

Historicism, Heroes and Canonized Saints

An oracle is upon the king's lips, no judgment of his mouth is false. A king's smile means life, and his favor is like a rain cloud in spring.
Proverbs 16:10, 15

The defining characteristic of a philosopher is not his ability to reason, as many other professions (most notably the scientist) do as much. No, what makes a philosopher a philosopher is his ability to look at something that is, and then to discern its relation to everything else. This is why so many comedians are often described as philosophers. They are able to look at the mundane and question its role in the rest of our lives in humorous ways.

Such inquiries are normally beneficial to man, at least when done with honest intentions. It was philosophy that led hunter-gathers to become ranchers and farmers. It happened when food was realized to be an important part of one's life, and the question was made as to why not make it more easily accessible and reliable? But there is a danger in assuming that there is *always* a deeper meaning, or connection, that can be understood and exploited.

For the material, there is indeed always such a connection. Science tells us that all matter is made of subatomic particles called "quanta." But the more science discovers these material connections, the more important the transcendental becomes. The connection between an apple and a lemon, both grown on trees, is easily understood by calling them "fruit." It is only when one desires a sweet drink that the difference between the material (fruit) and the transcendental (desire) becomes obvious. There is something innately different between an apple and a lemon no matter how similar they may otherwise be. For a more extreme, but still consistent, example of this fallacy, the wedding ring on a man's hand is no different materially than the sun in the summer sky, as both are made of quanta. But this truth is meaningless to man in any transcendental sense, as no man could wear the sun on his finger, nor can any ring provide the Earth with the heat the Earth needs. When recognizing the reality of quanta, every effort to separate a wedding ring from our sun can only be explained by the transcendental. The sun has many more atoms than the ring, but numbers are transcendental realities. The sun is too hot to wear on a finger, but temperature is a relative expression. Any attempt to measure it must be based on a standard that was arbitrarily chosen from other equally good standards (thus the popularity of both Celsius and Fahrenheit to measure temperature). And so on.

Transcendental realities, which include free will, reason and logic, numbers, imagination, emotions, faith, and many others, cannot be broken down for further understanding; they can only be experienced. For sure, we have learned that others have experienced these transcendental realities, and therefore we can communicate our experiences with each other (language). Our everyday concept of "reality" is ultimately based on the shared experiences of these transcendental realities. But before this is possible, we first have to accept that transcendental realities are true in themselves. In other words, we have to first accept that they work, and only then can we use them based on our trust. We use them because they have proven to be useful, not because we can understand them by breaking them down into more basic elements in an attempt to show they are all the same at some deep level.

From these transcendental realities, we have created concepts that are transcendental as well. These include, but are not limited to, history, beauty, time, distance, language, philosophy, science, etc. As we have to accept transcendental realities as being true, we can expect to find truths in the transcendental concepts that derive from them as well.

For my final argument before I get into historicism proper, I want to talk about the relationship between truth and reality. If we define truth as what is "really real," then truth and what is real are synonymous. What we *believe* about reality may be flawed, but this only affects our *perception* of reality, not what reality really is. We may have a flawed understanding of what is true, but truth remains true regardless. And I agree with C.S. Lewis, that if truth exists, then there must be non-truth as well. It then follows that transcendental realities must have transcendental untruths. This is NOT analogous to the material truth. For example, matter and anti-matter suggest a reality and not-reality, but in fact they are both real, as they are both made of quanta. In the material sense, non-reality is not anti-matter, but rather the absence of matter. A common example of this is light and darkness. Light is really real (it is made of matter called photons), whereas darkness is not real (it is the absence of photons). But for the transcendental, untruth is a contradiction, as opposed to the lack of something. A circle is not a square, and it cannot be found to be a square after all by breaking it down. Four is not five, and it cannot be found to be a five after all by breaking it down.

