of this tradition, the most important text in the Middle Ages was the *Martyrologium Usuardi Monachi*, dating to c. 860. As demonstrated by French Benedictine monk and neo-Lachmannian philologist Henri Quentin (1908), Usuard (died c. 877), a monk of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris, essentially created an abridged version of Ado of Vienne’s martyrology (c. 855), contaminated with elements borrowed from the *Hieronymianum* and Bede’s text. The success of Usuard’s martyrology, as evidenced by the number of manuscripts passing it down over the

5. *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*, book 5, chapter 24 (731 AD), quoted in Lifschitz (2000).

decades and centuries, is due to its textual uniformity, a feature that made it particularly suitable for liturgical purposes. Indeed, each portion of text dedicated to a saint is more or less the same length.

As may be inferred from the numeric difference between Bede's (272 eulogies, dedicated to the same number of saints) and Usuard's (approximately 1,100 saints) texts, the martyrologists strove to include as many saints as possible in the text, in order to fill all the days of the year. Neither fact-checking nor textual philology were their hobby-horse, so much so that the martyrologies, even the so-called historical ones, were not at all accurate as regards either the historical data (they are full of referential mistakes) or their own textual tradition (they are full of *busillis*, mistakes stemming from the incorrect interpretation of abbreviations, names, homographs, etc.). The MR emerged from this intricate tradition as an attempt to systematise and fix it, but it was also meant as a means of reorganising the phenomena underlying such a textual proliferation in the first place; namely, the cult of the saints.

2.2. *Before and After the Concilium Tridentinum: the politics of Sanctity*

It must be noted that, originally, sanctity was “not exactly a Christian faith thing”⁶ and that it has actually injected a new type of significance within this religion. As demonstrated by Irish historian Peter Brown (1981), the rise of this form of life⁷ must be understood

6. Barbaglio and Dianich (2000: 1754; my transl.). The original Italian quote reads: “Sebbene il concetto di ‘santità’ non sia proprio della fede cristiana, esso vi assume caratteristiche più precise che non nelle altre religioni” (Albeit the notion of “sanctity” is not exactly a Christian faith thing, in the Christian religion it is articulated in a much more precise way than in the other ones).

7. The German term *Lebensform* (form of life) was coined by Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and entered the semiotic lexicon (*forme de vie*) mainly thanks to Jacques Fontanille (for a state of the art, see Fontanille 2015); the notion has affinity with that of *mode d'existence* (mode of existence) proposed by French philosopher Bruno Latour. The idea of sanctity as a form of life and, more precisely, as a meta-form of life (namely, a super-ordinated form of life capable not only to serve as a model for structuring a whole project of life for the individual, but rather as a model for generat-

in light of its function as a tool of conversion in Latin Christianity, as the saints were not so dissimilar from the patrons (*patroni*) of the late-Roman social system; they served as a kind of protectors, sponsors, and benefactors of their clients-believers. Furthermore, on the one hand, sanctity provided believers with a much more relatable and feasible model than Jesus Christ (as human people participating in human events) and, on the other hand, in their primitive form as martyrs they represented the perfect updating of the iconic figure of the classical hero (Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri and Guidorizzi 2012)⁸.

According to Massimo Leone (2010, pp. 1–2), the popularity of the saints stems from the fact that they are visible, tangible, embodied signs of Catholicism:

Saints are among the most formidable communication media of Catholicism. Through saints, the Church proposes some narrative models of spiritual perfection. By embracing such models, believers are able to conform to certain religious values. [...] Saints are important in Catholicism because it is through saints and their representations that the Catholic idea of spiritual achievement can be signified, communicated, and transformed into a practice of life.

The saints became a successful medium and their diffusion rapidly reached a tipping point; they spread everywhere and risked overrunning their own role. Besides the fact that believers often worshipped controversial, questionable, legendary, and even manifestly never-existent figures at both local and global levels, the very presence of the saints, including highly famous saints, within the Christian landscape seemed to having weakened the centrality of Christ in the

ing other models out of it), is something I have been working on in collaboration with Jenny Ponzio.

8. See also the sub-paragraph “The heroes” of the second section (“The structure of hagiographic discourse”) in De Certeau (1968): the martyr, in the respect of being “the hero”, “is the dominant figure in the beginnings of the Catholic Church (the *Passions*), of the Protestant (the martyrologies of Rabe, Foxe, Crespin), or, to a lesser extent, of the Camisard, etc.” (my transl.).

cult. Paradoxically, this same concern was shared by both Protestant reformers, who judged the “Mediterranean”, popular cult of the saints to be a form of idolatry, and the Counter–Reformationists. As a matter of fact, the ideology behind the creation of the MR in the 1580s is consistent with a long–term strategy embraced by the Catholic Roman Church.

In early Christianity, there was no formal canonisation of saints (that is, there was no official declaration of one dead person’s status as such) and the cult of local martyrs was widespread and grass-roots, regulated by the bishop of the given diocese. Over time, ecclesiastical authorities gradually intervened more directly in the process of sanctification so that by the 10th century appeals were made to the Pope and, in 1200, with Innocent III, the *plenitudo potestatis* of the canonisation — namely, its monopolistic management — was assigned exclusively to the highest authority of the Catholic Church (Gotor 2004). The *Concilium Tridentinum* (Council of Trent, 1545–1563) and its resolutions, the main symbol and outcome of the Counter–Reformation movement against the Protestant waves spreading across Europe in the 16th century, strengthened this process. The Church of Rome launched a systematic centralisation campaign aimed at limiting any centrifugal force at play, a centralisation which was also carried out at the linguistic level (through the application of the label “Roman” to the titles of the new books being issued, as in the case of the *Missale Romanum* and MR itself). Such an effort could not help but include the re–appropriation of a very popular — and centrifugal — area of Christianity such as sanctity (Ditchfield 2005, Boesch Gajano 1999, 2007).

The Gregorian reform of the calendar was launched in 1582 with the aim of replacing the Julian one (named after its proposer, Julius Caesar, who established it in 46 BC), fixing its imprecision (which had caused the Spring equinox to progressively regress) and, finally, make it possible for Christians all over the world to celebrate Easter together, on the very same day. In 1588, the *Congregatio Rituum* (Congregation of Rites) was instituted and given a series of sacred assign-

ments, including that of overseeing a more and more formalised “trial” for the canonisation of saints. This move was consistent with a process of not only centralisation, but also “judicialisation” (Italian *giuridicizzazione*; Saccenti 2011)⁹, so much so that some scholars have used the phrase “juridical positivism”. The preparation of the MR occurred in the very same years, under the very same auspices.

2.3. *The Textual Politics of Sanctity: from the Counter–Canon to the Canon (and its “Static” Revisions)*

Heretics and Protestants had already equipped themselves with martyrologies asserting the courage of those who had perished at the hands of papists (the supporters of the Pope and Roman Catholic Church). In this respect, English scholastic philosopher John Wycliffe (1320s–1384) and Czech theologian Jan Hus (1369–1415), a follower of Wycliffe, served as Reformationist protomartyrs of a sort. As a matter of fact, they were both included in the *Actes and Monuments of these Latter and Perillous Days, Touching Matters of the Church* written by English historian John Foxe (1516–1587), published in an initial short Latin version in 1554 and then a full English edition in 1563 (regarded as one of the masterpieces of woodcut art of the time); a book which has ended up being handed down as Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* or the “Protestant martyrology”. In 1556, Istrian Lutheran theologian Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575) published *Catalogus testium veritatis, qui ante nostram aetatem reclamarunt Papae* (Catalogue of the witnesses of truth, who protested against the Pope before our epoch), an annotated review of anti–papal figures that became influential during the Reformation (Lavenia 2013).

