31 **Semiotics and the Representation of Holiness**
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In the Place of Sanctity
Religious Eminence in Jewish Tradition

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Abstract
The concept of holiness is among the religious innovations brought by Christianity. In Hebrew there is a word (kadòsh) that normally translates as holy, but its usage is noticeably different, as it applies mostly to deities or entities such as the Land of Israel or the Jewish people and rarely to people. The paper aims to investigate whether some other categories of the Jewish tradition, such as the prophet, the sage (khakhàm), the pious (Hassìd), the righteous (tzaddìk) can be considered in some ways similar to the Christian definition of holiness. But differences are greater than similarities.

Key Words
Sanctity; Prophecy; Sage, Tzaddìk[1]; Kadòsh; Jewish Culture.

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[1] The transcription of the Hebrew words in this article follows simplified criteria to facilitate pronunciation even for non-experts.

1. The meaning of k-d-sh

The Hebrew word for holy (kadòsh) is an adjective derived from a verbal root k-d-sh that primarily means "to separate", "to reserve", "to distinguish", and hence "to sanctify". From this three-letter root, according to the rules of the Hebrew language, many words derive, including the verb kidesh, the adjective kodesh, the noun kadosh, the derived nouns kedushà, kadesh, kiddush, which will be examined in the next lines. All maintain the meaning fundamental of sacredness and difference. It is worth first noting that in Hebrew there is no important lexical difference between "holy" and "sacred" nor between "holy" and "saint". As we will see, the word coming from this root covers all three of these semantic areas.

This "separated" quality is probably the basic meaning of the Hebrew word kadosh. Much like the English word "distinguished," which can mean both "separate" and "special," kadosh begins by meaning "separate" and ends by meaning "special" or "sacred," "holy," "elevated" (Gilman, 1990: 229)

The word kadosh has a similar etymology to the concepts of separation, distance, and difference found in the words sacer, sanctus, and hagios, as analyzed by Emile Benveniste (1976 II: 429-441). However, in Hebrew language and tradition[2], this relation to spatial and qualitative opposition is clearer and more present than in Greek and Latin where it became increasingly obscured. Following Rashi's[3] commentary on Talmud b. Sotah 22, the meaning of kòdesh as "separate" is very close to another word of considerable importance for the history of Christianity and Judaism: indeed Pharisee, or parush in Hebrew,

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[2] As I have explained extensively elsewhere (for example Volli 2012, 2019), my work focuses according to the semiotic disciplinary methodology on the attempt to understand the semantic structures of what I define as "Jewish tradition", i.e. the self-understanding of the textual production of the Jewish people, which begins with the books of the Torah and finds its memento of normative definition in the Talmud, then continuing with various phases of further production until today. Obviously these materials are characterized by a historical dynamic and by exchanges with other traditions, which philology usefully reconstructs. But from my point of view it is important to take note of the fact that it is a continuous corpus, which has lived for at least three millennia and which understands itself as unitary. It would certainly be interesting to reconstruct in detail how the oldest part of this corpus was formed, whether it comes from different sources and why these were written. For two centuries this has been the scientific program of a discipline that is more theological than historical or philological, called "biblical studies". But the results that the various authors of this discipline have proposed are so variable and not very cumulative that we must now admit the scientific failure of this project, its impracticability. In any case, from a semiotic point of view, it is much more interesting to analyze the corpus from below, starting from its stabilization, according to the synchronic methodology that applies to most texts. Above all because the Jewish tradition continually reinterprets itself, and always self-understands starting from its unity. This is certainly unwelcome to those who, according to the ideology of "supersessionism", claim to detach the texts of the Jewish tradition from their matrix and from the culture that produced them, with the presumption of understanding them "better than those who wrote them", according to the conviction of Schleiermacher and before him of almost all Christian and Islamic hermeneutics. The remainder of this article, like my other works on this topic, uses this methodology.

