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The Cults of Saints?

Veneration of 'Holy People' in the History of Christianity and
Contemporary Football Culture.

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1. Introduction

1.1. *The Topic - "God is round"*

The political and cultural implications of football as *the* dominant European ballgame have been treated more or less thoroughly in the past ten years. Particularly in a city like Glasgow, where the belonging to either Celtic or Rangers amounts to a confession of faith, the multiple significance of football is undoubtedly recognised.

Nevertheless, religious analogies of the game's system, function and fascination were discussed rather hesitantly. As the paragraph headline - a translation of the title of a recent German book (Schümer, 1996) - suggests, football and religion have more in common than one might expect at a first glance. The increasing numbers of publications regarding this pair of terms show the growing academic interest in this area of European culture.

One of the many and diverse characteristics of the professional game is its structure, an obvious mixture of ritual, emotions and business. Indeed, in football and its effects on the crowd, various aspects can be found that appear similar to features of religious life, e.g. a passage through emotional affection, from sin to grace and redemption.¹ As I shall show below, rituals and institutions of 'worship' can be found, too. Dignitaries and the faithful follow certain rules to contribute to a successful performance.

Starting from the discernible boom European football has undergone in the last ten years, i.e. overcrowded stadia, huge numbers of sold season tickets and a seemingly unlimited market for TV broadcasting, a thesis can be stated: football is far more than a game. It is not only a sport but also big business, a lifestyle, a way to shape and maintain identity in our age.

In addition, with a sidelong look to other, more traditional institutions like the Christian Church a further statement can be made: nowadays football offers an 'existential touch' and serves certain functions that have been represented by the church and its organisations in earlier times. This general assertion needs to be substantiated and explained in more detail with the help of a more specific focus on the subject.

¹ Overwhelming 'love' for the fellow human can be evoked as well as an extraordinary willingness to violence. On and off the pitch both extremes are observable among players and supporters (though the latter, who take

Therefore to find a useful topic which it is possible to treat properly in 15,000 words, I had to limit the various approaches and evolve a focus on a comparable issue. Although the final whistle of the World Cup 1998 in France has been blown long since, the most important football tournament with its coverage in Britain and Germany is still giving me a certain idea for a focal point, namely to concentrate on the players themselves. Every four years the players gain a central position in the public interest, venerated by crowds that are as colourful as their 'heroes'. The glamour and fascination of Zidane & Co. can be related to religious (i.e. Christian) parallels in structure and language. Like the representatives of more 'Christian' ages (preachers, bishops, popes or saints), stars and would-be celebrities cast their spell over the crowds, the modern form of congregations, in stadia as 'semi-secular' assembly halls all over the world. Whether commitment, fanaticism, hate or understanding between entire nations as well as self-definition or mass phenomena, the example of the players is transported from the pitch to the stands and into living rooms, using modern media to spread the 'gospel' of football.

How could this development occur? How could this sport become so successful, the football culture and particularly its playing representatives so victorious in a time often described as a 'secular age', when the Christian churches must admit to a loss of influence which is obviously manifested in the rapidly declining numbers of churchgoers? Answers to these and other questions might examine both religious and social attitudes of today's people and shed some light on their expressions of belief and identity. (...)

At the same time the background for such a comparison requires careful consideration because of the temptation to see the so-called 'Christian past' as an idealised image. Non-believers and atheists have always existed throughout the treated centuries as well as people today who are not interested in football or any other sports at all. Hence the comparisons are mostly drawn between visible features of the two spheres (i.e. rituals, parables, 'miracles', language, etc.), asking for their significance to the 'personal cults'.

pleasure from violence, hooligans, actually should not be called 'fans').

1.2. *The "divine" Side of Sainthood*

An overview shall be given of the formation and transformation of the Christian cult of the saints, beginning in the second century AD. Within this section certain questions will determine the investigation and lead to first conclusions: What function did the veneration of 'holy people' serve and how did this function change through the centuries? What were (and are) the human needs that required such personal cults beside the worship of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit? How were the needs met theologically and which 'side-effects' did occur (in social and religious life, matters of identity, economy, politics...)?

Moreover, another question appears to be unavoidable in this context: How could one become a saint? How were (and are) the processes of veneration, sanctification and beatification organised? A change can be observed that moves the authority of declaring sainthood from local communities to the centralised power structures of the Vatican in Rome. A closer look to the case of the English martyr St Thomas Becket (1118-1170) might be helpful to illustrate results of the research and clarify some answers in more detail.

1.3. *The 'Saints' of the Game - Football from a Different Perspective*

Within this section I attempt to examine how modern football found its glorious way into European culture. Which of the already mentioned 'human needs' does it meet and how? A particular effort shall be made to explain the phenomena of the rise and fall of football stars, their cults and marketing. They fill in several functions like ethically good examples or folk heroes, warriors and ambassadors, and their performances delight or annoy the crowds. Furthermore, the players' tops are adored like medieval relics while the market of devotional objects (merchandising) is booming. These developments have to be examined, asking why this expansion could become possible.

However, the suggested analogies work only to a certain extent. At a second glance the limits are obvious: what about the 'transcendental effects' of the offered redemption? Although Christian sainthood depended also on the power of the then media, its cult appears to be more durable than the veneration of a super striker. How far can we go to compare the 'salvation' offered by the tricks and skills of Ronaldo to the redemption and grace that the Christian Church claims to mediate?

A cross cultural case study of the events around Eric Cantona in England, and Stefan Effenberg in the German Bundesliga, shall help to shape profiles of players who are controversial personalities on and off the pitch, adored for their skills and hated because of the things they said and ways they acted.

