

## Article

# Comparison as Collaboration: Notes on the Contemporary Craft of Hagiology

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Received: 17 December 2019; Accepted: 3 January 2020; Published: 7 January 2020



**Abstract:** A workshop on “comparative hagiology” over the course of three years at the American Academy of Religion has yielded not only a series of articles but an experimental methodology by which scholars hailing from different disciplines and working in different fields might collaborate in threshing out commonalities and entanglements in their respective treatments of holy figures. This article’s response to the workshop identifies three pillars of general consensus among the participants that serve as promising footholds for aligned innovation in our respective fields: That hagiography (1) is constituted not only in verbal texts but in a wide array of media, both material and ephemeral; (2) is best interpreted by attending substantially to the “processes” of thought, life, and society in which it is rendered; and (3) opens possibilities of cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparison by way of the many family resemblances in how saints (or more broadly, religious and even para-religious exemplars) are rendered in transmittable media and mobilized for a particular group’s benefit. The article concludes by suggesting vectors for further development on these grounds, indicating how the category of “hagiography” affords a resource for interpreting unauthorized and apparently irreligious phenomena akin to sanctification, and calling for a professional and pedagogical ethic of collaboration that extends beyond any particular scholarly fruits of hagiological comparison.

**Keywords:** collaborative scholarship; comparative method; comparative religions; disciplinary innovation; hagiography; hagiology; sainthood; theory and method in religious studies

## 1. Comparison and Collaboration

A roundtable on “comparative hagiology,” at which questions of theory and method in the study of holy figures (broadly construed and continually contested) are in the foreground, is an outstanding opportunity not only to compare the materials and methods with which a group of scholars spends its time but also to consider more generally what role comparison plays in one’s larger scholarly objectives. What are the prerequisites of productive comparison, and for what is it a condition of possibility? For my part, I would locate comparison as bound up with (both fueled by and allowing for) two other modes of scholarly activity. Before comparison is possible there must be a degree of *comprehension*: considerable enough expertise in the subjects under consideration to be able to assess not only their differences but also the significance of those differences.<sup>1</sup> In addition, while comparison can stand

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Freiberger therefore recommends describing comparison as a “second-order method,” on the grounds that “comparing two or more items can be productive only if those items are being seriously studied” (Freiberger 2018, p. 2). However, it must also be said that the deliberate engagement with difference implied by comparison is indispensable to adequate comprehension of a phenomenon in the first place, so we are dealing with a positive feedback process rather than a neat succession of analytical stages. J. Z. Smith describes this as a continual interplay between “description” and “redescription,” where comparison “rectifies” the initial understanding of that which is being compared and which was (only partially) comprehended beforehand—see (Smith 2000, p. 239; Ritchey 2019, p. 3). On difference being the ground and fuel of productive comparison, see (Smith 1987, pp. 13–14; McClymond 2018, p. 2).

as a proximate end in itself (as in a publication providing edifying conclusions as to the nature or significance of some difference), I would commend the craft of comparison as a means of facilitating the wider and more open-ended tasks of *collaboration*: public scholarly itineraries determined not primarily by the individual interests of those walking them but by mutually articulated needs in the academy and/or society.<sup>2</sup> Such an interplay of comprehension, comparison, and collaboration is certainly of meaningful utility in the two primary fields in which I locate myself and to the flourishing of which I dedicate my hagiological research—interreligious studies and ecumenical theology.<sup>3</sup>

It is in light of this general sense of the function of comparison in my own work that I can examine and evaluate the AAR workshop on comparative hagiology that has led to this collection of essays. At the outset I would note that in none of the phases of this project—the original papers circulated by five participants, the interlocking conversations on site at the AAR in Denver (in 2018), and the subsequent production and exchange of response essays by the workshop’s other participants—has the sense of “comparative hagiology” been limited (or even primarily dedicated) to comparing the varied hagiographical media on which we work. Rather, we have embraced the opportunity to bring into the foreground a comparison of our methodologies and orientations, contextualized as these are by different disciplines, fields, and institutions. Accordingly, I would like to reflect, first, on my sense of some shared hagiological commitments that seem to have emerged in the core papers and our conversations around them, so as, second, to highlight what I take to be some lingering tensions and promising directions for future deliberation.