In view of these developments, for a while by in the second half of the 16th century the Vatican did pursue the idea of reviewing the martyrological tradition and preparing a systematised “Roman martyrology”. On the one hand, the Popes intended to claim the conti-

9. See also the essay by Giovannucci included in this issue of “Lexia”.

nunity between the ancient martyrs and modern heroes of the faith as proof of the authenticity of the Catholic Church; on the other, they wanted to respond to the Reformists by purging the liturgy of the legendary excesses that had infiltrated it over the centuries. In 1568, Johannes Molanus (1533–1585), an influential Flemish Counter-Reformation theologian, reissued the *Usuardi Martyrologium* complete with his notes and a long critical *Praefatio*. Ten years later, in 1578:

Pietro Galesini, a Milanese apostolic prothonotary, had already prepared a new edition of the Roman martyrology, which was not approved because of prolixity, the author's negligence in the quotations, and the way he had confused people and names of places (Moroni 1847, p. 204).¹⁰

In 1580, Pope Gregory XIII (1502–1585), who had rejected the work of Galesini (1520–1590), assigned Cardinal Guglielmo Sirleto (1514–1585) to prepare a martyrology for the whole Catholic Church; namely, to review, systematise, and fix the tradition dating back to the *Hieronymianum* and popularised by *Usuardi*, the latter constituting the natural point of departure for this new book-to-be. The martyrology of the Roman Church would have been a further instrument of the orthodoxy, providing the official, canonical list of saints to worship. Cesare Baronio (1538–1607), then a presbyter at Saint Philip Neri's Oratory and a key figure in the religious erudition of the time (Guazzelli *et al.* 2012)¹¹, emerged as such a central actor in the commission that he is actually considered not only the editor

10. In his *Dictionary of ecclesiastical and historical erudition* (my English translation of the original Italian title), bibliographer and scholar Gaetano Moroni (1802–1883) employs the expression *nuova edizione del martirologio romano* (new edition of the Roman martyrology), which may convey the idea that an “old Roman martyrology” already existed; this is due to the fact that the tradition included Ado's *Parvum Romanum* which, at the time (1847), had not yet been the object of philological scrutiny (cf. *infra*).

11. In his collection of epigrammatic portraits *La Galeria* (The Gallery), poet Giovan Battista Marino (1569–1625) defined Baronio as the *gran cronista di Dio* (the great chronicler of God). Between 1588 and 1607, Baronio published the monumental history of the Church *Annales Ecclesiastici* (Ecclesiastical Annals), thus becoming the official historian of the Catholic Church of the time.

and compiler but the proper author of the MR. A first published version of the work came out in 1583 and was immediately revised. The next year, in 1584, the first official edition, the *Editio Prima Typica*, addressed to the Universal Roman Church, was issued; this volume was destined to be the *de facto* main edition of the book up to 2001. In 1585, what seems to be the first, unofficial Italian translation, by Girolamo Bardi, was published and since that moment there have been literally countless vernacular editions of this kind. In 1586 Baronio added two whole sections to the book, the *Tractatio* and *Notationes*; namely, his commentary and notes on the eulogies.

In 1613, Dutch Jesuit hagiographer Heribert Rosweyde (1569–1629) published an edition of the MR based on Baronio's, with the addition of what Ado of Vienne — the main source for Usuard (cf. *supra*) — had proposed as the *Parvum Romanum* (The Little Roman [Martyrology]); an allegedly ancient and embryonic version of the MR that was later rejected as a fake fabricated by Ado in order to justify his own inventions (Quentin 1908). Between the 17th and 18th centuries, the MR was at the centre of an intricate series of revisions (a popular — but “modest”¹² — one was issued under Benedict XIV in 1749), but the real protagonist of the martyrological matter of the epoch was the *Société des Bollandistes* (the Bollandist Society), a group of Jesuit scholars named after their inspirator, Belgian hagiographer Jean Bolland (1596–1665), who had continued the exegetical work started by Rosweyde.

The Bollandists presented themselves as a critical voice aiming at reviewing and verifying the historical reliability of the texts (Godding 2005b); their main work was the monumental series *Acta Sanctorum* (53 volumes issued between 1643 and 1794), a critical hagiography arranged, as usual, in calendar order. In 1695, a decree from the Inquisition of Toledo condemned the 14 *Acta Sanctorum* volumes for the months of March, April, and May as heretical, due in part to the offensive notes about the MR that they included (Delehay 1959).

12. Ditchfield (2005, p. 317).

The Bollandists were not the only ones to have questioned and harshly criticised the MR; others did so for different reasons, such as local, particularistic interests. For instance, in 1742, presbyter and scholar Giuseppe Maria Brocchi (1687–1751) published *Vite de' santi e beati fiorentini* (Lives of Florentine saints and blessed), a book that programmatically reviewed “those saints and blessed ones whose relics and pictures have been, since time immemorial, the object of public cult, even though They are not remembered in the Roman Martyrology and their Holiday is not celebrated with Mass and Office”¹³, as the full title reads.

Ten years later, in 1752, abbot, historian, and philosopher Girolamo Tartarotti (1706–1761), a polemist and fierce opponent of witch-hunting, published *Lettere di un giornalista d'Italia ad un giornalista ultramontano sopra il libro intitolato Vindiciæ Romani Martyrologii* (Letters of an Italian journalist to an ultramontane journalist about the book entitled *Vindiciæ Romani Martyrologii*). Grounded in evidence collected through an in-depth reading of the MR (defined as “yet to be emended and corrected”), the book was a response to the one addressed in the title, the *Vindiciæ Romani Martyrologii* published the year before by Benedetto Bonelli (1704–1783)¹⁴. As a matter of fact, the two historians Bonelli and Tartarotti were involved in a long-standing controversy concerning the origins of the Church of Trent and the status of sanctity of a series of local figures (Trentini 1960). This is a perfect example of the way the MR naturally served quite frequently as a pretext for personal, ideological, and political disputes between scholars. In 1799, canon Luca Fanciulli (died 1804), as the anonymous author of *Esame dell'apologia alla controcritica in*

13. “Quei santi e beati che hanno *ab immemorabili* il pubblico culto alle loro reliquie ed immagino Quantunque di Essi non si faccia memoria nel Martirologio Romano e non se ne celebri la Festa con Messa ed Uffizio”.