1.4. Methodological Background

Is it actually appropriate to speak about such a cult of saints in relation to football? If so, what does it tell us about the human being and our ways of understanding ourselves in the surrounding world and the possibility of living a 'religious' life in a secular age?

Furthermore, the question might arise why the present dissertation claims to be written in Christian theological perspective and not as a result of a comparative study of religions. The answer is that by limiting the focus to the Christian traditions some important aspects of theological thinking become more apparent and thereby useful in order to explain recent secular phenomena like the boom of football. Christian theology might provide a terminology that helps to express and define the happenings on and off the pitch and - as a kind of reciprocal gesture - gain new expanded meanings for its own traditional terms like 'grace', 'blessing' or 'redemption'. This interaction can attach great value to the interdisciplinary efforts presented in the following chapters.

Both theology and sociology have a common aim inter alia: to deepen the understanding of the human being and other related concerns, such as identity, sociability and religion. Despite the different perspectives of these two academic disciplines, both can work together on certain issues and enrich each other. This enriching co-operation between the theological and sociological disciplines is one reason for the present work.

2. Sainthood in Christian Europe - Emergence and Development of a Phenomenon

"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."²

As this quotation from the opening chapter of 1Cor shows, the New Testament of the Bible allows only a narrow interpretation when dealing with the term 'saints'. The term itself appears only 64 times in the collection of the Christian Holy Scriptures, mainly pointing to the followers of Christ.³

'Saints' in the language of New Testament authors are pursued in Jerusalem and elsewhere (Acts 26.10) and get support from the holy spirit (Rom 8.32), they have "needs" (Rom 12.13) and need aid (Rom 15.25). They work in the ministry (Eph 4.12) and have churches (1Cor 14.33), while they will judge the world in the future (1Cor 6.2). Through the biblical contexts the usage of the word appears to direct towards all followers of Jesus.

It is only the image which is drafted by the Revelation of John that becomes more concrete by using the word 'saint' for describing believers who had to endure persecution and war (Rev 13.10), who confirmed their faith by shedding their own blood (Rev 16.6; 18.24). Particularly this latter feature contributed to the development of a certain aspect of sainthood that shaped the early Christian church: martyrdom.

St Paul follows the predominant meaning of most of the New Testament authors by addressing members of the Corinthian congregation as 'saints'. As the formal expression in his letters indicates (e.g. 2Cor 1.1; Phil 1.1; Rom 16.15) in these contexts that all Christians were called 'saints', following and committing themselves to Christ.⁴

Theologically speaking, *all* believers were regarded outstanding from humanity with a special relationship to the God of Jesus of Nazareth.⁵ The promised predestination of all 'saints' for the ultimate reality in the 'Kingdom of Heaven' establishes an important part of their hope that allowed them to be capable of living in the unre-

² 1Cor 1.2. All biblical quotations are drawn from the Holy Bible (1995) *New Revised Standard Version. Anglicized Edition*. Oxford: University Press.

³ The following evidence has been gained by examining Clinton Morrison (1979) *An Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, p. 494f.

⁴ See Bernhard Schimmelpfennig (1993) *Afra und Ulrich*. Oder: Wie wird man heilig? in: *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Schwaben*. Vol. 86. Augsburg, p. 23.

⁵ Today the Catholics creeds (as well as the Protestant) still call all members of the Church "holy" and the Church herself a "community of saints". See Joerg Splett (1970) *Article Saints*, in: Karl Rahner and others (eds) *Sacramentum Mundi. An Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Volume Five: Philosophy to Salvation. London: Burns and Oates, p. 395.

deemed worldly spheres, as expressed in St Paul's eschatological reservation, the tension of "not yet, but already" of experiencable redemption.

However, this usage, unlimited to all believers and common among Christ's early followers, underwent significant changes through the first Christian millennium according to the change of challenges and demands on Christian existence. Presenting some of these alterations shall be the task of the subsequent thoughts.

2.1. *Origins or Where Heaven and Earth Joined Hands*

The idea of particularly 'holy people', who deserve a certain degree of respect because of outstanding activities and signs of belief during their lifetime, goes back to early Jewish traditions. As Peter Brown describes the view of rabbi Pinhas ben Hana, the 'patriarchs' of the Hebrew Bible⁶ (e.g. Abraham, Joseph, James) were seen to have made their trust in God visible and merited a special place in heaven. Yet from the moment they had decided to remain on earth and, as the Old Testament tells, buried among their human fellows, their graves became places of divine presence.

Their [the tombs'] occupants were called 'holy' because they made available to the faithful around their tombs on earth a measure of the power and mercy in which they might have taken their rest in the Above. The graves of the saints - whether these were the solemn rock tombs of the Jewish patriarchs in the Holy Land or, in Christian circles, tombs, fragments of bodies or, even, physical objects that had made contact with these bodies - were privileged places where the contrasted poles of Heaven and Earth met.⁷

However, the veneration of "exceptional dead persons"⁸ is even older and reaches back into late antiquity. Within certain limits it was rather common in the Hellenistic and Roman world to adore heroes and emperors who achieved great honour in the eyes of their peoples during their lifetime.

Although the monotheist claim of early Christianity was one of its most central tenets, some of the faithful became more recognised among their fellow Christians, i.e. those who died in adhering to their faith, tortured and killed by their 'Jewish' and Roman persecutors⁹, like the earliest witnessed martyrdom of Polycarp (c. 156 in

⁶ Throughout the exegetical discourses of the twentieth century the term 'Hebrew Bible' has become a more appropriate designation for the scriptures of the Christian 'Old Testament', especially when dealing with Jewish concerns. Therefore I shall follow this unwritten convention.