[3] Rashi, is the acronym if Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaqi (Troyes 1040-1105) is the most authoritative commentator on the Torah and Talmud.

means "separate", "different", or even "hermit". The Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to the laws of the oral and written Torah, which set them apart from others. This similarity allows us to focus on a religious concept that is widespread in Judaism: the path to holiness goes in the direction of separation from common behavior due to strict adherence to the rules of the Torah and tradition

The term kadòsh is used in various contexts, such as marriage when the newlyweds declare in a ceremony called Kiddushin their commitment (literally consecration) to each other; martyrdom (which is called keddushàt Hashèm or "sanctification of the [divine] Name"); places and buildings intended for liturgical use, and the "land of holiness" (Eretz haKòdesh, i.e., Israel, which is often referred to by Western sources as the 'Holy Land'). The Hebrew language is called "The Holy Language" (Lashòn HaKòdesh); the Holy Temple in Jerusalem is called Beit Hamikdàsh ("the holy house"), and Jerusalem Ir Ha-Kodesh ("City of the Holy"). Three liturgical actions come from this root: Kiddùsh, which is the sanctification of the Shabbàt or a festival with a blessing over wine; Kaddìsh, the sanctification of the Divine Name which is used as a sort of liturgical punctuation of all religious services, but also after each Torah study and even as mourner's prayer; and Kedushàh which is a responsive section of the main Jewish prayer, the Amidàh. Additionally, it is used to describe the "spirit of holiness" (rùach hakòdesh). This locution means "divine presence and assistance" and has a different meaning in Jewish tradition than in Christian theology, where, as "Holy Spirit", it refers to the third "Person" of the Trinity.

In Jewish language, kadòsh primarily is applied to the deity himself, who starting from the Talmud often is called haKadòsh barùch hu ("the blessed Holy One"). The angelic choir invokes Him three times with this adjective (kadòsh, kadòsh, kadòsh) according to Isaiah 6:3. This phrase is prominently featured in Jewish liturgy in the Kadushah and later was also adopted in Christian liturgies under the name trisagion.[4]

In Leviticus, there is a famous intimation to holiness and separation addressed to the entire people of Israel: "Be holy/separate because I am holy/separate" (kedoshìm tihiù ki kadòsh anì). This underlies the entire understanding of Jewish ethics and is a collective obligation concerning the people. Therefor Israel is sometimes referred to as the "holy people" (Goi Kadòsh) and Jewish communities are typically defined with this adjective, by using the phrases Kehiláh Kadìsh, Khal Kadòsh, or Edàh Hakedoshàh.

However, the adjective kadosh is rarely applied to individual human beings. No Biblical figure is customarily referred to by this title, including Abraham (who is instead called avìnu, meaning "our father"), Moses (rabbènu, meaning "our teacher"), and even the prophets. In the Talmudic sphere, the title kadosh is attributed only to Rabbi Yehudah haNassì, a second-century sage to whom the compilation of the Mishna is attributed; this title was given to him for the merit of his demureness, as recounted in Talmud b. Shabbat 118b, and no other prominent figures in ancient Jewish thought and spiritual life such as Rabbi Akivá, Maimonides, Rashi, or the Baal Shem Tov is called

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4   For an analysis of this derivation, see Flusser (1963).

this way. The most well-known exception is very late: Arì hakadòsh is the name by which Yitzhak Luria, an important teacher, mystic, and kabbalist who lived in Galilee in the 16th century, is often referred to. Following this innovation, a few other later rabbis were also given the title Hakadosh ("the saint one") as Alshìch HaKadòsh, Isaiah Horowitz (Shelàh HaKadòsh), the Arizàl HaKadòsh, and Chaim ibn Attar (Ohr HaChàim HaKadòsh). They were all distinguished spiritual masters and scholars of the last centuries but are not well known today.