It seems appropriate at this point to pause and make explicit, as other contributors have done, what I take as my working distinction between “hagiology” and “hagiography”—terms which I use frequently and together, but not interchangeably. I describe the materials on which I work as “hagiographical media,” that is, media that inscribe and transmit human understandings and experiences of holiness (and that include but are not limited to verbal inscriptions such as texts and prayers), and the discursive work of interpreting them as “hagiology,” that is, the *study* of how holiness (or its analogues) is construed and of the media in which it is purported to be manifest. In this framework, hagiography and hagiology are not mutually exclusive: Hagiological discourse, scholarly or otherwise, might well itself become a means of hagiographical mediation, depending on its context and participants.<sup>4</sup> However, I am in no way eager to insist that this working distinction is valid for everybody. (Philippart 1994) established the wide historical variability of both terms’ use in European scholarship and ecclesiastical use more broadly, and, in my own context of study (Greek Orthodox Christianity), it is important to recognize that the two terms have an emic utility of distinguishing between verbal and visual representations of holiness (with *agiographia* referring today mainly to icons and freschi—*images* of saints—and *agiologia* mainly to texts such as *Lives*, passion accounts, hymns, etc.—*words* about saints). Both terms, then, are worth retaining in scholarly analysis—in this position I

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<sup>2</sup> I am not at all suggesting that the worth of scholarship is directly proportional to the number of scholars that it animates. Rather, this collaborative pursuit is only one of multiple valuable ways of scholarship, one which foregrounds public significance and attempts to build a bridge between the efforts of individual scholars and the multidisciplinary mutualism of groups of such scholars willing to be challenged, reoriented, and strengthened by one another’s work.

<sup>3</sup> The burgeoning scholarship on interreligious studies has insisted on thorough comprehension of the traditions and phenomena that are entangled (a rather more robust sense of connectivity than is typical for comparative work) at any interreligious interface, which in turn necessitates scholarly collaboration between experts in different traditions in order adequately to account for the multiple horizons and deep roots of a given interreligious texture. So too, the older framework of ecumenical theology has benefitted from a similar (indeed more linear) methodological integrity of comprehension, comparison, and collaboration: substantial and empathetic immersion in a tradition other than one’s own, followed by patient comparison of how some matter of importance is engaged in this other and in one’s own tradition, *for the sake of* collaborative articulation of some new understanding and ultimately more productive relations between communities.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, it is no challenge to recognize the hagiographical force of Kallistos Ware’s or G.K. Chesterton’s literary/theological interpretations of the lives of the saints—or indeed, as I will discuss below, if we recognize the hagiographical productivity of the varied and unpredictable *uses* of media depicting the saints, there is no reason that a scholarly article intended as nonreligious analysis could not be appropriated as hagiographically edifying by a devotee of the saintly figure in question.

differ from most, but not all, of the core essays of this special issue, which tend to prioritize (explicitly or implicitly) one term as more adequate than the other for the task at hand.<sup>5</sup>

Our emphasis on comparing methods for scholarship pertaining to holiness, saints, and their representation (and on comparing the possible definitions and taxonomies of such key terminology)<sup>6</sup> has meant that a kind of fruitful frustration has prevailed in our conversations. As Jon Keune poses the question: “How is meaningful comparison even possible without first clarifying the criteria by which scholars selected items to be compared?” (Keune 2019, p. 1). Recognizing the need for such metatheoretical reflection has led the comparative hagiology workshops into a kind of two-steps-forward-one-step-back rhythm, as every apparent agreement has been accompanied by the recognition that the agreement obscures differences in our working definitions of core problems and holds a tenuous common ground between different frameworks of scholarly sense-making. However, it is my sense that these delaying detours, sending us back through the weeds of suppositions we had not yet worked to explicate, can be counted as features rather than as liabilities of comparison. We are all the better off for having reckoned with approaches that we do not share and the challenges leveled by those approaches’ differences, whether or not we come (or even want to come) to consensus on particular elements of them.