⁷ Peter Brown (1981) *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. London: SCM, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁹ I am aware of the difficulties that this statement might cause. To talk about 'Jewish' at this stage of history is

Smyrna).¹⁰ Soon these martyrs were seen as having a special relationship to God through their courage to face death and using this relationship in favour of the bereaved who were still struggling against oppression.

Thus the first function of the 'saintly prototypes' was to use their special relationship in order to intercede with God and to protect the living from physical hazard.¹¹ One could say that participation in these saints and their occurring cults was seen as a participation in God and God's promises of salvation. From this early stage, the saints became 'bridges' that helped to overcome the barriers between God and humans, places where Earth and Heaven joined hands. Here, in the lives of those saints, God's promises became transparent as they were in the existence of the early apostles and disciples.

With the crisis of the Roman Empire in the late third Christian century not only power relations changed but also the religious situation. Mass conversion to Christianity as a result of its growing popularity and Constantine's profession of his faith enabled Christendom to find itself on the established side, gradually displacing the polytheist belief system of the Graeco-Roman world. However, at the same time the increasing numbers of Christians from a gentile background forced church leaders into "accepting a wide variety of pagan practices, especially in relation to the cult of saints".¹²

Therefore, some Mediterranean and other non-Jew notions found their way into the Christian conception, like the bodiless images of angels and demons which then served as divine companions either to protect or to tempt the individual and connect it to heavenly spheres. By the end of the third century these relationships were transferred to the human figures of the martyrs who, though they were dead, served as "guardians of identity" and personifications of that identity.¹³ The close relationship worked not only between individuals and their personal saints but had always a social component for entire communities. 'Patron saints' became important especially in ascetic circles where a "deep sense of sin" made any kind of identity

often considered inappropriate, however, beside Roman forces also members of the 'Israelite faith' were fighting the increasing numbers of Christians. Even Paul regards himself as a pursuer while he was a 'Jew' in charge in Jerusalem (Acts 26.10). With all respect to the connotations that the term 'Jewish' might evoke, shaped by the history of the twentieth century and the incredibly cruel extents of its anti-Semitism, I use this description for the people mentioned above.

¹⁰ See David Hugh Farmer (1997) *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Oxford: University Press, p. XI.

¹¹ Brown, Cult, p. 6: "Their [martyrs] intimacy with God was the *sine qua non* of their ability to intercede for and, so, to protect their fellow mortals. The martyr was a 'friend of God'. He was an intercessor in a way which the hero could never be".

¹² Brown, Cult, p. 18.

completely vulnerable and "cried out for some intimate thread of stability".¹⁴ Again, God's caring attention to the church and her members was seen embodied in those people, evoked through their veneration.

During the fourth century the cult and its background changed further, as Brown puts it:

It was a form of piety exquisitely adapted to enable late-antique men to articulate and render manageable urgent, muffled debates on the nature of power in their own world, and to examine in the searching light of ideal relationships with ideal figures, the relation between power, mercy, and justice as practised around them.¹⁵

A first collection of miracles that were observed on the tombs of local martyrs dated from this period as well as a list of "approved" saints in respective churches¹⁶, before, with the sixth century, a period began in which the regional cults gained increasing public attention. By then the tombs of local martyrs were centres of religious life in their region, where they were believed to be present. Churches were dedicated to them while the number of people, who gave their life for the faith's sake, rapidly declined, because of the altered political and religious situation in Europe. Since the Roman Emperor, Constantine, had become a Christian no adherent of the Jesus movement had to undergo martyrdom to confess his or her belief.

Nevertheless, the 'production' of saints continued. Another group emerged instead up to the end of the first millennium, called 'confessors'.¹⁷ Saints of this group stood out for the moral accomplishment they achieved during their lifetime, often as hermits, missionaries or spiritual guides, seen as good examples of a way of life that is pleasing to God. Through the changes in the political and religious landscape the Christian Church required those people to make plain the gospel of Jesus Christ with their lives to new converts as well as to her own 'children' more than ever before.

Throughout the following centuries this idea of sainthood remained predominant and even nowadays new saints are made of people with an extraordinary vita

¹³ Brown, *Cult*, p. 56.

¹⁴ See Brown, *Cult*, p. 57. This need for a certain degree of identity can be found in the spread of Christian names during the third and fourth century. The new (Christian) name meant a new (Christian) identity and was confirmed and cared for by a patron saint.

¹⁵ Brown, *Cult*, p. 63.

¹⁶ For miracles see Barbara Abou-El-Haj (1994) *The Medieval Cult of Saints. Formations and Transformations*. Cambridge: University Press, p. 8; for lists see Schimmelpfennig, Heilig, p. 24.

¹⁷ See Abou-El-Haj, *Transformations*, p. 9.

that is considered to contain certain aspects of a exemplary religious (i.e. Catholic) life.¹⁸

Alongside all the presented developments there has always been criticism of the notion of sainthood. Be it Julian the Apostate in the early period or Augustine, both expressed their resistance concerning this part of the belief of their contemporaries by doubting its legitimisation through the gospel or by insisting on the possibility of speaking directly to God.¹⁹ Furthermore, Guibert of Nogent and Bernard of Clairvaux denied any special human mediation and turned against "gold-bedecked reliquaries".²⁰ However, at least Augustine recognised the importance of a martyr's fate but more in a practical way: People who had shown their obedience to God through their deaths could be more successful "to bind their fellow men even closer to God".²¹

Yet who decided about the sainthood of the venerated people and how did and does this decision-making process work? Moreover, which categories had a dead local person to fulfil in order to become an officially recognised saint? By approaching these questions the stated human needs for protection of life and identity shall become clearer.