2. Is there such a thing as sanctity in the Jewish tradition?

In conclusion, this small lexical analysis shows us that the root k-d-sh corresponds more to the semantic core of English "holy" than of English "saint"/"-sanctity". The Hebrew language does not know this distinction, which is not evident even in the classical and neo-Latin languages. Sometimes it happens that k-d-sh also covers in Hebrew the meanings that are expressed by the English saint/sanctity; but in general these are not equivalent linguistic entities and even in the case of people it cannot be thought that the expression of the concept of personal sanctity in Hebrew is equivalent to the use of kadòsh. We will now inquire whether there is a Jewish equivalent to Christian sanctity. However, from a semiotic point of view it is important to note that there may not be a direct correlation between the concepts that define the workings of one social system and those of another, even if they are expressed by words that are generally used to translate each other, such as "saint" and kadosh. Believing in the universality or factuality of the scientific metalanguage we use, or worse, thinking of our common language as it were a universal metalanguage, is a questionable ethnocentric or "etic" (vs. "emic") attitude, as anthropologists would call it (Headland, Pike, Harris 1990). From a semiotic perspective this can be considered "illusion of the signifier". For instance, there is no concept of "dogma" or "faith" among peoples such as the Nambikwara or Inuit, or ancient Jews. It has been demonstrated that the concept of "religion" is not applicable to the social organization and spiritual world of most ancient cultures, including Greco-Roman and Jewish societies. For further information on this topic, I refer to Ngombri (2015), Dubuisson (2020), and Barton & Boyarin (2016), who have extensively discussed the relevant literature.

The concept of religion as a distinct aspect of individual life, separate from politics, economics, and science, is a relatively new phenomenon in European history. This idea has been projected onto other cultures and even backwards in time, creating the impression that religion is an inherent and essential part of our world. However, upon closer historical examination, this appearance proves to be a superficial veneer that quickly fades. (Ciappina 2023, my transl.)[5]

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[5] "L'idea della religione come una dimensione della vita individuale separata dalla politica, dall'economia e dalla scienza è una evoluzione recente nella storia europea, che è stata proiettata su culture «altre» e indietro nel tempo, con il risultato che ora la religione appare una parte naturale e necessaria del nostro mondo. Questa parvenza, tuttavia, si rivela una verniciatura sorprendentemente sottile che scolora sotto un'attenta disamina storica."

The same can be said about the word "saint", which is still closely tied to the ecclesiastical institution, even in current definitions, particularly when used as a noun. See, for example, the opening section of the definition in the Italian dictionary edited by De Mauro (<https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/santo> my transl.):6

1a. adj., which is worthy of religious veneration:[...].

1b. adj., s.m., who, who is holy; spec., who, who has been canonized by the Church: cult of saints, the holy martyrs

1c. [...]

1d. adj., who is endowed with holiness: a holy prophet | spiritually united with God because he lives in his grace: the holy souls of heaven

And the Treccani Encyclopedia (<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo/> my transl,)7

In Catholic theology, sanctity is the complex of moral perfections and the spiritual state of one who possesses them. In an absolute, transcendental way, sanctity is proper to God and is not distinct from His very essence; in a more limited sense, the attribute is applied to the Mother of God and further, in varying degrees, to persons who have reproduced in some way the divine perfection of Christ or who have modeled their lives after His. In Christian ethics, all believers are called to the practice of a holiness of life, although not all of them attain it to the same degree.

In the Catholic Church and other churches outside the Reformation tradition, in a broad sense, all those who belong to Christ's mystical body, all those who are children of God because they supernaturally share in his own life, are saints; in this sense, we speak of the communion of saints; in a narrower sense, those who, after earthly life, enjoy the beatific vision are saints In a specific sense then, saints are those who are invoked and venerated with public worship, called by theologians worship of dulia. The exercise of said worship, however, is permissible only on condition that it is permitted or approved by the Church; therefore, in this sense, those who are declared by the Church to be such are saints.