That said, it is heartening to see the degree of agreement around some key, yet more or less novel, parameters of hagiological scholarship. I would identify three of these matters in which participants (myself included) were generally convinced, and which seem to me to be representative of what can be identified as a contemporary approach to hagiographical sources. These areas of alignment provide initial frames for collaborative sense-making even in the absence of shared material or scholarly goals.

## 2. Common Grounds

Hagiography, whether understood as “a text about the life of a figure regarded as holy by some subset of a population” (DiValerio 2019, p. 1), “texts about exemplars, when texts include objects, non-verbal images, and ritual actions (procession, votive offering, pilgrimage)” (Ritchey 2019, pp. 2–3), or, most capaciously, “the complex web of behaviors, practices, beliefs, and productions

<sup>5</sup> DiValerio does not draw an explicit distinction—he uses “hagiology” in his abstract and does not examine the term further (DiValerio 2019, p. 1). French does not explore the distinction in his own analysis but makes note of other contributors’ preference of one rather than the other (French 2019, note 6). Ritchey prefers *hagiography* and notes that “hagiology” “shifts attention from writing about sanctity to its logos”—more appropriate for the philosophy of religion than for material-cultural analysis of the sort that she deems most fruitful in her work (Ritchey 2019, note 1). Keune prefers *hagiology* and provides an explicit justification for his use of the term rather than hagiography on the (debatable) grounds that hagiography implies a fixation on “written documents” (Keune 2019, p. 2). Only Rondolino seems to maintain both terms side by side, designating hagiography as “an analytical category for the taxonomy of sources that contribute to construct and promote the recognition of a given individual as a perfected being” and hagiology as “an academic, scientific approach to the study of particular religious phenomena” (Rondolino 2019, p. 2; see also his Introduction to this special issue)—our approaches are aligned insofar as hagiology designates the academic project and hagiography designates the web of products and processes analyzed by it, although the *partial mutual inclusivity* between these two goes unnoted in Rondolino’s piece (as it is barely noted here—it is a topic owed more substantial consideration elsewhere).

<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that not only the choice of “hagiology” or “hagiography” but also the content and most appropriate English designation of the “*hagio-*” itself were unresolved questions in our workshop and scholarly exchange. Keune explains this with particular sensitivity: “Prioritizing *hagiology* at the start of a comparative hagiological project prompts the scholar to articulate what constitutes *hagio-*, to stipulate what meaningfully compare-able items might look like when the scholar starts searching for them. In English and most European languages, this would usually involve carefully redefining the word ‘saint’ so that it is not too Christian, or it involves adopting a term (like Ritchey’s ‘exemplary figures’ and Rondolino’s ‘perfected beings’) that resolutely avoids the word ‘saint.’ Yet, with all of these terms, the weight of semantic precedent and tradition would make it difficult to define such terms without reference to ‘religion.’ And if *hagio-* is hard to define in a cross-culturally sensitive way, religion is even more notoriously difficult” (Keune 2019, p. 3). Although my work does focus on Christian saints (Greek saints, *hagioi*, no less) and so I have not been especially obligated to worry about the applicability of the Greek-Christian vocabulary, I would suggest for the sake of the comparative project that we can never completely sanitize our vocabulary of associations and debts to particular traditions—the best we can do is cultivate hermeneutical rigor and reflexivity toward these entanglements. With this expectation, I am comfortable with any of the proposed terms of the roundtable—“holy figures,” “exemplary figures,” “perfected beings,” and indeed “saints” (given the etymological root in the *process* of human beings’ sanctifying or setting-apart a person, object, place, or the like, for veneration or emulation—a Roman term which, after all, does not originate in or belong to Christianity). I address this issue further below.