2.2. Procedures: How to Become a Saint

Nowadays, becoming a saint seems to be rather difficult. Certain procedures have to be observed before a cult can be established. Under the papacy of John Paul II the proceedings underwent their last changes. With the *Codex Iuris Canonici* and the extra law *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* both published on 25 January 1983 the papal initiative made canonisation cheaper, faster and more concise.²² The investigations start on the spot where the initial petition for the canonisation of a local cult came from, being led by the question if there is evidence "that the venerable servant of God practised virtues, both theological and cardinal, and in a heroic degree".²³ After the first examination of the candidate's

¹⁸ As I shall explain below the decisive process always depends on the current pope and Vatican policies.

¹⁹ See Brown, *Cult*, pp. 7 and 60.

²⁰ See Abou-El-Haj, *Transformations*, p. 16. I shall treat the matter of relics below in further detail.

²¹ Brown, *Cult*, p. 61.

²² See Schimmelpfennig, *Heilig*, p. 25.

²³ F.G. Holweck (1969) *A Biographical Dictionary of the Saints. With a General Introduction on Hagiology*. St Louis: Herder, p. XXII.

'qualifications', which originally include two miracles, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome inspects all files and documents, his or her possible theological writings and then suggests an approval or disapproval to the pope. In the end when all requirements are accomplished, he gives his final consent and signs a 'bull of canonisation', "in which he not only permits, but commands, the public cult" of a new saint to all the faithful.²⁴

A distinction between the groups of 'blessed' and of 'saints' was introduced in the eighteenth century. While the first title allows a local devotion only by a limited number of groups or small communities after a successful beatification, the latter signifies a universal veneration, to be observed by the entire Catholic Church.

Today the Vatican records indicate more than 11,000 saints. However 10,000 were canonised before the "bureaucratic process of saint-making"²⁵ which began at the end of the Middle Ages.

As in the current procedures, from the fourth century the primary initiative was taken by small communities that claimed the sanctity of one of their members on the "fact of true martyrdom".²⁶

Before the coming of the age of science, (...), the major force in the establishment of saints' cults was veneration by a community of believers, whether that community was the populace of a particular town or nation or the membership of a monastery or order. (...) Believers were little concerned with the theological ideas of their heroes, much less with questions of doctrinal purity. What interested the faithful was the holy life and, above everything else in that life, evidence of supernatural power.²⁷

Local bishops undertook further decisive action to approve the saint demanded by the believers and induce a ceremonial "elevation" of the body to a "place of veneration".²⁸ The occurrence of miracles, both during lifetime or posthumous, were seen as the only and satisfying proof for someone's sanctification.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, p. XXIV.

²⁵ John Cornwell (1998) Blessed be their Names? in: *The Sunday Times Magazine*, 26 July 1998, p. 43.

²⁶ *Former, Saints*, p. XII.

²⁷ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell (1982) *Saints & Society. The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*. Chicago: University Press, p. 142. See also Pierre Delooz (1983) Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the catholic Church, in: Stephen Wilson (ed) *Saints and their Cults. Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*. Cambridge: University Press, p. 199.

²⁸ See *ibid.*

However, these regional courses remained only until efforts had been successful in centralising the Catholic Church and strengthen her hierarchy. With the growing prestige of the papacy during the eleventh century the status of the local saints were enhanced while "false cults" among the increasing numbers of new cases required certain legal regulations. Thus owing to the efforts of the popes Alexander III (1159-81) and Innocent III (1199-1216), the Holy See finally succeeded in claiming a monopoly of canonisation and established judicial statutes.²⁹ Yet the public demands from the 'grass-roots level' continued to suggest new candidates and assured sainthood.

Nevertheless, by the seventeenth century the influence of the public almost disappeared and this decrease was accompanied by the 'decrees' of pope Urban VIII in 1634 which still apply to today's Vatican inquiries. Three main points can be named: firstly *doctrinal purity*, that distinguishes the candidate from heresy; secondly *heroic virtue* instead of banned magic and black arts, and thirdly *miraculous intercession* which proves that the dead "servant of God" is now in heaven among other saints and answers prayers of his or her faithful.³⁰ All these requirements were applied to varying extents, shifting the emphasis of the individual points from case to case.

As already shown with the quotation from Weinstein/Bell above, for the ordinary people, someone's "heroic virtue" was rather a charismatic matter than a question of magic powers. They were convinced by the "combination of the force of personality, rigorous self-denial, humility, and good works"³¹, a combination that enabled the person concerned to appear in the light of credibility. The popularity of this famous feature of a 'saintly' personality indicates simultaneously a lack of the same in the surrounding reality. Unfortunately, it is impossible to deal with all the socio-economic conditions of these times here, however, far from any social romanticism it is conceivable that the experience of those virtues had been quite rare among needy crowds in Medieval rural Europe. Authenticity that was found in the words and actions of such a person might have given a notion of 'true identity', a 'true being' that brings people in contact with a heavenly reality imagined to be without any harm.

In a theological perspective this God-given 'counter reality' can be underlined by the biblical motif of a successful search for the 'holy land'. Like the Israelites had

²⁹ See *ibid.*, p. XIII.

³⁰ See Weinstein/Bell, *Christendom*, p. 141.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

to endure the time of the desert, led by Moses, who himself was vested with authority and miracles by God, on their way to a promised reality where they could live in true identity as a people, Christian believers threw their hopes and fears onto the saints of their times.

In order to put this idea of 'true identity' in more concrete terms it can be useful to consult Weinstein/Bell's explanation for the saints' popular acceptance. They argue with an originally "harmonious" Christian world order within which nature (i.e. environment) is believed to be the source and threat of life at the same time.³² By embodying a genuine coherence between faith, words and (miraculous) actions the saints restored the lost harmony of relationships not only between humans and their natural conditions but also among themselves. In this respect the venerated saints took the place of divine intervention in everyday life experience as it was seen in the 'early days'.