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[6] "1a. agg., che è degno di venerazione religiosa:[...]
1b. agg., s.m., che, chi è santo; spec., che, chi è stato canonizzato dalla Chiesa: culto dei santi, i santi martiri
1c. [...] 1d. agg., che è dotato di santità: un santo profeta | unito spiritualmente a Dio perché vive nella sua grazia: le anime sante del paradiso"

[7] "Nella teologia cattolica, santità è il complesso delle perfezioni morali e lo stato spirituale di chi le possiede. In maniera assoluta, trascendentale, la santità è propria di Dio e non è distinta dalla sua stessa essenza; in senso più limitato, l'attributo è applicato alla Madre di Dio e inoltre, in grado diverso, alle persone che hanno riprodotto in qualche modo la perfezione divina del Cristo o che hanno modellato la loro vita alla sua. Nell'etica cristiana, tutti i credenti sono chiamati alla pratica di una santità di vita, anche se non tutti vi pervengono al medesimo grado.
Nella Chiesa cattolica e nelle altre Chiese estranee alla tradizione della Riforma, in senso ampio, sono s. tutti coloro che appartengono al corpo mistico di Cristo, tutti coloro che sono figli di Dio perché soprannaturalmente partecipi della sua stessa vita; in questo senso, si parla della comunione dei s.; in senso più ristretto, sono s. coloro che, dopo la vita terrena, fruiscono della visione beatifica. In senso specifico poi, sono s. coloro che vengono invocati e venerati con culto pubblico, detto dai teologi culto di dulia. L'esercizio di detto culto è però lecito soltanto a condizione che sia permesso o approvato dalla Chiesa; pertanto, in questo senso, sono s. coloro che vengono dalla Chiesa dichiarati tali."

In the Jewish world, there are no official list of saints, no procedures for proclaiming sanctity, or authorities capable of doing so. Furthermore, there is no definition of same "complex of perfections" that would allow one to attain the exceptional human state that we might understand, roughly, as the generic (non-ecclesiastical) meaning of the word "sanctity". This lack of formalization of different aspects of religious life is common in ancient cultures. Often within these cultures one finds a liturgical life made up of "mysteries" (Buckert 1987), to indicate among other things that the rules that govern many ceremonies that today we would call religious, the qualities of their participants, the forms and objects of the rites, the divinities that are worshiped in this context are kept secret and made known only to the "initiated".

From this point of view, however, Jewish culture is a notable exception, because not only does it have no "mysterious" liturgy or "initiation", but it is evident its vocation to meticulously and explicitly regulate liturgical and ethical behavior, to define in detail the categories of people and objects relevant to worship and spiritual life, in short to grammaticalize (Lotman 1990) the whole of society. And there is no explicit and well-defined category in the Jewish world that can be compared to Christian sanctity. There are only characters and roles that are generally interpreted as particularly deserving or exceptional, but there are no rules for admission nor is there a particular otherworldly destiny for them different from that of other human beings who deserve the "future world" (literally "the world that comes" olàm ha-bà"). The categories of this exceptionality in Jewish history differ from other cultures, also because the narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures clearly implies that no human being can truly be considered "perfect". Also, for this reason there are no Jewish "saints": cultural heroes such as Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, not to mention their "historical" successors, are always looked at in a more realistic than hagiographic way, as people with merits but also faults and defects. The categories of religious exceptionalism in Judaism also present a notable historical dynamic, as we will now see.

3. The categories of religious exceptionalism

After the time of the patriarchs, whose direct relation with the rùach hakòdesh is implied in the narrative of the book of Genesis, when we are told that their descendants multiplied and established themselves as a people in Egypt, the highest recognized religious status in the Biblical narrative became that of the neviim ("prophets", people who spoke in the name of divinity), including Moses and some of the "judges" or provisional tribal rulers such as Samuel. This is the first religious role that is appropriate to compare with Christian sanctity. However, prophets not necessarily are described as morally superior or flawless people. For instance: Moses, guilty of murder and disrespect for the instructions received from God (once); Jonah, who refuted the mission given to him by God; and Elijah, who tested God to challenge the priests of Baal, are considered by tradition to have committed serious mistakes. Additionally, the Bible sometimes (for instance 1Sam: 10) features groups of neviim who used to sing and dance for

God while in a trance, but who did not possess any special qualities beyond this state of possession.