(literary, visual, acoustic, etc.) in and by which a given community constructs the memory of an individual who is recognized as the embodied perfection of the ‘religious’ ideal promoted by the community’s tradition and socio-cultural context” (Rondolino 2019, p. 5, presupposing the longer discussion in Rondolino (2017, pp. 35–40)), is an analytical category more capacious than the literary productions that have typically exhausted it. Already in 1994, Felice Lifshitz demonstrated how the notion of hagiography as a distinct “genre” of religious literature is problematic in light of this definition’s reliance on obsolete historiographical suppositions about the opposition of history and fiction.<sup>7</sup> However, much of the hagiographical scholarship in the years since has remained invested in construing hagiography as essentially literary or verbal: for instance, as “a variety of literary forms” in which special individuals are glorified (Rapp 1999, pp. 64–65), or as “a set of discursive strategies for presenting sainthood” (Miller 2009, p. 118). By contrast, the papers under consideration at the recent comparative hagiology workshop, and the contributions of the other participants in conversation, have for the most part embraced the subsequent move of classifying as hagiographical non-verbal or trans-verbal “texts” (such as images, objects, apparitions, buildings, processions, festivals, etc.).<sup>8</sup> While this move should not be made merely for convenience and should be robustly theorized (a project in which I am engaged as well), I take it as promising that “hagiography” is recognized to be a heuristic tool rather than a stable and single set of data. This allows for the interpretation of family resemblances and integrated functions between a vast array of media that, as enough of us have found, work together and amplify one another’s interventions in the life-worlds of their consumers.<sup>9</sup>

So too, there seems to be an encouraging level of (at least provisional) agreement with Rondolino’s proposal that hagiography be considered not only in terms of the “productions” in which the sanctity of some person is constructed but also in terms of the “behaviors, practices, beliefs,” and other ways of life of which those material productions are but one manifestation (Rondolino 2019, p. 5). Rondolino describes this overall theoretical thrust as being concerned with “hagiographical process” (Rondolino 2017, 2019, throughout)—a formulation that sparked excitement and recognition among other participants, myself included. My doctoral dissertation, to take the example with which I am most familiar, interpreted the relationship between the (multiple and interlocking) material textures and the (public and private) political functions of the hagiography of St. George in modern Cyprus. In that work, I developed a framework for interpreting hagiography as “the multimediation of holiness,” that is, as designating not solely the media themselves but also and more fundamentally the psychosocial processes that generate and mobilize these constructions of holiness for a wide array of purposes in the world. I was delighted to find that this framework was at home in the comparative hagiology workshop, and it was evident that the other primary contributions besides Rondolino’s were resonant with the “hagiographical process” approach as well.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> (Lifshitz 1994; Rondolino 2019; French 2019) further explore the dysfunction of genre-based definitions of hagiography and suggest promising alternatives—as do I in forthcoming work.

<sup>8</sup> Keune’s dissent on this point is significant, but not disruptive of the shared orientation. He argues that the term hagiography “cannot but prioritize textuality in its very restricted sense of written documents” (Keune 2019, p. 2) which worries him precisely because the *hagio*-(however this ends up being construed in a given tradition or context) is *not* inscribed solely in such written documents—exactly the case that I and others make in favor of an expanded definition of hagiography, inclusive of the many forms of “inscription” (*graphē*) besides verbal texts. Here, the (reasonable, though I do not think determinative) disagreement is over the scholarly lexicon rather than with the object of analysis. Likewise, although Zimbalist concentrates her methodological attention on “the literature of sanctity,” she acknowledges that “hagiography in and of itself exceeds the textual” (Zimbalist 2019, p. 2).