So, how does the "historicism" relate to all of this? Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel denied the transcendental. Many other philosophers of his time did as well, because the transcendental points to Jehovah. By denying the transcendental and accepting that the material was all-encompassing, then anything I call transcendental is really material. According to this line of reasoning, any thought one has is not above the material; it is a property of the material. So any thought one thinks is material, and since all material is ultimately the same, there is no such thing as a contradictory thought. Truth and non-truth are both thoughts, so truth and non-truth are both properties of the material, and since all material is made of quanta, truth and non-truth are also made of quanta. Finally, since they are both made of quanta, they are ultimately the same thing, one just hasn't discovered the specifics of how they are united. For Hegel and his followers (the most famous being Karl Marx), knowing that the apparent contradiction of any truth and non-truth can ultimately be reconciled is what being "enlightened" means. By claiming that reason and logic are not transcendental, but rather a fortuitous experience of the deterministic process of the material, only a select few could be so enlightened, and then only by accident. This is known as Gnosticism, as Gnostics claim special knowledge that the common person does not have and cannot have. Hegel looked to history and claimed special knowledge of the present from doing so, and therefore he defined the Gnostic practice of historicism.

C.S. Lewis appears to have known something about Hegel, although how much is unclear. While Hegel is only mentioned a disappointingly few times in his works, C.S. Lewis nonetheless had a talent of zeroing in on Hegelist influence in culture, clearly explaining why it is a problem, and offering practical solutions to it. Regardless of how well C.S. Lewis knew Hegel's works, I know of no one who did a better job combating the cancer of Hegelian thought in his time. His book, *Abolition of Man*, should be a must read for our culture, perhaps even more so than George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*. Another work by C.S. Lewis, "Historicism," is going to be key for the rest of this paper. In it, he defined "historicism" as "the belief that men can, by the use of their natural powers, discover an inner meaning in the historical process." Note how this concept of breaking down of history (a transcendental concept) is like breaking down a car engine (a material reality). But while breaking a car engine down can be productive (a bad gasket can be discovered), some things in history just happen because of our transcendental free will. While free will clearly influences the future, and itself is influenced by past experiences, there is no hidden process behind free will -- free will simply exists in humans. The choices Napoleon made at Waterloo greatly influenced world history, but he could have just as easily made other choices and world history would be much different. A historian can speculate how the world would be different if Napoleon had made these other choices, but to assume that Napoleon was *forced* to make the choices he did is getting into the Gnosticism that Lewis warned of. The historicist is

claiming that he has special knowledge behind every decision Napoleon made. The historicist looks for any and all evidence that supports this belief (which is logical), but will also discard any evidence that does not support this theory on grounds that its influence was not sufficient to alter the outcome (which is not a logical conclusion). The "enlightenment" of Gnosticism (in our case historicism) is really just "cherry-picking" facts to support a presupposed belief, something Christians are quite often accused of doing no matter how much evidence or logic we use to defend our faith. But to the Gnostic, they can cherry-pick because they are enlightened, whereas those who believe in god(s) clearly are not enlightened. The lessons Napoleon learned throughout his military career did not *force* him to make the mistakes he made at Waterloo, although they certainly *influenced* him to do so.

Now, in this paper, Lewis claimed that historicism was a myth that was finally laid to rest. In some important ways, he is correct. However, it is a fitful sleep at best. Historicism was very much alive in 2020 when statues of historical figures in the United States were taken down or destroyed. And iconicide is not unique to 2020, it merely reached previously unprecedented levels in the U.S. Skeptics claim that the Bible is a result of historicism developed by early Christian leaders. Protestants claim much of what the Catholic Church does is historicism practiced by the pope and other key leaders. They may not actually use the word "historicism" in doing so, but if one looks at Lewis's definition, it is clear from their arguments that this is the alleged crime. From this point on, I am going to address one such claim in particular: that the canonizing of saints by the Catholic Church is a form of historicism.