14. In keeping with common practice at the time, both books were published anonymously. The full title of the book attributed to Bonelli reads: *Vindiciæ Romani Martyrologii, XIII Augusti S. Cassiani Foro–Corneliensis Martyris, V Februarii SS. Brixinonensium Episcoporum Ingenuini et Albuini Memoriam Reolentis* (meaning “Revindication of the Saints Cassiano, Ingenuino, and Albuino, by means of the Roman Martyrology”).

difesa del vero sull'identità del sacro corpo di san Basso (Examination of the apology to the counter-critique in defense of the truth about the identity of the sacred body of Saint Basso)¹⁵ joined the lineage of “the famous Bollandist Papebrochio” (Daniel Papebroch, 1628–1714), who “tears the Roman Martyrology apart and conspires to make it questionable from every point of view”¹⁶, as well as Tartarotti. Fanciulli, identifying both Galesini’s and Baronio’s editions as the “culprits”, judged the MR to be “asperso qua e là di errori” (sprinkled here and there with errors).

Despite all the editions and revisions (at least 130, from 1584 to 1912, according to the Bollandists; see Godding 2005a), over time the main updates to the MR have involved inserting newly canonised saints, leaving intact the original 1584–Baronio conception and structure that went on to serve as the basis for the 1913 so-called *Editio Typica* (Typical Edition, Revised Edition)¹⁷. The “infamous” 1922 *Editio Prima Post Typica* edited by Pasquale Brugnani, full of mistakes and redundancies, served as the perfect polemical totem for the Bollandists Henri Quentin (1872–1935) and Hippolyte Delehaye (1859–1941) and their call for a structural revision of the oeuvre (in part on the basis of a better philological understanding of the *Hieronymianum*). Their behind-the-scenes work did not lead to a new edition of the MR, as hoped, but it did provide the basis for such a project in the next decades; at the beginning of 1941, just before dying, Delehaye (see 1940) published his monumental, 680–page critical commentary of the MR in Latin (based on the 1913 edition) as part of the new *Acta Sanctorum* series. The last edition of

15. Full title reads: *Esame dell'apologia alla controcritica in difesa del vero sull'identità del sacro corpo di san Basso primo vescovo e primo martire di Nizza in Provenza ora venerato nella terra di Marano nel Piceno. Osimo MDCCXCIX presso Domenicantonio Quercetti Stamp. Vesco. e della Reggenza Cesar. Reg. con Approvazione.*

16. Delehaye (1959, p. 95; my transl.); this is actually a quote from the document *Exhibitio errorum...* issued in Cologne in 1693 by Carmelite Sebastian of St. Paul, an adversary of the Bollandistes.

17. Examples of detailed comparisons of the different editions of the MR can be found in the work of Giuseppe Antonio Guazzelli (see Bibliography).

the MR issued before the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) dates to 1956; the Council went on to radically change both the public image of the Roman Catholic Church and many of its theological principles, including the definition of sanctity.

In 1964 Pope Paul VI promulgated *Lumen Gentium*, a Dogmatic Constitution which, among other things, strongly reaffirms the evangelical principle of the “universal call to holiness”. This move has been interpreted as the start of a new, more inclusive stance on the subject matter of sanctity. Since then, the Catholic Church has launched a process of de-centralising the procedures involved in canonising saints (now split into two inquests: a local one at the Diocesan Tribunal and a Roman one at the Congregation), mainly thanks to Pope John Paul II (with the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, 1983)¹⁸ and the establishment of a new type¹⁹ of sanctity such as the *vitae oblatio* (offer of life). Instituted by Pope Francis (through the 2017 Apostolic Letter *Maiorem Hac Dilectionem*), this type of sanctity appeals to those who have been martyred not because of their faith (*in odium fidei*), but because of a great act of love that derived from such faith (*in odium iustitiae* or *miser cordiae* or *amoris*, in the hatred of justice, mercy or love)²⁰.

18. As regards the number of blessed (1,338) and saints (482) proclaimed, John Paul II will be the most prolific Pope to date (see bit.ly/JPII-saints; between 1588 and 1988, 39 Popes had proclaimed 672 saints).

19. The classic types of beatitude and sanctity (it is not possible here to engage in a satisfying explanation of the differences thereof; as a rough guide, the blessed are saintly figures that only specific local communities are allowed to worship) were: martyrdom (martyrs), the exercise of virtue to a heroic degree (confessors), and equipollent (which, essentially, aims at ratifying the existence of an ancient cult). The third type was established by Prospero Lambertini (1675–1758) in his fundamental treatise for the codification of sanctity *De Servorum Dei beatificatione et Beatorum canonizatione* (published between 1734 and 1738; a revised edition was issued in 1743). Lambertini was Pope, under the name Benedict XIV, from 1740 to 1758.

20. Such definitions are not officially proposed by the Roman Church, but are widespread in the interpretation of this latest typology of sanctity. For instance, according to Jesuit Bartolomeo Sorge (1999; my transl.): “there is a particular aspect in the new martyrs of our days: they are killed not because they believe, but because they love; not *in odium fidei*, but *in odium amoris*. Obviously, theirs is not mere philanthropy, but authen-

Between 1961 and 2013 the Pontifical Lateran University created the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, a monumental oeuvre (12 volumes, plus 4 volumes of apparatuses) introducing a new hagiographic paradigm; the critical history and exegesis of the saints is no longer presented in calendar order (as in the *Acta Sanctorum*), but rather alphabetically, according to the modern logic of dictionaries and encyclopaedias (the series is also known as the *Encyclopedia of Saints*).

3. The New *Martyrologium Romanum*

3.1. *The Re-Writing of the Textualised Sanctity*

The drive to review the MR in light of Vatican II led, first in 1966, then between 1970 and 1975 and, afterwards, by 1984, to a renewed critical effort on the part of a dedicated group of scholars, supervised first by Jacques Dubois (born 1933) and then, by 1988, by Jean Evenou (1928–2014). The critical struggle involved in such an emendable text, its intricate tradition, and its obscure, questionable sources made the MR the last liturgical book to be reviewed, rewritten, and reissued after the Council (Sodi 2013).

Finally, the result of a twenty year-work of editing came out in 2001 with the first postconciliar *Editio Typica*, a volume which actually constitutes a radical rewriting of the text. Three years later, in 2004, a revised edition from which a series of mistakes had been expunged was issued, the *Editio Typica Altera*; this is generally considered to be the reference edition to date, in Latin²¹. The same year, the first postconciliar Italian translation was also issued, and this edition must be considered the official *Editio Typica* for the Italian lan-

tic Christian charity, that is, a form of love that is born from faith and is nourished by faith". See also the notion of *scientia amoris* as a complementary to the *scientia theologica* in Coda (2005, pp. 47–49).

21. Also because it is virtually impossible to purchase a new copy of the 2001 edition (it is no more available on the website vaticanum.com).

guage and liturgy (it went on to become mandatory by 1 November 2006)²². In 2005, Roberto Fusco and Manlio Sodi edited the anastatic reprint of the *Editio Princeps* (the 1584–Baronio edition).

This long — but actually stripped-down and extremely simplified — overview of the textual vicissitudes of the MR clearly shows that what over the centuries we have labelled “martyrology” is perhaps best understood not as a genre proper, nor even as a series of specific texts, but rather as something in-between; a kind of “genre-text”, given that the latest martyrology in the series does nothing but remix one or more pre-existing ones which, in turn, did the same thing and so on and so forth backwards to a single “Ur-martyrology”²³. This is why no attempt at understanding this text can be anything but an internally diachronic study. The idea of sanctity inferable from the text cannot be understood without an awareness of the way this very same idea has been differently defined, articulated, and regulated before. In this sense, the MR stands as a perfect “post-” book; it does not make a clean sweep of the past but rather subsumes it, offering the past to the reader in a new light.