The Torah also establishes another figure of religious exceptionalism known as the nazìr (Nazirite, i.e. consecrated), a position which, however, should not be confused with sanctity. This figure is described in the Book of Numbers (6:1-21) and further specified in a treatise of the Mishna, whose name is precisely Nazir, which is commented in more detail in a treatise of the Babylonian Talmud and one of the Jerusalem Talmud with the same name. A nazir is someone who takes a vow (or receives it at birth) to abstain from any product derived from the vine, to avoid becoming ritually impure, and abstain from cutting their hair. This vow applies for a period defined by the individual, which can last up to a lifetime. Samson is an example of someone who took this vow from birth. However, being a nazir does not necessarily mean that one's behavior is morally commendable or close to divinity, as for example the case of Samson shows. The nazir just fulfills a vow by adhering to the detailed rules. After he finishes and ritually cuts his hair, he is subject to a sacrifice of atonement, as if his vow itself involved some guilt towards one's own body.

According to tradition, Hebrew prophecy ends after the rebuilding of the Temple in the fifth century BCE. Haggai, Zachariah, and Malachi are considered the last prophets (see, for example, Tosefta Sotah 3:3; Talmud b Yoma 9b; Sanhedrin 11a. Sotah 48b). The transition to a new form of religious virtue is exemplified by Ezra, who arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon in 458 BCE to rebuild Jewish life. Ezra is a descendant from High Priests and is considered by some sources to be still a prophet (he is identified with Malachi, see for instance Talmud b. Megillah 15a), but is primarily known as a scribe or sophèr. Although the Gospels will judge this qualification negatively, it is highly valued in all the Jewish tradition. The scribe is not simply a copyist, but also an intellectual expert in the Law, a link in its chain of transmission, and a custodian of the holiest text in Jewish life: the Torah. Ezra is the first to be qualified in this way:

> He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, given by the Lord God of Israel. The king of Persia, Darius, acceded to his every request because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him. Ezra devoted himself wholeheartedly to studying the law of the Lord, practicing it, and teaching Israel law and Torah. (Ezra 7:6-10; transl. JPS 1985)

This passage also mentions later his knowledge of divine wisdom [khokhmàh]. Therefore Ezra is considered qualified to lead the people and make important decisions, such as preventing and dissolving mixed marriages, restoring Jewish festivals, and spreading the text of the Torah. Wisdom (khokhmah) is traditionally considered a divine attribute, one of the ten sefiròt (divine forms or emanations) later described in the Kabbalàh. Therefore, someone who is knowledgeable in this wisdom, in a clear and rational manner, called khakhàm from the same lexical root, is considered superior to the prophets. Ezra is the first sage (khakhàm) to be legitimized as a lawgiver and ruler precisely on the basis of his knowledge of the law. His model of leadership would inspire thenceforth. The idea that the study of Torah is the su-

preme religious virtue, which supersedes all others (as stated later in Talmud Megillah 16b), is a decisive innovation that began with the life of Ezra. It lies at the heart of the Talmud and extends to present-day Judaism. This is therefore the second religious role somehow comparable to Christian sanctity. Typically, a khakhàm (sage) in Judaism does not engage in asceticism, mystical experiences, or miracles, although there are sages in the Talmud who possess these characteristics. Instead, his life is dedicated to studying the Torah in order to teach and practice it. The sage is considered the religious figure in Judaism closest to sanctity, rather than the hermit, mystic, martyr, or good person. According to tradition, it is better to perform a good deed because it is prescribed rather than simply out of a good heart. Therefore, the wise man is superior to any religious enthusiast because he consciously does what must be done. Ethical and religious intellectualism is a fundamental characteristic of Judaism.

Two important concepts of Jewish ethics must be considered to further elaborate. The first is defined in rabbinic sources as gemilùt hasadìm, which can be translated as acts of piety, works of charity, acts of loving kindness, or works of mercy. According to the Mishnaic treatise Pirké Avot, which is the oldest and most authoritative source of Jewish ethics, Shimon the Righteous, one of the last members of the Great Assembly, said (1: 2) that the world rests on three things: on the law, on divine service, and on the gemilùt hassadìm. According to rabbinic tradition, the study of Torah is considered the prerequisite for all virtues, including generosity and benevolence. Therefore, in addition to laws and precepts, the khakhàm is obligated to exhibit these qualities.