Although this matter of a harmonious world had its roots on a personal level, some signs of supernatural power contributed to the assumed sanctity of a candidate. Miracles were believed to work in the same way of restoring harmony, yet on a much more 'essential' level, as Weinstein/Bell state:

The majority of miracles and miracle-workers, however, addressed obvious human needs - many were the saints whose prayers sent rain or whose hands healed the sick or lame, even revived the dead. Legions are the saints who protected the crops, rescued condemned men from the gallows, or provided food for the hungry by multiplying loaves of bread.³³

All these miracles had the effect of disclosing power and authority as an attribute of God to the faithful, regardless of the social background such a person came from. In the same way charity, given to the poor and needy during a candidate's lifetime, could also be interpreted as a sign of holiness. Kings and bishops could become saints as well as ordinary people, all in their own ways seen as embodiments of humility because emphasis was laid on the purpose to which supernatural and worldly power was utilised.

While these criteria of sainthood had been applied to a wide range of people from different social settings, it was gradually displaced from the thirteenth century by the rising influence of papal canonisation and its specific politics. In order to fight

³² See *ibid.*, p. 146.

growing heretic movements and political opponents who were threatening the Roman papacy, pope Innocent III and his successors restricted the extent of successful candidates to those who "had shown themselves firm allies of Rome".³⁴ The so-called 'confessores' gained even more attraction and were used as "signs of God's favour towards the Catholic Church", while the canonisation of 'dynastic saints' resulted from the "subsidiary goals" of the Vatican and its worldly partners, i.e. to back up the *status quo* of the established power relations.³⁵

These multifarious aspects are aptly summarised by Aviad M. Kleinberg in the following words:

Saints were canonized at a particular moment in time because all the procedures had been exhausted, because the Pope was sympathetic to the cause, because it was an opportune moment, and because nobody objected.³⁶

During the Reformation period the cult of the saints came under attack by the anti-clerical propaganda of Luther, Zwingli and Erasmus which led to a mob against any form of displayed piety, be it relics, images or portraits. Thereby, for instance, Henry VIII of England felt encouraged to order the dismantling of the shrines of English saints and to transfer accumulated wealth to the royal treasury.³⁷

Nevertheless, the Counter Reformation itself also contributed to this development by claiming an intermediate role for the Catholic Church only, almost denying the significance of any "supernatural folk heroes".³⁸ While the emergence of Protestantism and the responses it evoked caused a major shift in 'official religion' and, less intensive, in the popular belief of the faithful, its cultural and religious effects are still discernible in contemporary piety. The growing awareness of the laymen's and laywomen's place in the church is only one of those new forms.³⁹ While in predominantly Catholic countries like Italy or Spain attention is still paid to the cult of saints and their 'public' veneration, mixed or more Protestant regions show a declining interest in pil-

³³ Ibid., p. 143.

³⁴ See Michael Goddich (1983) Politics of Canonization in the Thirteenth Century. Lay and Mendicant Saints, in: Stephen Wilson (ed) *Saints and Their Cults. Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*. Cambridge: University Press, p. 182.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 181 (confessores) and 183 (dynastic saints).

³⁶ Aviad M. Kleinberg (1992) *Prophets in their Own Country. Living Saints and the Making of Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. Chicago: University Press, p. 13.

³⁷ See Former, *Saints*, p. XVIIIff.

³⁸ Weinstein/Bell, *Christendom*, p. 161.

³⁹ See Splett, *Saints*, p. 397.

grimaces. There local Catholics rather tend towards visiting the famous places - like Lourdes - instead.⁴⁰

2.3. Presence of the Counter Reality - Relics and their 'Side-Effects'

Saintly persons have made possible an encounter with a heavenly and harmonious reality for their contemporaries. Yet since only dead people could become saints, the memory of their actions and manners, though they had been recollected for the canonisation, depended on a generation's transfer of remembrance to its descendants. Furthermore, visible objects proved to be required to maintain a cult of veneration that remained powerful throughout several centuries.

Indeed, the idea of venerable remainders was drawn from the desired presence of a dead saint, especially in situations of desperate straits and temptation. While early Christian belief saw the *praesentia* of an invisible person bound to particular locations like his or her grave, Christendom's success and spread in the Roman Empire demanded a certain degree of 'mobility' from its faith.⁴¹ Thus physical remainders of saintly persons became rapidly sought-after, even "contact relics", i.e. those objects saints had allegedly touched or used, were highly valued.⁴²

All of these relics were believed to have the same effects on devotees as the saints themselves, healing and well-being as the visible results of the "immensity of God's mercy", "moments of amnesty" with a touch of "deliverance and pardon" mediated through the physical presence of God's holy men and women.⁴³ Here, again, the notion of a restorable harmony (explained above) can be seen as a leading motif in the search for tangible representations that made the godly powers of a dead saint available.⁴⁴

Two 'side-effects', which occurred alongside the conception of relics, should be mentioned not only because of their extra-theological implications, but also because they

⁴⁰ See also Weinstein/Bell, p. 161f.

⁴¹ The term "praesentia" is borrowed from Brown, *Cult*, p. 88ff. Its description of a more universal presence seems appropriate since a celebrated cult emphasised an ubiquitous dimension of the saint's effects on his or her faithful.

⁴² See Brown, *Cult*, p. 88.

⁴³ See Brown, *Cult*, p. 92.

⁴⁴ A closer look at the word 'representation' might help to explain this phenomenon: 're-presentation' comes from Latin and actually means 'to bring something from the past back (re-) into presence (praesentia)'. In this meaning of the word relics should fulfil the task of bringing back and 'updating' the saint's powers into the current state of affairs.

are comparable with a certain feature of the topical 'football world' as I shall elucidate below.