On even superficial scrutiny, it is clear that the 2001 edition presents a brand-new MR; whereas its defining elements have been left unchanged, other elements of structure as well as the number and “quality” of the saints included have not been. The textual aspects of the traditional MR have obviously been maintained: the accounts of the saints (the eulogies) are arranged in calendar order according

22. This edition is available as a free downloadable OCR pdf document on the official website of the National Liturgical Office: bit.ly/ufficioliturgicoMR. For a punctual analysis of the official Italian translation/adaptation of the MR, see Barba (2005b, 2006, 2007).

23. “The first three martyrologies we have talked about here [*Hieronymianum*, Bede’s, *Usuardi*] are like the sources and the originals of all the others, which are only their increased copies” (Moroni 1847: 204; my transl.). According to Baronio, “The origin of the martyrologies [...] derived from Pope St. Clement I, elected in 93, who established and introduced the use of collecting the acts of the martyrs [...] by means of seven notaries distributed in as many regions, according to the ecclesiastical division of Rome made by the Popes, so that two regions were assigned to each one” (Moroni, *ibidem*, p. 201; my transl.).

to their anniversary (day of death) and include what Delehaye had called “hagiographic coordinates”, namely, the name of the saint, place, and — in most but not all cases — a brief description of their death²⁴. A number of eulogies have been rewritten with the aim of both maintaining the tone of voice of the original text (namely, the modest style)²⁵ and creating homogeneity among the individual texts. The work of re-writing is not merely a textual-stylistic affair, it is also a referential one; as a matter of fact, for instance, the eulogies have been re-written with a view to reducing the space devoted to the description of the torments, tortures, and agonies suffered by the saints (Evenou and Tarruell 1992, p. 471)²⁶.

3.2. *Deletions, Additions, and Adaptations in the New Martyrologium Romanum*

On the one hand, a number of saints with no sufficient reliable historical proof of existence were expunged in an effort to restore historical reliability to the text; the exact list or even number of deletions have never officially been declared, but some key cases became public domain due to the relevance of the given saint within a specific community even before the new book was officially published: “Whereas we still find St. George who defeated the dragon and St.

24. Saint Gregory the Great (540–604) had already suggested three elements as the indexes — in the strict semiotic sense of “traces of physical presence”, as defined by Charles S. Peirce, it might be added — of the cult of the saint: *nomen, locus, dies*; namely, the name of the saint and the place and date of his/her death.

25. Fusco (2005, p. 118) refers to an “asciutto modello letterario, stilisticamente ‘dimesso’”, explicitly reconnecting it to the Ciceronian *concinmitas*. In the interview I conducted with him, Fusco told me he had proposed to the commission supervising the work of editing and re-writing for the new MR to intervene on the style of the text; namely, to intentionally make it more solemn and poetic in order to render it more suitable for liturgical purposes. However, the MR was not eventually modified in this sense.

26. Notwithstanding this, the 2004 Italian edition still includes the details of many executions of early martyrs; for instance, in the entry on St. Vulpian (3 April), we can still read that he was “sewed up in a sack with a serpent and a dog, and drowned in the sea” (this text is from the English 1916 edition and is identical to the new postconciliar one).

Cristopher, the names of St. Filomena and St. Uria, a victim of King David (a saint himself), have been deleted”²⁷.

The case of St. Wilgefortis (20 July) is resounding: the legendary figure — popular in the XIV century — of a bearded Portuguese lady allegedly crucified for her faith and volition to remain chaste had been included in the MR since the 1583 edition; her cult was eventually suppressed in 1969, and so the 2001 edition was the first one to not include her²⁸.

In other cases, the “questionable” saints have not been expunged but rather re-written with caution, disempowered as regards not so much their cult but rather their actual status as saints. An interesting example is that of Rosalia (15 July), the traditional patron saint of Palermo, Sicily (and, today, of El Hatillo, Zuata, and Anzoátegui in Venezuela). The preconiliar Latin (1913), Italian (1955), and English (1916) versions, respectively, read:

Panormi Inventio corporis sanctae Rosaliae, Virginis Panormitanae; quod, Urbano Octavo Pontifice Maximo, repertum divinitus, Jubilaei anno Siciliam a peste liberavit.

A Palérmo l’Invenzione del corpo di santa Rosalia, Vergine Palermitana, Al tempo del Sommo Pontefice Urbano ottavo, ritrovato miracolosamente, nell’anno del Giubileo liberò la Sicilia dalla peste.

27. Salvatore Mazza, *Il Martirologio del Vaticano II*, “Avvenire” (3 October 2001; my transl.).

28. *Nota bene*: the saint’s beard is not mentioned in the eulogy, although it certainly served as the whimsical detail that guaranteed the popularity of this figure. The Latin 1913 edition reads: “In Lusitania sanctae Vuilgefortis, Virginis et Martyris; quae, pro Christiana fide ac pudicitia decertans, in cruce meruit gloriosum obtinere triumphum”. The Italian 1955 one: “In Portogallo santa Vilgefórte, Vergine e Martire, la quale, combattendo per la fede Cristiana e per la pudicizia, meritò di ottenere sulla croce un glorioso trionfo”. The English 1916 one: “In Portugal, St. Wilgefortes, virgin and martyr, who merited the crown of martyrdom on a cross in defense of the faith and her chastity”. For the implied iconography in the MR, and in particular for a comparison of martyrological *codices* and hagiographic illuminated manuscripts, see Fusco (2005).

At Palermo, the finding of the body of St. Rosalia, virgin of Palermo. Being miraculously discovered in the time of the Sovereign Pontiff, Urban VIII, it delivered Sicily from the plague in the year of the Jubilee.

The postconciliar Italian version (2004) deletes reference to the miracle of finding the body (i.e. the *inventio*, and therefore shifts the eulogy from 15 July, the day when the body was supposed to have been found, to 4 September, the day the Saint died), the miracle of the epidemic, and the Pope, and instead speaks only of an *alleged* solitary life:

A Palermo, santa Rosalia, vergine, che si tramanda abbia condotto vita solitaria sul monte Pellegrino.

At Palermo, St. Rosalia, virgin, who legend has it spent a solitary life on Mount Pellegrino (my transl.)²⁹.

On the other hand, comparing the preconciliar and postconciliar editions, the number of additions is remarkable. In the 2001 *Typica* edition there are 6,538 entries and a total of 9,900 including both blessed (indicated with an asterisk) and canonised saints, and in the 2004 *Altera* edition, there are 6,658 entries and 6,881 companions (namely, anonymous saints who are nevertheless counted as such, or saints whose name is put in footnote; both categories are introduced with the formula “and X companions”)³⁰. Of the total, female saints account for approximately half the number of male ones (Trapani 2006: 185).