<sup>9</sup> Such a recognition of “hagiographical” qualities and functions beyond written texts does not, of course, dispel the reasonable concerns with the implications of extending the tools of textual hermeneutics beyond the verbal realm. Such a hegemony of the text has been capably critiqued, for instance, in (Sullivan 1990; Asad 1993; Gell 1998; Malafouris 2013). Negotiating the merits versus the liabilities of a hermeneutical approach to non-verbal “texts” remains part of the ongoing task of theoretical and methodological reflexivity.

<sup>10</sup> See (Hollander 2018, pp. 21–45; cf. Ritchey 2019; Keune 2019; DiValerio 2019). Siebeking also offers the resonant notion of “the hagiographical” (Siebeking 2019, pp. 1–2) along the lines of Mark L. Taylor’s “the theological” and “the political,” as an emphasis on the “creative and receptive dynamics of hagiography” unbound by institutional or historical norms.

Finally, although there was not as much consensus (indeed there was some heated dispute) as to whether “hagiology” and “hagiography” could be useful categories of analysis in the context of religious traditions that either do not use the terms (or analogous terms) or that do not frame phenomena as “saints” or “holiness,” etc.,<sup>11</sup> there *was* a sense that all of our many approaches to dealing with many incommensurable materials *have something to do with one another*, even if the act of intellection around our commonalities (particularly where we are using terms derived from Greek or Latin and regularly associated with Christianity) sounds all the usual alarm bells. After all, there we all were, taking the time and effort to participate in a shared workshop, able to build upon one another’s contributions and conceive of a collaborative future even when we could not agree on the definition or specific utility of the terms we were working with. It may be my ecumenical disposition speaking, but I take this to be enormously promising: The comparative hagiology project is constrained, unsurprisingly, by all the challenges of comparative work in religious studies more generally, but it is also fueled by the recognition that hospitality to one another’s contributions across our wide range of hagiological construals and analytic suppositions is worthwhile even without the ability to translate perfectly and without a lockstep commitment to the same intellectual goals. This is, of course, the norm of human communication more broadly—we can never understand other people (or other languages, or other traditions, or other disciplines) exactly as they understand themselves, yet communication, translation, and multilingualism are not only possible, they are overwhelmingly the norm. As Keune points out, we may not need conclusively (or even preemptively) come to consensus on our terms before we begin the collaborative work of comparative hagiology.<sup>12</sup> Thinking together, including about these differences and disagreements, is transformative—we will not see our own material and our own methods the same way when we can accompany others gleanings insights from their own.<sup>13</sup>

I will conclude these reflections with an indication of where my own approach, while wholly aligned with the above areas of general agreement, would try to massage through some lingering knots in our enterprise of comparative hagiological interpretation.

### 3. Where Next?

First, insofar as we are asking about the processes of thought and life that give rise to hagiographical media (by which, in Rondolino’s terms, “the embodied perfection of the ‘religious’ ideal” (Rondolino 2019, p. 5) is constructed in publicly-available forms), we ought to consider within the field of view not only those processes of hagiographical *production* but also those of what I would call hagiographical *consumption*. The many authorized and unauthorized uses to which hagiographical media are put in people’s lives are indispensable to the continued construction and circulation of the ideals of which these media are representative. Indeed, an object that plays a hagiographical role in the life of a community need not even be deliberately “produced” to be hagiologically significant. To take an example from my own material: Across the island of Cyprus there are shrines that have developed around stones bearing the hoofprints (*ta pathkia*) of St. George’s horse; such shrines may eventually be formalized through recognition by the institutional church, but well before this point they have coalesced as sites of holy significance and power through the procedures by which people interact with them. Whether at such informal sites as this or in the established churches, practices of veneration may be ephemeral but still constitute part of the status and indeed the very form of the holiness that is there represented. Hagiographical consumers become part of the mediating field for one another, their devotions being publicly perceptible, and the offerings that are frequently left behind (wax or

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, the various discussions of these thorny issues in Keune (2019) and Rondolino (2019) (drawing on Monge 2016); and see again note 6 in this article.