As we have seen, relics were treated as the 'mobile representatives' of saintly power. Their popularity created a booming market for bones and other 'saintly' remains. Trading business flourished according to the public demands for those objects; and by the ninth century a flow of stolen or purchased relics was ensured by the travelling merchants and pilgrims who took them away from their original regions.⁴⁵ Moreover, trade and the emerging phenomenon of pilgrimages to original shrines empowered the economical recovery of such sites. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries entire local economies were associated with the wealth brought by a cultic peculiarity.⁴⁶

Hand in hand with this rising trade with and the exchange of 'travelling relics' another secondary result occurred. New social ties and business relations were achieved across Christian Europe; social relations and even friendships could be found among believers, a "network of interpersonal acts" that was indirectly established by the holiness of a saint.⁴⁷

In a nutshell, the saints' powers were even expanding by the centuries, mediated by a boundless trade and exchange of relics. Also the notion of a 'holy reality', which might not be subjected to the political and natural law as well as to the economical and social constraints, was maintained and actually flourished. This 'counter reality' presented by the saints could still be encountered and participated in.

2.4. Ceremonies and Festivals: The Celebration of Community

Since local communities had been the origins and 'stages' of practised sainthood throughout the centuries, the links between a particular community and its saint(s) must not be underestimated. Initially saints became 'holy' for a certain group of people primarily determined through geographical boundaries, although this has not al-

⁴⁵ See Abou-El-Haj, Transformations, p. 12.

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ See Brown, Cult, p. 90f.

ways been the case.⁴⁸ More generally speaking in words of Delooz, "being a saint for other people means essentially being a saint for those who initiated the cult".⁴⁹

Celebrating a local saint's cult would have included certain feasts and rituals, all deep-rooted in local customs and the stories that let the celebrity appear in a saintly light. Hence these ceremonials became inevitably a celebration of the whole community and were used both to distinguish and to extend this community. Especially the festivals in rural regions "were occasions when room had to be found for all categories of Catholic Christians, new and old alike".⁵⁰

A certain sense of belonging together was enforced where solidarity and a common identity were needed most: in urban Christianity as well as in the universal Catholic Church herself. Because the major cities of the known world became often cultural and religious melting-pots, a notion of a wider 'corporate identity' was vitally necessary.

For the festival of a saint was conceived of as a moment of ideal consensus on a deeper level. It made plain God's acceptance of the community as a whole: his mercy embraced all its disparate members, and could reintegrate all who had stood outside in the previous year.⁵¹

Such a unifying power comprised also of different social groups and classes within a community, as the example of St Cuthbert's translation in 1104 at Durham shows. Any kind of "class diversion and class struggle" among those who were present seemed to be "erased".⁵²

Another feature of communal life can be noticed: While the relation between individual and saint looked and functioned rather on a patron-client-level⁵³, a group of faithful could live in a kind of 'reciprocity' with its local saint. A 'deal' was often made that 'guaranteed' protection by a saint in exchange of the veneration of his/her community, for instance a monastery, as Patrick Geary states.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ For instance, saints have occurred who were considered venerable for other, non-geographical communities such as sailors, firemen or even medical doctors. Those groups have their respective professions in common, with intrinsic situations that shape their identities.

⁴⁹ Delooz, *Sainthood*, p. 194.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Cult*, p. 99.

⁵¹ Brown, *Cult*, p. 100.

⁵² See Abou-El-Haj, *Transformations*, p. 15.

⁵³ See Kleinberg, *Prophets*, p. 152f.

⁵⁴ See Patrick Geary (1983) *Humiliation of Saints*, in: Stephen Wilson (ed) *Saints and their Cults. Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*. Cambridge: University Press, p. 123.

(...) In the physical act of humiliation, the saints, themselves were humiliated , punished in order to carry out their duties. This (...) focus of humiliation as coercion did not differ greatly from a popular ritual designed to force saints to protect their followers, that of beating saints' relics.⁵⁵

Again, this perception of those "mutual rights and responsibilities between the supernatural and the human world" was shared by all sorts of social classes, be it monks, landowners or peasant, although they were organised in "different symbolic systems".⁵⁶

From a dogmatic-theological point of view, those festivals were not mainly considered in contrast to the strictly monotheist appearance Christianity claimed from its very beginning. Occasions like translations or other feasts served the same purposes as the early Christian rituals. Eucharist and worship also provided means to strengthen the Christian community and encourage congregational ties throughout different social classes. Furthermore, the healing and grace people hoped to get from the saints was identical with the promised salvation through Christ, although the question might occur why additional rites of ensuring Christian redemption were necessary. After taking into consideration the history of the cult of saints, its origins and theological implications on the experience of everyday life religion, its popularity does not seem to be either mysterious or generally heretical to the Christian faith. On the contrary, saints made the hope for redemption applicable to their respective times and renewed Christ's claims of God's unconditioned love by establishing the described harmonious counter reality, in which people were reconciled with God and themselves. In other words, they *defended* the 'religious' identity administered by Jesus Christ as martyrs and, later, *provided* it as 'confessors' on a local stage.

The successful canonisation of a candidate was and still is of incredible significance for the local community concerned, because it signifies the representation of the group or region where the saint came from among all the other fellow saints and more importantly before God. Thus social religious identity is given and preserved at the same time, i.e. similarity to the Christian universal Church is testified and its local uniqueness acknowledged. By cultivating a saint's feasts the acclaiming

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 137.

community also celebrates itself and its recognition in the Catholic world. Finally, here the biblical and the traditional understanding of the term 'saint' come together again.