Key additions have been made mainly as regards secular figures (approximately 300 units; Trapani *ibidem*), according to the more inclusive notion of sanctity promoted by the Council, and figures belonging to so-called third world or developing countries, in keep-

29. Oddly, the eulogy of St. Rosalia is not included in the online Italian edition of the MR published on the official website of the Vatican (see bit.ly/vaticanMR).

30. The *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* would include approximately 20,000 saints overall.

ing with a global and postcolonial sensitivity³¹ (many seem to fit the profile of martyrs *stricto sensu*). As a purely numerical indication that means nothing but itself, the notion of “secularity” is explicitly referenced and diversely lexicalised 33 times in the postconciliar Italian edition (as compared to three times in the preconciliar one) and a country and nationality such as Korea/Korean, completely absent in the preconciliar edition, are explicitly mentioned 39 times³². The most recent figures included in the new MR were canonised in 2001. The text has not been updated since then, which means that it would be inaccurate to define today’s MR as “the official list of Christian saints” (it would also be inaccurate given that it is liturgical in nature, not a census). As a matter of fact, such a document does not exist³³.

Theology scholar Valeria Trapani (2006) has identified the types of secular saints in the new MR. Male secular figures may fall into the following main categories: hermits, pilgrims, evangelisers, and charity operators. Female ones are virgins, widows, wives, and mothers. After having analysed these types, Trapani draws an interesting conclusion that is consistent with the conciliar *Magisterium*: the new MR seems to propose the idea that faith, Christian virtues, and the call

31. During the interview I conducted with him, Fusco warned me about the usage of the term “postcolonial” in that it may convey a nuance of artificially-embraced political correctness on the part of the Roman Church. By “postcolonial sensitivity” in this case I mean the inclusion of saints from a series of countries that have only gradually and recently gained prominence of some kind in the Christian community as it is officially represented by what historians have called the Great Church and, in particular, the Roman Church. Today, the MR is aimed at reflecting the contemporary context of a globalised world by outlining “a kind of ‘global’ network of sanctity” (Sorrentino 2005, p. 125; my transl.).

32. Obviously, this does not mean that only 33 secular figures and only 39 Korean figures are included as saints (there are many more of them); I refer only to explicit mentions of the notions of “secularity” and “Koreaness”.

33. It is possible to consult the official list of saints proclaimed by John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis at bit.ly/JPII-BVXI-F-saints. The official Vatican website presents also the *Martyrology of the Church in XXI century*; namely, the list of religious figures (priests, monks, nuns, etc.) who have been killed *in odium fidei* between 2000 and 2003 (see bit.ly/vatican-martyrs).

to holiness stem from within the family (also in cases in which the saint-to-be has to leave his or her native house in order to spread the experience of God to all his or her siblings in Christianity). Due to the scope of this article, it is not possible to delve more deeply into this issue, but “secular sanctity” and the idea of the “family as domestic Church” (*ivi*: 194) definitely constitute a focal point.

The idea of sanctity conveyed by the new MR returns not a static scheme to the reader, but rather a constellation of historically situated actualisations, a “panorama of Sanctity: a panorama of a thousand colours and a thousand routes” (Sorrentino 2005, p. 124; my transl.).

3.3. *The Paratexts in the New Martyrologium Romanum*

The first-ever printed edition of the MR, dating to 1583, is 316 pages long, with 15 pages of initial paratextual apparatus (*Explicatio, Tabella Temporaria, Rubricae*)³⁴. The 1955 Italian edition is 384 pages long, with the exact same initial pages (as regards both contents and length) and a 43-page-long final alphabetical index of the saints. The 2004 Italian edition is 1,138 pages long, with a more than 250-page-long textual apparatus divided into initial and conclusive parts; the former is made up of *Decrees, Premises*, (the explanation of the) *Lunar day*, the *Ritual for the Reading*, the *Eulogies for the mobile celebrations* (such as Advent Sunday), the *Orations*, the *Music* (to be played), while the latter is an alphabetical index of the saints.

In addition to its increased quantitative scope, this paratextual apparatus has acquired a focal role. The 15-page-long *Praenotanda* (*Premises*) of the new MR present a detailed theological and liturgi-

34. By paratext (from the Ancient Greek preposition παρά, next to), French literary theorist Gérard Genette (1982, 1987) means everything that surrounds the text; namely, all the elements which accompany the production and presentation of the text. In particular, prefaces, premises, notes, indexes etc. are to be understood as peritexts (from the Ancient Greek preposition περί, around). Paratextuality is part of the transtextual system (along with intertextuality, hypertextuality, metatextuality, and architextuality); namely, the possible different types and degrees of relationship among the texts.

cal interpretation of the text, reconstructing the network of contemporary intertextual relations within which it is entangled and providing pragmatic instructions about when and how to use the book. Besides *Lumen Gentium* (cf. *supra*), the main conciliar and post-conciliar documents referenced here include the Dogmatic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the *Roman Missal*, and some apostolic letters by John Paul II. No reference is made to the prior tradition of the MR (no Baronio, no *Usuardi*), with the exception of Pope Gregory XIII (under whose auspices the MR was created and issued for the first time)³⁵ and the *Hieronimianum* (which is also referenced in a few eulogies).

The addition of the year of death — or, at least, of the century in which the saint lived — is a significant innovation presented by the final alphabetical index included in the postconciliar edition, as even the most recent preconciliar ones did not include such a historical datum, but only the names of the saints and the indication of the place and day they died³⁶.

4. The Temporal Dimension of the *Martyrologium Romanum*

4.1. *In the Text: Past, Cyclicity, and Simultaneity*

One of the first things that might strike when reading the MR — besides its ponderous dimensions and yet minimal appearance — is its prominently plain and formulaic prose. This voice is capable of overwriting, to a certain extent, the semantic and lexical variety cre-

35. In the *Praenotanda*, Pope Gregory XIII is featured with the modalisation of “will” (he is the one who wanted the MR to be created) and, thus, may fill the role of the Sender, that is, the actant — the agent, syntactic role — that initiates the action of a narrative (such as the Old King in many fables; see Greimas and Courtés 1979, p. 5, *ad vocem* “Actant”).

36. Mons. Barba has prepared a series of indexes for the MR concerning the chronological, geographical, and sociocultural distribution (e.g. the religious or secular attributes) of the saints; these rich apparata have yet to be published.

ated by the presence of so many different names of people and places and granting the text great internal coherence. In other words, the reader is actually travelling across space and time in the span of just a few lines but, nevertheless, the sensation is that of moving within a neutral, purgatorial³⁷ dimension. This chiasmic *effet de sens* (effect of meaning)³⁸ is conveyed through a refined textual strategy and, in particular, the way in which the temporal dimension is structured. The MR seems to present a stratified, *fivefold temporality* to its reader; three of these temporal dimensions are inscribed in the text itself, as they are enunciated in writing, while the other two lie in its pragmatics (analysed in the next section).

On the one hand, the saints are listed according to the day of their death, which is the day when they were born into a new life in Christ (the Christian *dies natalis*; literally, day of birth, birth-day) and, thus, the day when they are remembered and celebrated by the Church³⁹. Even though it would be difficult for the reader to enjoy the stories of the MR for their narrative, given their shrunken length, he or she can definitely set them within a more or less precise idea of history, of passed time, of the past (the first temporal dimension). At the same time, such past temporality is set within a span of time that lasts one year and is cyclical (the second temporal dimension), since each day — and its corresponding saints — occurs once a year, every year, until the end of time.