The Talmud mentions the second fundamental concept of lifnìm mishuràt hadìn which specifies the obligation to go "beyond the line of law". The good Jew, especially the khakhàm, must paradoxically do more than he is strictly obliged to do. An anecdote from the Talmud Bava Metzia 83a (transl. r. Steinsaltz) illustrates this concept.

[Because their negligence] porters broke a barrel of wine belonging to Rabbah bar bar Channah [a Talmud sage], and he took their garments as compensation. They complained to the court of Rav [another important sage], who ordered Rabbah to return their robes. Rabbah protested: "Is this the law [which on the contrary allows such compensation for damages]?" Rav responds, "Yes, [because, as it is said Proverbs 2:20]: "you must walk the path of the good." Rabbah returns their robes, but the men still protest, claiming that they are poor and hungry after working all day and deserve payment for their labor. Rav orders Rabbah to pay them, Rabbah asks again, "Is this the law [that actually denies payment for unfinished work like this]?" [Rav] replies: "Yes, [because, as the same verse continues], you must maintain the path of the righteous [tzadikìm]."

This last word [tzadikìm] is important in our discourse, and we will have to revisit it later.

In addition to the figure of the khakhàm (sage), there are two other ideal models of religious life that are formed successively in Jewish tradition (and they can integrate each other and the khakhàm) and can somehow be compared to Christian sanctity: the hassìd (pious) and the tzaddìk (the righteous,

of which we have just found a mention in the text of Proverbs).

Hassid has a semantic reference similar to "pious", "devout", or "religious". It is associated with a divine attribute (sefiràh) namely Hesed or grace. It has been attributed to several pious movements in Israel's history. Three are worth mentioning here:

a. The "Hasideans" (Hasidìm ha-Rishonim) (Kempen 1988, Grabbe 2020), a religious movement that appeared at the beginning of the age of the Maccabees (mid-2nd century BCE). Allied with Mattathias in armed resistance to the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Hasideans were a community of staunch assertors of the Torah with ascetic tendencies. According to Josephus Flavius, around 150 BCE, the Hasideans differentiated into Pharisees and Essenes.

b. The Jewish religious movement, Hassidé Ashkenàz ("Pious of Germany"), also known as medieval Hassidism, was widespread in the Rhineland during the 12th and 13th centuries. It was initiated by the Kalonymus family of Lucca. The movement was known for its strict observance of asceticism and mystical doctrines. Their primary text was the Sèfer hassidìm. The movement disappeared following the massacres of Rhenish Jews by the Crusaders.

c. What is called also today Hassidic movement (Lamm 1999), was founded by the Baal Shem Tov (rav Israel ben Eliezer) in the 18th century in Poland and Ukraine, became the most significant religious movement of Judaism in Eastern Europe. It is still important today, particularly in Israel and the USA, despite Communist persecution and Nazi extermination during the Shoah. The movement was organized into numerous "courts" around a local rabbi. It is not possible to discuss the various customs, habits, political and religious positions of this very pluralistic and fragmented religious reality here. However, it is important to note that they practice a religion of the heart (deveqùt, "adherence" to the divine) and constitute a rather large popular group. They are often stereotypically referred to as "ultra-Orthodox" in the press, despite their differentiation. But the popularity of a movement does not necessarily imply a uniform level of culture, morality, or virtue among its adherents. Therefore, even the most recent Hassidim, popularized by Martin Buber and much literature, as well as recent TV series, certainly cannot be identified as a whole to the Catholic figure of saints due to their group nature and the diverse populations that follow them.