2.5. *Anti-Hero of Canterbury: The Case of St Thomas Becket*

These stated characteristics of a saint and the making of his/her sainthood can be specified in applying them to a case study. Hence, in this section I shall give a short overview of the life and sainthood of St Thomas Becket, knowing that his example might be a bit extraordinary and representative only to a limited degree. However, his story can be useful in order to clarify the notions and surrounding features of sanctity in the Middle Ages.⁵⁷ Becket is regarded as one of England's most controversial Saints. Yet at a second glance the circumstances that made him become famous appear in a different light and explain the peculiarity distinguishing him from his contemporaries.

2.5.1. The Life of a "Proud, Vain Man"

Born in 1118 into London's bourgeois class, he gained an excellent education in Merton and Paris. During his engagement as clerk of the sheriff court in London he spent his leisure time frequently as a passionate huntsman. Here the legend starts to emphasise supernatural concomitants of his life: While he was hunting one day, his hawk dived after a duck into a river and Thomas after it, fearing he might lose the hawk. He was only rescued from the stream because of the sudden stopping of the nearby mill-wheel which appeared miraculous.

In the age of twenty-four he got his first post in the household of the Archbishop of Canterbury, soon becoming the provost of several churches before he was ordained in 1154 and then served as deacon and archdeacon of Canterbury with comprehensive responsibilities.

However, his clerical dignity did not remain limited to ecclesiastical concerns. In 1155 he was the appointed Lord Chancellor of King Henry II, where the influence of his advice made celebrated decisions possible, e.g. the right to gain legal justice for everybody and a uniform law. During and even before this period the dimension of

⁵⁷ The following data and information are drawn from the work of Herbert Thurston/Donald Attwater (1938) *The Lives of the Saints*, originally compiled by Albon Butler. London: Burns & Washbourne, and here particularly from their chapter on Becket, Volume XII, pp. 270-281.

the charity attributed to him was unusually immense. He was considered generous to the poor and used his position to act in their favour wherever it was necessary. Later in 1162, although he tried to refuse, he was persuaded by the Papacy in France to take on the Archbishopric of his diocese and was accordingly called into the ministry of Canterbury. From then on, his characterisation by Thurston/Attwater becomes ambiguous, presenting him as on the one hand committed to the poor and needy people of his diocese and, on the other hand, as troublesome to religious and 'worldly' authorities.

For it has been said that he fulfilled a hard duty as Archbishop, washing the feet of thirteen poor people early every morning and giving them money as well. Daily alms were given to a hundred impoverished persons with an amount twice as much as his predecessor was willing to give. But also the presence of the Archbishop in hospitals and remote monasteries contributed to a certain popularity among his subjects. Furthermore he showed an advanced interest in reading and discussing the Holy Scriptures, which must have been something unusual among his colleagues.⁵⁸ At the same time his relations to the crown deteriorated and foreseeable difficulties occurred. Thomas's resistance to the royal land tax was only one occasion out of many like the defending of the right of criminals to seek asylum in his churches. In all the conflicts with his former companion Henry II he remained stubborn and did not act diplomatically, waiting for absolution by the pope. The remark "I am a proud, vain man, a feeder of birds and follower of hounds, and I have been made a shepherd of sheep. I am fit to be cast out of the see which I fill"⁵⁹, delivered at this time shows unwillingness to conform to the attitudes of most of his bishop colleagues who tried to curry favour with the crown in political issues concerning both religious and secular authorities.

Nevertheless, soon he had to flee away from a council held by Henry, refusing him a demanded sign of loyalty to the English Majesty. While Thomas found asylum in France the Pope Alexander III forced him to retire from the Archbishopric before sending him to the Abbot of Pantigny in order to save his life. Meanwhile, King Henry persecuted Thomas' relatives in England and confiscated all goods and lands of his family.

As a papal legate for all affairs concerning England (except York) he enjoyed a good friendship with the French king Louis VII which did not last for long, because

⁵⁸ Otherwise we would not have been told by the records.

of Thomas' character. Both Henry and Louis accused him later of pride and stubbornness that made it impossible for the monarchs to cope with his personality. Repeatedly, he returned to England, ignoring the hazard from the angry king, and was joyfully received. The people did not forget and they still obeyed and loved him. However, soon the quarrels with his colleagues started again. Shortly after his fifty-second birthday four knights were sent by Henry to end Becket's life after recent complains of three bishops. This royal decision led to the circumstances that then would have fostered the successful canonisation.

Although he was warned, Thomas stayed in Canterbury, refusing to change his mind. Instead he opened the church doors for his murderers and received them with the words: "I am ready to die but God's curse be on you if you harm my people".⁶⁰ He was said to have died 'heroically' before the altar, murdered as a "metropolitan in his own cathedral"⁶¹ with Jesus' words from the cross on his lips.