On the other hand, the MR systematically and programmatically suppresses any chronological indication concerning the saints and

37. In the sense of “suspended”, “limbo-like”.

38. Also translated as “meaning effect”. Coined by French linguist and philologist Gustave Guillaume in 1919, this term was recovered by Algirdas J. Greimas (see Greimas and Courtés 1979, p. 96, *ad vocem* “Effect, Meaning” [Meaning effect]) to identify the impression, sensation — “simulation” — of reality we perceive through our senses when we make contact with meaning (or, to put it more simply, when we make contact with a semiotic experience), whereas in reality this feeling is just the result of a textual strategy.

39. The days are presented according to a threefold system: the Gregorian, Julian, and lunar calendars. Most but not all of the saints in the MR are listed according to the day of their death; some have been listed according to other anniversaries (such as the day their sacred relics were found, as seen in the case of St. Rosalia).

their time. The saints are always geographically situated in that the city or, at least, the country or region where they were martyred or where they died and, thus, where their saintly mission was performed is always indicated. On the contrary, the year of the incident is never made explicit. In fact, although it is always known or, at least, can potentially be reconstructed, it is nonetheless deliberately expunged. This is a common feature of hagiographic texts (“Hagiography used to be characterised by a predominance of details concerning places, rather than times”; De Certeau 1968, my transl.), but in the MR it is particularly prominent. Although reading the MR means reading the stories of exemplary Christians who offered their lives for their faith in very diverse ways and epochs, from the time of the first martyrs up to the Middle and Modern Ages and 20th century, such a temporal textual strategy conveys the idea that the saints all reside, *in praesentia* (*here and now*), simultaneously, on the same temporal plain (the third temporal dimension). In truth, the only way it is possible to establish a chronology of some kind is in an internal, relative fashion; that is, among the saints and within the “time of sanctity” but not in a dimension that directly links the saints to human history. As a matter of fact, the eulogies are numbered according to the chronological order of the saints corresponding to that day; in other words, we are allowed to know that St. Rosalia (4 September) comes after St. Irmgardis and before Caterina Mattei, but not when each saint can be situated non-ambiguously in history.

In the past, it was not unusual to find sporadic indirect temporal indications in the form of contextual clues, such as the name of a sovereign or a Pope; in the 2001 revised edition most of these clues have been eliminated (for instance, as we have seen in the case of St. Rosalia) in order to homogenise the text in terms of this aspect as well. As mentioned above, the explication of the chronological setting for each saint has been concentrated exclusively in the final index, whereas the postconciliar intertextual network of the MR is reconstructed in the *Praenotanda*. This partial chronological mapping conveyed via paratextual means seems to place the MR back

into a historical perspective while at the same time seemingly setting it in contemporary times.

4.2. *In the Pragmatics: Prolepsis and Projection*

The MR is about the past and the present. However, it is also about the future. A given text is not only what we can read, namely a verbal artefact, but also what we *can* and what we *actually* do with it. This applies to any text, but is a defining characteristic of functional texts such as liturgical ones; these not only tell us something, but are also meant to *do* and *make us do* something⁴⁰.

For centuries, the eulogies of the MR — along with other eulogies drawn from other sources — were read as part of the Prime or First Hour (*Hora Prima*; one hour after sunrise, at about 6 a.m.), when this part of the liturgy was celebrated in choir in secular chapters, monasteries, and convents; “in the communities that did not celebrate the Divine Office in choir, it was not uncommon for the Martyrology to be read in the refectory”⁴¹. The specificity was — and still is — that it was not the passages about the saints for that *same day* that were read, but rather those for the *next* one. In the Dogmatic Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963), the Prime Hour was expunged as part of a wider reform but the martyrological reading is still located within the Liturgy of Hours, specifically during the Morning Prayer (or during any other Minor Hour). These kind of practical instructions about the liturgical use of the MR are outlined in detail in the new MR’s *Praenotanda*, along with all the derogations regarding specific celebrations (e.g. on Easter day, not only the eulogies for Easter Monday but also the eulogy for Easter Sunday are to be read; on Christmas Eve the celebration is to include not the reading

40. According to the notion of the “performativity of language”; see Austin (1962).

41. Jorge Arturo Medina Estévez, *Conférenza stampa di presentazione del nuovo Martirologio Romano* (Press conference for the presentation of the new Roman Martyrology), bit.ly/vatican-estevéz (my transl.).

for the day of Christmas, but rather its solemn singing, etc.)⁴². Still today, it is possible to read the MR in assembly (in the choir, chapter, refectory), as an alternative or complementary use outside the Liturgy of Hours. This pragmatic side of the text — reading the saints for the next day — or aspect of its “radical of presentation”⁴³, to use Northrop’s Frye (1957) terminology, has at least two consequences.

In terms of drawing from the calendar (and still incorporating it as its own skeleton key), the MR is literally capable of anticipating the future (the fourth temporal dimension), of making it possible to read — “prophetically” (Barba 2005a) — into the future; a future that is already known (a “future passed”), that has already been written in that it has already happened (it is an anniversary). The text does nothing but accompany the believer from “today” to “tomorrow”, the day-to-be. Such a prolepsis is consistent with the idea that the saints, understood as the witnesses of faith in history (namely, as the chosen, selected models of the Christian way of living and dying), can project their exemplarity not only onto the present, but also into the future. By representing the *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ) as articulated according to the different ideologies of sanctity that the history of Christianity has proposed and ratified (from Trent to Vatican II and afterwards), the saints included in the MR represent both the growing and updatable corpus of embodied sanctity and a paradigm of possibilities among which believers can choose in order to in turn become a saint, or at least live piously.

Whereas the past projects itself towards the future, the opposite is also true to a certain extent; namely, the future projects itself backwards into the past. The future does influence the past. If a person is able to understand where he or she *can* or *wants* to arrive, his or her

42. I have found an example of this Christmas chant as performed on Christmas Eve in 2017 at the Church of all Saints in Minneapolis (see bit.ly/minneapolis-xmas). This church is ascribed to the *Fraternitas Sacerdotalis Sancti Petri* (the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Peter) and celebrates according to the ancient pre-Vatican II rite; so that, the Christmas chant is sung in Latin (the text is faithful to the preconciliar edition).