Again, C.S. Lewis is important to this paper. He wrote a letter published in *Church Times* in response to the Anglican Church attempting to canonize saints on their own. It can be found in Part IV, letter 10 in the book *God in the Dock*. While some issues he addressed were based on a false understanding of the particulars of Catholic belief (such as *dulia* and the existence of a hierarchy of sainthood), or whether it was prudent to risk a schism in defense of what is right (which is one of the few times I disagree with C.S. Lewis, as Jesus lost 5,000 men and their families in the course of a short discussion with his Bread of Life discourse (John 6:22-59)), he did raise two questions relevant to this paper. The first is what scriptural evidence supports the ability to canonize saints, which I will address with the rest of this paper. The second, and more important, is who will have the final authority on the selection process of canonizing saints. Without recognizing the office appointed to Saint Peter by Jesus (Matthew 16:18), I do believe it may be impossible to find such an authority. While it is no secret that there have been "bad" popes, there are many examples in life when having a "bad" leader is better than no leader, and "bad" decisions are rarely worse than no decision at all.

So with no further ado, let us get to the accusation of canonizing saints as being a form of historicism. The Catholic Church, like any other successful organization, seeks to promote heroes to inspire the masses. This concept is not new, as it predates history. No pharaoh ever built a pyramid; it was the masses that the pharaoh inspired that did the building. History is too great for any one man to make a meaningful contribution to in his isolation; it takes the masses. But history also shows us that the masses tend to be lazy, not wanting to contribute in a meaningful way to history. The hero needs the masses to make things happen, and the masses need the hero to inspire them to do so. These are historical facts, not historicism. The evidence is both plentiful and out in the open, and the claim is the result of man using his own reasoning ability to create a rational and reasonable conclusion based on the evidence.

Even Jesus abided by this reality. He inspired a small mass of followers, and chose twelve of them to become heroes. These twelve inspired even greater masses. Out of the masses that the twelve

inspired, still more heroes came forward, and this virtuous cycle has grown to the point where one out of three people in the world today claim to be a follower of Christ. Just because the Church follows the lead of Jesus and recognizes the heroes that came forward, does not make this practice a form of historicism any more than a king appointing a proven captain to lead soldiers into battle.

That being said, I will accept that the transcendental idea of claiming with certainty that someone is a saint (i.e., is in Heaven) does go beyond what mere history can teach us. But historicism is not the only alternative to knowing something beyond what mere history can tell us. Historicism can only exist if MAN takes the place of God, and *claims* to know only what God could know. C.S. Lewis made this clear by quantifying historicism as being "by the use of [man's] natural powers." Indeed, in his paper, C.S. Lewis admitted that historicism would work if one had the knowledge of God. So if man arrives at the conclusion that specific individuals are indeed saints by means *other* than his own reason, then it is not historicism.

The Catholic Church does not believe in only using its own reason when canonizing saints. I won't go into detail here, but there is a hierarchy of heroes who led exemplary lives. Those who follow the precepts of the Church's teachings without standing out are at the bottom of this list. If their outward actions matched their inner motivations, then we believe they are indeed saints, but Catholics do not claim any special knowledge of their inner motivations. Instead, this group is essentially given the "benefit of the doubt" to protect their good name and to promote similar behavior in others. When exceptional and powerful evidence is available to suggest that their inner motivations were in accord with their outward behavior (such as confirming miracles were worked through them), they may progress from one honorary title to another as confidence in the likelihood of true sainthood builds. But this is merely increasing one's confidence in a particular belief based on rational and reasonable evidence. It still falls short of claiming special knowledge beyond man's means. Some doubt, no matter how small, still remains. It is only when one is canonized as a saint that knowledge outside man's natural powers is being claimed.

But the argument does not end here. Lewis claimed that man must "discover" this knowledge by his own powers. Revelation by God is not knowledge that comes from man's own powers. So canonizing saints is not historicism if God does make a revelation concerning this matter. So it falls on the Catholic apologists to show how such knowledge could have come from God. But before I go on, I want to quickly address the skeptical counter-argument of "why would God do so?" This is a form of deflection, not a real argument. To ask "why" implies "can," so the skeptic is actually legitimatizing the Catholic argument despite himself. As he is admitting that God could indeed provide the necessary information to man, the burden of evidence now shifts to him to justify his alternative theory based on his apparent knowledge of God's will to do otherwise. Those defending canonized sainthood should not be fooled into attempting to explain God's will at this point. It is the skeptic's responsibility now; hold him to it. If he has no evidence, then he is making what is called an "argument from ignorance," and is making his own Gnostic claim.