Nevertheless, the figure of the tzaddìk (Dresner 1977), who is the most important role within these groups, may be somehow comparable to that of a saint. This term, tzaddìk, literally means "righteous", and not "saint" as noted above. According to Maimonides, a tzaddìk is just "he whose merits surpass his wrongs."However, in Jewish tradition, it has historically been used in a very expansive manner. It is a title traditionally given to some Biblical characters, primarily Joseph, but not to the other patriarchs, Moses, or the kings. Tzèdek ("Justice") comes from the same linguistic root. This corresponds to an ethical instance in the Toràh that is emphasized in the frequently quoted phrase tzèdek tzèdek tirdòf which means "justice, justice you shall seek!" (Deut. 16:20). However, the concepts of Hebrew tzédek and English "justice" do not wholly align. Tzedakàh, the action term derived from tzédek, does not mean what we call justice, but rather refers to the practice of charity or

almsgiving. Thus, justice encompasses not only law-abidingness and fairness, but also social generosity. The notion of tzaddik is particularly significant in Hassidism, where it designates the spiritual leader of a hasidic group, while his disciples are called Hassidìm. Tzaddikim are often attributed with miracles, therapeutic powers, and metaphysical knowledge, as well as a personal relationship with the divine sphere. Because of these characteristics, tzaddikìm can be perhaps compared to the Catholic saints.

4. Conclusion

I conclude this brief historical-linguistic illustration here. In Judaism, there is no single concept of sainthood, fixed title, list of saints, or procedure for proclaiming them. There is a perception of a number of particularly religiously enlightened figures capable of influencing even today, possibly even after their death, the most committed religious practices, but no fixed threshold qualifying them.

One final caveat. In the Jewish tradition there are somewhere traces of euhemerism, which is the cultural process of transforming eminent personalities into semi-divine creatures, especially on the religious level. For example, the prophet Elijah is credited with numerous miracles, with ascension into Heaven without passing through death, and with a number of appearances throughout history, even with the role of announcing the arrival of the Messiah. Also Talmudic characters such as Rabbi Eliezer and Shimon Ben Trochaic are attributed with impressive miracles. There is a well known Talmudic narrative (Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 59b), where Rabbi Eliezer uses miracles to try and win a theoretical argument. After losing it, he curses his opponents, causing their death. Shimon Ben Yochai, the pseudo-epigraphic author of the Zohar, takes refuge with his son Rabbi Elazar for thirteen years in a cave to escape the Romans (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 33b). When he emerges, he is so strong and angry that he burns the entire landscape around him with his gaze. A pilgrimage to Mount Meron in Galilee is still celebrated in honor of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Similarly, modern figures such as Isaac Luria, or the great Tzaddikim of the Hassidic movement, Israel Ben Eliezer (the Baal Shem Tov), and Nachman of Brazlaw are also attributed with miracles and mystical elevations to the divine, and pilgrimages are made to pay tribute to them. This is especially true for Nachman of Brazlaw, who is honored until now with massive pilgrimages to his grave at Uman in Ukraine.

Nevertheless, these aspects are merely part of the popular halo of Judaism. While these sages are highly respected by religious Jews and considered a spiritual treasure to draw upon, they do not serve as the object of official worship or faith. The mentioned rabbis are particularly significant for their religious thought and action. It would be inappropriate to consider them literally as saints in the Catholic sense. In the Jewish tradition, there is no sanctity but holiness, which is seen as a path that never ends, as Rabbi Pinhas ben Ya'ir famously stated in the Talmud (Talmud Bavli, Avodah Zarah 20b, transl. r. Steinsaltz):

Torah study leads to care in the performance of mitzvot. Care in the performance

of mitzvot leads to diligence in their observance. Diligence leads to cleanliness of the soul. Cleanliness of the soul leads to abstention from all evil. Abstention from evil leads to purity and the elimination of all base desires. Purity leads to piety. Piety leads to humility. Humility leads to fear of sin. Fear of sin leads to holiness. Holiness leads to the Divine Spirit. The Divine Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead. And piety is greater than all of them, as it is stated: "Then You did speak in a vision to Your pious ones" (Psalms 89:20).

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