43. “The fundamental, original, or ideal way in which a literary work is presented” (Denham 1978, p. 92).

actions will be oriented towards something that *is not yet* (the “future unknown”), according to the idea of what *would be*, following a plan (the fifth temporal dimension). The idea that the future does indeed have an influence on the present (which will become its own past) is a very semiotic one. According to Charles S. Peirce:

To say that the future does not influence the present is untenable doctrine. It is as much as to say that there are no final, causes, or ends. The organic world is full of refutations of that position. Such action [by final causation] constitutes evolution. But it is true that the future does not influence the present in the direct, dualistic, way in which the past influences the present. A machinery, a medium, is required. Yet what kind of machinery can it be? Can the future affect the past by any machinery which does not again itself involve some action of the future on the past? All our knowledge of the laws of nature is analogous to knowledge of the future, inasmuch as there is no direct way in which the laws can become known to us. We here proceed by experimentation. That is to say, we guess out the laws bit by bit. We ask, What if we were to vary our procedure a little? Would the result be the same? We try it. If we are on the wrong track, an emphatic negative soon gets put upon the guess, and so our conceptions gradually get nearer and nearer right. The improvements of our inventions are made in the same manner (CP 2.86, 1902).⁴⁴

Following Leone (cf. *supra*), one such indirect influence exercised by the future over the present, one such “a machinery, medium” or mediation device would be sanctity as a way of life, a form of life; namely, the saints as possible models for structuring an entire life plan. The believer celebrates the memory of the saints and such a model could serve as a driving force for him or her to act according-

44. I follow the traditional referencing system for Peirce’s writing (see Peirce 1931). This passage is important as it affirms the pragmatist — as Peirce used to say — nature of semiosis (which is always oriented towards action) and vividly depicts how abduction — a third form of knowledge proposed by Peirce along with deduction and induction — works as an experiment (an always provisional and perfectible way of guessing; a shift, a progressive approach in the direction of “being right”). In the words of American philosopher David Lewis (1973), Peirce’s assertions constitute a “counterfactual” and, therefore, create a path towards a “possible world”; in this case, a “future world”.

ly: the saints of tomorrow were like this and did these things; what are we going to do?

In summary: the saints have been (in history; past), are here again (every year and every day-to-come; cyclicity and prolepsis)⁴⁵, all together (simultaneity), and they — soteriologically, escathologically — always will be (projection). The saints in the MR are set, at the same time (pun intended), within both a historical dimension and an atemporal, meta-historical dimension that succeeds in overcoming the human limits of events and contingency. In other words, by translating time into a single dimension of coexistence (an infinite expansion of the present which, being beyond our time, may be understood as only a spatial dimension; the space of the text), the text (the time of which is the only one left to the reader)⁴⁶ causes us to perceive the idea of eternity by intuition. This is consistent with the twofold nature of the book, which is neither historical nor fictional, but rather liturgical and hagiographical; as such, it generates its significance and makes it possible to engage with its full understanding only through a theological perspective (sanctity is a “theological place”; Coda 2005).

By incorporating both past and future into one dimension of infinite present (a kind of persistent “memory of the future”), the MR is aimed at building a bridge between the Church on Earth, which is subject to human variables, and the Church in Heaven, which is not, being eternal, although it has been and is nourished by the former. The MR stands as a device of temporal regulation and framing, as both a timeline and a timer. In maintaining this vision of time, the new MR does not turn the tables; rather, this approach to the temporal dimension has been left untouched throughout the entirety of its textual history.

45. It would be interesting to compare this dimension with the notion of *Vergegenwärtigung* (representification; literally, visualisation) as defined by Austrian philosopher Edmund Husserl.

46. Regarding the notion of “time of the text”, see Genette (1972) and Volli (2016).

5. Conclusion: Reading the *Martyrologium Romanum*

The model reader⁴⁷ of the MR has to be equipped with a stratified, multi-layered set of competences rooted in both the textual history and hermeneutics of the hagiographies produced by the Christian tradition throughout the centuries. The book offers its reader a series of subtle, implicit, and yet precise semantic, thematic, and figurative affordances⁴⁸ to be recognised, grabbed, and activated. In this sense and by definition, it must be conceived as a hypertext⁴⁹, a text symbiotically grafted onto pre-existing ones on the basis of the knowledge of the texts themselves, the meta-knowledge of which one or ones of them to select from time to time and, more generally, which portion of the sedimented, precipitate immaterial knowledge concerning sanctity — the “book of sanctity” — to go rummaging through.

If we accept that even a story which is 9,609,000 characters (or 3,724 pages) long such as Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (In Search of Lost Time; 1913–1927) can be summed up by means of a simple Subject–Predicate–Object sentence such as “Marcel devient écrivain” (Marcel becomes a writer; Genette 1972, pp. 75, 237), then we can postulate the opposite; namely, that a very simple sentence would conceal a story which takes much longer to reconstruct. The MR actually tells its reader, for each and every figure included in it,

47. The “implied reader”, in German literary scholar Wolfgang Iser’s terminology; namely, the reader which the text implicitly designs as its ideal user and interpreter, according to Eco (1979).

48. A notion popularised by American psychologist of perception James J. Gibson and subsequent interpreters, meaning the ergonomics a given object or environment offers to its potential users or inhabitants in order to be used or interacted or engaged with. Eco (1997) recovered this notion by reconnecting it to the notion of “pertinence” as investigated by Argentine linguist Jorge Luis Prieto.

49. According to Genette (1982), who developed and systematised the notions of “dialogism” developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and “intertextuality” by Julia Kristeva, a hypertext is a text derived from a pre-existing one through a process of transformation or imitation. At the time of Genette’s theory, American cultural theorist Ted Nelson had already proposed the notion of hypertext to refer to non-linear textuality (which is the conception later implemented in the World Wide Web’s hyperlink structure, albeit with key differences from Nelson’s original conception).

that one person — not necessarily named Marcel, nor a French person born to an aristocrat family in the 19th century — has become a martyr, a witness of faith in Christ. The textual formula through which such a process generates such a result cannot be expanded too much in the MR (on the contrary, other hagiographies would expand it massively); instead, we may be given, at most, a discursive configuration⁵⁰ of this kind:

At [place], [is celebrated and, thus, we remember] St. [name], [attribute of some kind]⁵¹, who [notable actions] and [way in which he or she was killed or died] [by which “tyrant”]⁵² due to [complement of cause].

Consistent with its origin as an annotated calendar (an annotated list of saints arranged along the liturgical calendar), the MR stands as nothing but a systematic series of paralipses⁵³, a one-thousand-page summary asking to be encyclopaedically expanded⁵⁴, a paradigm of

50. For this notion, see Greimas and Courtés (1979, p. 49), *ad vocem* “Configuration” [Discursive configuration].

51. Mainly of a religious nature (such as priest, monk, deacon, anchorite, martyr, nun, virgin, etc.), but not only (family man, catechist, etc.). This categorical clustering of the saints would be an interesting route of inquiry to pursue.

52. According to Lambertini (*De servorum Dei...*), martyrdom entails “willingly bearing or tolerating death for faith in Christ [...]. In fact, two persons must intervene in martyrdom; that is, the persecutor or tyrant must absolutely be a person distinct from the martyr, since, on the one hand, the persecutor or tyrant must inflict the punishment and, on the other hand, the martyr must suffer it” (book III, ch. 11; my transl.).

53. According to Genette (1972), an alteration of the main focalisation — namely the cognitive perspective from which the story is being told — of a text which implicates a “lateral ellipsis” or, in other words, a voluntary, partial, and usually temporary omission of information. This is the case with the expunging of the chronological data from the eulogies; the dates are known, but they are intentionally not included (cf. *supra*).