<sup>12</sup> See (Keune 2019, pp. 1–2). It is, moreover, worth remembering that using the same term—for instance the mere presence of a concept of “saints” in multiple traditions—is by no means a guarantee that the ideas and images communicated by these terms are aligned or even commensurable.

<sup>13</sup> French suggests much the same and expands on the merits of this approach (French 2019, pp. 2–3, 6–7).



tin votives, photos of loved ones, candles, coins, crutches, etc.) remain as a cumulative precipitation from acts of consumption that amplifies the content and power of the media in question. In Michel de Certeau's formulation, such consumption is itself a co-production, not only of a site's significance but even of that which is available to signify in the first place. It is important not to let an allergy to over-broadening our categories foreclose on including such phenomena in our hagiological analyses.<sup>14</sup>

Second, while I am in agreement that the analytical use of "hagiography" as a category is broader than those religious traditions in which the term has emic significance, I would also suggest that this breadth extends past religious studies as a discipline, or perhaps better, offers a point at which religious studies may contribute to broader questions in cultural and political studies. The study of saints has already made room for this recognition (for instance in Lawrence Jasud's short but significant piece, "St. Elvis," (Jasud 2011)), yet the opportunity exists for more thoroughgoing theoretical attention to how such transreligious hagiographical phenomena are related to those that are more familiar to scholars of religion.<sup>15</sup> Such an applicability at the margins of religious studies was, unsurprisingly, a point of tension in our conversation (around the reasonable but, I think, ultimately untenable worry that once everything is hagiography, nothing will be), yet I would suggest that Rondolino's definition of hagiography may in fact remain rather too narrow. As Keune puts it "But that's not religion, and those aren't saints" (Keune 2019, p. 6) is a gatekeeping move that, though well-intentioned to keep a firm grip on the reins of interpretation, will impede some of the most interesting analyses that comparative hagiology may engender—for instance around sanctifying representations (verbal and otherwise) of politicians, soldiers, celebrities, or animals.<sup>16</sup>

Third, I would like to encourage those of us committed to pursuing comparative hagiology not to view the insights available in this comparative key as self-sufficient. I mean this not only in the sense that sound comparative work can and should open the door to collaborative scholarship that mobilizes diverse strengths in shared projects, but also in the sense that comparative methods risk giving a pass to obsolete parameters for examining religious traditions, practices, or texts "individually," as it were, as if such phenomena were discrete entities that could be set next to one another as non-overlapping spheres.<sup>17</sup> Where hagiographical production and consumption are concerned, however, a community's dealings with holy figures are often if not usually preconditioned by a history of *interreligious* interaction, in which the community's own understandings and behaviors are oriented in no small part by what they have witnessed on the part of religious others, whose presence and activity have contributed to their repertoire of self-understanding. In this respect, I would offer the methodological resources of interreligious studies—in its early days as a formal academic apparatus but earning ample recognition and enthusiasm from practitioners across a range of disciplines—as valuable assets for the project of

<sup>14</sup> See (de Certeau 1984, pp. xi–xxi); cf. (Siebeking 2019) on hagiographical "reception".

<sup>15</sup> I have tried to deliver on this suggestion in my forthcoming article, "The Heromartyrs of Cyprus" (Hollander 2020), in which I interpret a museum dedicated to the memory of the Greek Cypriot "national struggle" against British colonial rule, suggesting that the museum functions as an apparatus of hagiographical mediation insofar as it renders for local and international publics an aura of sanctity around the dead anticolonial fighters.