The Catholic Church believes that the Holy Spirit remains in communion with man, and tells man what God wants man to know. The final step between a Catholic hero being called blessed (extremely strong evidence exists that this person is truly saint material), and actually being honored as a canonized saint, is when the pope, being personally informed by the Holy Spirit because of his unique position among Christians (papal infallibility), confirms that the soul of this hero is actually in Heaven. It is therefore not man who canonizes a saint by claiming self-determined knowledge, but a revelation from God Himself. As a side note, despite all the hype concerning "papal infallibility," it is used almost exclusively in canonizing saints.

The only way I can see to attack the above line of thought is to provide credible evidence that the pope is not being so informed by the Holy Spirit. This will be a tough challenge for the skeptic. To begin with, we have Proverbs confirming that not only are kings oracles, but they have the power to proclaim life (the opening scriptural quotes). Popes are not called "kings," but they are nonetheless considered heads of state, which is what a king is. Also, note that "life" and "sainthood" are used quite interchangeably in scripture (there are even cases of this in the Old Testament). Next, one needs to consider that the papacy is modeled after the Jewish tradition of the high priest. We have scriptural proof that God speaks to the high priest. We have a rather detailed example of this with Zechariah through the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:5-25), but for this paper I think Caiaphas is the better example. Caiaphas said,

"You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.' He did not say this on his own, *but since he was high priest for that year, he prophesied* that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God." (John 11:49-52, italics mine)

Furthermore, Jesus appointed Peter as the high priest of the new Church (Matthew 16:18). Finally, the papacy is the office of the elected successors of Saint Peter (the election itself is done after praying to the Holy Spirit for guidance). Based just on these considerations, I feel there needs to be an extremely strong case to prove historicism, but I will break this down even further.

Perhaps this is an unfair bias on my part, but I simply will not accept the idea that the Holy Spirit is not among us, so simply claiming that the Holy Spirit cannot reveal saints in Heaven will not sway me. One might consider why God would prophesy through a "bad" pope, but we have scripture showing that God *did* prophesy through a "bad" high priest. Considering that the Holy Spirit still spoke through Caiaphas despite his desire to commit the most horrific crime in human history, I see no reason why the Holy Spirit would not talk through "bad" popes to promote the "success stories" of Christ's sacrifice. Scripture seems clear that it is the office that is important, not the moral character of the person holding that office at any given time.

The only route I see that could convince me to accept canonizing saints as an exercise in historicism would be to show me that the election of successors for the twelve apostles (I'm including Saint Paul here) as being illegitimate. I would need strong evidence that God wanted the Church to die with Saint John (the last surviving apostle). Unless such evidence can be provided, I will believe that the prayerful election by the magisterium (the council of bishops) is legitimate. From there, it would follow that the election of the pope, and therefore his unique relationship with God, is likewise legitimate. But this is not going to be an easy task for the historicism conspiracy theorist, as we have several examples in the Bible where successors were appointed. Judas the betrayer had a successor (Matthias, Acts 1:23-26), keeping the original bishops to twelve. Jesus then personally selected Saul to join these twelve (Acts 9: 1-6, 10-16), bringing the number of original bishops to thirteen. Saint Paul, in turn, is shown to have appointed at least two bishops himself (Titus and Timothy). So, far from showing that Jesus meant for the apostolic tradition to die with Saint John, there is Biblical evidence that the ordained leadership was not only intended to renew itself, but to grow with the Church. But even if an argument against perpetual spiritual leadership of the Church on Earth could be made successfully, there is still a problem for the historicism conspiracy theorist.

Jesus said that "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John

15:13) By His own words, to die for Jesus is the greatest love a man is capable of giving Jesus. Again, I will admit my bias here, because I cannot accept the idea that Jesus would reject those who loved Him with the purest love they were capable of giving Him. Therefore, I will never believe that there is even one martyr that has been damned. And the vast majority of Catholic canonized saints are martyrs. So even if one could convince me that the pope's special position is insufficient to stop the historicism of canonizing *some* of the saints, it would still follow that the *majority* of canonized saints are nonetheless recognized by using knowledge God gave us.

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