54. By encyclopaedia, Eco (1975) means “the general set of knowledge of the world, of a factual nature [i.e. not only of linguistic nature] and potentially open, if not unlimited” (Violi 1997, p. 87, my transl.). According to Eco (1984, p. 112), the encyclopaedia is structured not as a tree but rather as a rhizome (a notion introduced into the philosophical debate by philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari to designate a lattice, a network without a proper centre the nodes of which are all connected to each other).

condensed stories about the saints to be fully realised by filling in the blanks⁵⁵. The MR is meant to “evoke” rather than “narrate” (Sorrentino 2005, p. 127).

This action of (trans)textual reconstruction is not the only one allowed and fostered by the text. The MR does not only ask to be read, it also asks to be competently manipulated and personalised in order to appropriate it. This is by definition the description of an ergodic text⁵⁶, a text that needs to be interacted with. As I have shown, it is possible to choose when to read it (and along with which other readings, such as hymns, psalms, orations, etc.), but it is also possible to choose which saints for the day (to come) to read and in what order, according to the particular interest of the community (religious order, local community, etc.) of believers⁵⁷. For instance, in the 2004 Italian edition, the *Praenotanda* state that (my transl.):

The eulogies of the Saints or the Blessed marked with an asterisk should be read only in the dioceses or in the religious orders for which the cult of that Saint or Blessed was granted (p. 43).

Every diocese, nation or religious order can create Their Own Martyrology or Appendix of the Martyrology, including the saints and the blessed that are inscribed in Their Own Calendar, but that were not inscribed in the Roman Martyrology or that are celebrated on a different day or provided with another liturgical grade or for whom it seemed appropriate to make their eulogy a little more extensive. This Own [Martyrology] has to be transmit-

55. A similar hypothesis — the importance of intertextuality and paratextual apparatus — is explored with regards to the litanies of the saints from their origins to their YouTube remediation in Ponzio, Galofaro, and Marino (in press).

56. According to Norwegian literary theorist Espen J. Arseth (1997, p. 2), in some forms of literature, which he defines as ergodic (from Ancient Greek ἔργον, labour, work, activity), a “nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text”; namely, an effort which goes beyond simple “eye movement and the periodic or arbitrary turning of pages”.

57. An ethnosemiotic analysis of one or more liturgical moments including the reading of the MR would be interesting as regards not only an understanding of the pragmatics of the text, but also its *variational* pragmatics (e.g. taking into account how different orders and communities appropriate and personalise it in practice).

ted to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in order to obtain revision and approval or confirmation (p. 18).

Obviously, all the considerations above are true for most, if not all, texts (and especially for religious ones): namely, they do need the cooperation of the reader to be made meaningful, they do need a more or less specific competence to be enjoyed (including knowledge of other texts and the relations between them and the text in question), they are ergodic to a certain extent, etc. The case of the MR is different, however. Any attempt to understand it — especially nowadays; namely, after the release of its postconciliar edition — without putting it into context, without positioning it within its implied and complicated intertextual network, is bound to fail. In order to be read, interpreted, and used — put into practice — the MR cannot stand by itself, it cannot be taken as an autonomous, independent unit of meaning. Hence, the importance of the paratextual apparatus and especially the *Praenotanda*, intended as a true guide for the reader. In hindsight, it must be noted that the paratextual dimension of the MR is actually twofold; it obviously has its own paratexts and then, being itself a kind of summary, it can also be considered a paratext in turn: a summary of sanctity as it has been displayed throughout the history of Church and thus a paratext of the immaterial book which would be “the book of sanctity”.

The intertextual dimension in which the MR is profoundly entangled entails a centrifugal movement from this text towards other ones; at the same time, it also entails a centripetal, reflexive movement. Due to its textual history and diachronic dimension, the martyrological intertextuality is both external and internal. The understanding of what sanctity is today simply becomes richer and more meaningful when it is put into perspective and takes into account what sanctity was yesterday⁵⁸. The MR must be scrutinised as a

58. In the same way that the understanding of what art is today cannot fail to consider what art was before. For instance, *Piss Christ*, a 1987 photograph by American artist Andres Serrano — a crucifix submerged in a glass container of what was purported

palimpsest in the very sense of “a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed on effaced earlier writing”. Viewed from such a perspective, it reveals itself as a kind of *deuterosis*, of deuteron–writing, a term originally proposed by Jesuit biblist Paul Beauchamp (1977, pp. 136–199) to identify the specificities of Biblical textuality; namely, the poetics of continuous subsuming and re–writing⁵⁹. According to Luciano Zappella (2014, p. 171; my transl.), in the case of deuterosis:

The text does not proceed in a straight line, from either the point of view of chronology or that of content, but instead folds back; indeed, it advances backwards, so that writing is nothing but rewriting⁶⁰.

All this considered, the MR constitutes an esoteric text in the etymological sense of “intended for or likely to be understood by only a small number of people with a specialised knowledge or interest”; namely, it is a text for initiates only. According to liturgist Manlio Sodi (2013, p. 98; my transl.), any

liturgical book is a *sui generis* tool, it is one of a kind because it is meant to mediate both a divine and a human reality: the celebration. No other tool has to carry out such a “mission”. Hence the consequence: in order to be valorised with competence and respect, the liturgical book must be known and studied in all its multiple contents.

to be the artist’s own urine and blood — cannot be understood as a work of sacred art, as it was meant to be, without knowing both Marcel Duchamp’s Dadaism and Catholic Baroque aesthetics.

59. *Deuterosis* would literally mean doubling, repetition and, by extension, recapitulation; the term is etymologically and metaphorically linked to the act of wrapping and unwrapping a papyrus roll. See also Bovati (2002).

60. This image seems to be consistent with the temporal dimensions we have identified in the MR (cf. *supra*). Whereas the realm of religious — and more broadly “functional” — texts is commonly featured by such textual phenomena of re–writing, narrative and fictional literature is usually not; we may think of a few specific cases, such as Goethe’s *Faust* (and *Ur–Faust*), Stefano D’Arrigo’s *Horcynus Orca* (and *I fatti della fera*), and Alberto Arbasino’s *Fratelli d’Italia* (which underwent a continuous process of both accretion and re–writing since its first edition in 1963).

Despite such an elitist targeting, we can imagine a new type of fruition today that is different from both its antiquarian, erudite one and its prescribed acroamatic⁶¹ performance within liturgy; genre is as much given as negotiable. As a matter of fact, the martyrs and martyrologies — most notably, the *Hieronymianum* — have been the object of cult not only within the Divine Office, but also in the form of “private reading” (Lessi–Ariosto 2000). The new MR would not be inappropriate in a private, meditational context (perhaps in a litanic–like fashion as well)⁶², wherein its nature as index or map, *lato sensu*, could be fruitfully employed as either a point of departure or a point of arrival. People might embark on their own investigations of sanctity by using it as a guide (a “manual”; Sodi 2006b, p. 22), a list of names and stories to be considered in further depth, or they could start from other hagiographic texts and then use the *Martyrologium Romanum* as a notebook to chart their route towards sanctity.

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61. Meaning an oral, collective, communitarian performance (from Ancient Greek ἀκρόασις, listening).

62. For a possible, implied meditational use of the litanies of the saints, see Ponzo, Galofaro, and Marino (in press).

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