<sup>16</sup> It is on these grounds that Keune proposes his methodology of "prioritizing the *comparative*" (Keune 2019, p. 6) in comparative hagiology, whereby the specific taxonomical boundaries of holiness, saints, religion, etc., are allowed to remain fluid until the comparanda in question are posed to one another with a maximum of openness to possible resonances and resemblances. Brian Siebeking helpfully tests this approach, in his contribution to this special issue, finding that the avoidance of early definitional overdetermination not only allows for more interesting comparative insights in which the rewards are potentially greater than the risks, but also for more effective and dexterous *collaborative* support for one another's projects (Siebeking 2019).

<sup>17</sup> As Laurie Patton puts it, drawing on David Eckel, "modernist myths are broken [in contemporary comparative methods], but they do not go away ... they coexist instead with the rediscovery of traditional patterns of life and thought that were considered long since out of date" (Patton 2000, pp. 193–94). Moreover, as McClymond observes (McClymond 2018, p. 3), the scholarly work of comparison is itself *creating* (or at least intervening in) relationships between the phenomena to which it attends, relationships bound up with power dynamics between the human representatives, agents, or addressees of these phenomena.

comparative hagiology, useful as they are for illuminating and accounting for the entanglement of even apparently distinct religious phenomena.<sup>18</sup>

Where we go from here is as wide open as the breadth of imagination on the part of participants in this series of workshops and of those in our own networks and beyond who are inspired by the work. The collaborative commitment on the part of those involved is encouraging indeed, in light of an academic profession that will not easily survive (or at least, will not easily flourish again) in the absence of such collaboration. In a way, the fact of *how* such a contemporary hagiology is being pursued—a circulation of drafts, an in-person negotiation of parallels and divergences, a collaborative editing process, and a shared publication in a setting that amplifies each scholar's contribution in light of its resonance with the others—is as significant as the content of any of its scholarly accomplishments. This experiment, whatever its quantifiable products, has *moral implications* not only for our responsibility to steward the profession sustainably for the next generation, but also for our pedagogy as teachers of students who will need to navigate a world of religious difference and will do so for better or worse. The collaborative comparison in which we are engaged is—if we apply it thus—of substantial value in the classroom, as we work to equip our students to think differently, and more precisely to think *with others*, decoupling their commitments and horizons from a sense of self-evidence and offering these destabilizing comparisons as opportunities to practice intellectual empathy and hospitality.<sup>19</sup> If the collaborative enterprise that has led to this collection can help cultivate the recognition that individual excellence is not a sufficient end toward which to dedicate our scholarship, then our students, our professional networks, and our interlocking publics will be much better for it.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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<sup>18</sup> For an early and influential articulation of the priorities and methods of interreligious studies, see (Leirvik 2014). A more recent and diverse set of perspectives can be found in (Patel et al. 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Scott Harrower expands on the pedagogical implications of the comparative hagiology project (Harrower 2019, p. 9), offering valuable metapedagogical reflections along with some specific examples of how his classes cultivate and mobilize comparative methodology with reference to hagiography in particular. In the spirit of our comparative inquiry, I can add that certain of my own classes—"Classical Mythology and its Afterlives" and "Literature and the Sacred: Writing Saints" in particular—have likewise relied on methodological elements of comparative hagiology in order to provide students with a toolbox to pose questions and perceive attributes they might not otherwise have done in new materials. Thus, we study (for instance), the exhortation to refashion oneself in the model of one's heroes found in *The Amazing Spider-Man* in light of Pericles' *Funeral Oration* and the saint's-day homilies of John Chrysostom, or we attend to James Baldwin's and Malcolm X's critiques of white supremacy in terms of the language of demonic possession that they employ—after and in conversation with our study of the *Lives* and *Sayings* of the Desert Fathers, whose own diagnosis of the demonically-warped perception of other human beings is, for students, productively similar. In each case, the hagiological framework allows us to pose consistent questions without becoming mired in trying to nail down what is or is not proper hagiography: "What is the picture of holiness presented here?" and "In what way might this text be considered or promoted as cultivating that holiness in its audience?"

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