2.5.2. The Sainthood of Thomas Becket: Resisting the 'Establishment'

From his biography the reasons for canonisation were obvious. Apart from the very few supernatural events that accompanied his life, for Thurston/Attwater this "Archbishop of Canterbury, in many ways an unsympathetic character, whose methods were not beyond reasonable criticism, was a martyr and worthy to be venerated as a saint".⁶²

However, was it really the martyrdom that made him 'saintly'? In 1173 Thomas Becket was already canonised, relatively soon after his death. This circumstance leads to the assumption that this canonisation can be regarded as a political move of the Papacy rather than the emphasis of an 'ideal' Christian individual. Since the translation of his bones in 1220, relics spread all over Europe while many books and manuscripts were written on him, showing the rising popularity that passed national borders.⁶³ His shrine was "one of the half-dozen most favoured places of pilgrimage in Christendom, famous as spiritual sanctuary, for its material beauty and for its wealth".⁶⁴ It became a monument of consequent resistance against worldly powers in

⁵⁹ See Thurston/Attwater, *Saints*, p. 275.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁶³ See Former, *Saints*, p. 473.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

favour of a service to God and God's people, used by the church officials for their political purposes.⁶⁵

Furthermore, he showed most of the features brought out above, starting from the miraculous rescue from the mill-wheel and the protection he gained through his troublesome life. Charity and a special care for those who suffer injustice were considered his great virtues as well as the martyrlike courage with which he faced his death. And, of course, within a few years the numbers of miracles, which appeared at his tomb, rose rapidly. This might have finally led the church authorities to sanctify him. It gave them the opportunity to 'overlook' the less glorious aspects of their bothersome brother's life in favour of the politically welcomed opposition to the crown.

Besides the 'official' reasons, other parts of his vita might explain his popularity among the ordinary folk more extensively. Not only the church and her status benefited from his opposition against Henry, but also those needy people. It may be too over-interpreted to state that, although - and mainly because - he came from a higher class background, he preserved and improved their life conditions and therefore assured their identity. Yet particularly on the stage of diplomacy he did not prove to be as sophisticated as his fellow bishops, lacking the ability to accept compromise. As an 'Anti-Hero', i.e. by ignoring the agenda and customs of his profession, he caused inconvenience for almost every part of the 'establishment', be it the clergy or the crown, and *this* seems to have brought him great acceptance among those he had to care for.

In summary, by combining social and spiritual commitment without betraying himself Thomas Becket gained a certain degree of peculiarity. The matter of authenticity should not be underestimated in this context, even though, of course, more 'physical' needs had to be met first for the impoverished.

2.6. *Encountering the Harmony - An Attempted Definition*

In order to sum up the first part of this study, a definition of sainthood shall be established that is expandable to several directions. First, it must contain an inner-

⁶⁵ See Deloos, *Sainthood*, p. 201: "The canonization of rebels like Thomas Becket (...) was a way of successfully expressing resistance to royal power." Hence Becket's case is another example for the policies which sanctification also depends on.

theological openness for ecumenical discourse, i.e. a generally Christian perspective that enables all denominations to join in the discussion.⁶⁶

Second, and more important for the present purpose of this dissertation, an interdisciplinary openness must be achieved that enables the 'notion of sainthood' to be comparable to modern events and phenomena of our more secular times (e.g. 'football'), simultaneously explaining them and gaining new dimensions for the traditional definition(s).

During the preceded pages I have already tried to give different definitions. From the New Testament with its reference to all believers and from the official Catholic demarcation which describes a saint as "an individual who is believed to be in heaven and who merits public veneration" after a successful canonisation⁶⁷, both regard the context of an extraordinary religious virtue as highly valuable.

Besides, more sociological interpretations are also possible, stressing, for instance, the significance of a small social group as the context of primary relations. According to Delooz, saints are "witnesses of the group, considered by the group to be ideal models"⁶⁸. These ideal models come from a 'primary group', that defines its own system of values and virtues to be venerated, and function as embodiments of such. In the described exchange 'veneration for protection' personal interaction kept the relationship between a saint and his/her community 'alive'.

Moreover, a certain effort can be made to bring together both theological and sociological aspects by focusing on the role 'identity' plays in the entire subject. "Supernatural grace, asceticism, good works, worldly power, and evangelical activity" are the main features of those 'holy persons'.⁶⁹ In earlier words, their activity helps the faithful to restore a harmony of life, which was lost at some stage, both during the history of the community and the very individual development through childhood, adolescence and maturity. This harmony is substantially made of vital relationships, human communication and interaction. With all their appearances saints enable those relationships to oneself, to different people and to the Christian faith. Life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ established similar relationships within the

⁶⁶ Although the Reformation's rage against 'popish stuff' has extinguished almost every approach to sainthood, there are still some intellectual endeavours to forward a dialogue on the subject. See, for instance, the German essay collection from the Evangelische Akademie Baden (ed) (1993) *Heilige(s) für Protestanten. Zugänge zu einem "anstößigen Begriff"*. Karlsruhe: Ev. Presseverband Baden.

⁶⁷ Cornwell, *Blessed*, p. 42.

⁶⁸ Delooz, *Sainthood*, p. 189.

⁶⁹ Weinstein/Bell, *Christendom*, p. 159.

community of his church, not primarily redeeming God with humanity but human beings with themselves.⁷⁰

For the church, those saints have been crucial through her history. Their 'services' were required as examples for the work of the 'Holy Spirit' who calls into ministry and operates through the special gifts of the selected believers, continuing on the behalf of Jesus.

While the saints remain attached to their original communities (and community: the Catholic Church), their sainthood was evolved in the tensions between, as Weinstein/Bell put it, the two poles of "humanity of the many and the perfection of the one" in which the cult of saints took place.⁷¹ Because they lived a mortal life with all its pains they were seen able to represent humanity's case before God in the way of the god-human Jesus.

Therefore, taking part in a saint's cult is linked with the hope of participation in a divine reality including a 'true identity'. As a source of hope and faith the saints encourage to follow the ways of Christianity, providing a framework of interpretation that would allow their faithful to understand life and its purpose.

In addition, they served as 'screens' for the sorrows and desires of their fellows and helped to create the harmonious 'counter reality' of Christ. Kleinberg names most precisely their function of 'projection screens' as a main contribution to the phenomenon's popularity and its rise through the centuries:

The devotees' ascription of ever more fantastic powers to the saints, often beyond what the saints would have claimed for themselves, reveals a deep strain of anxiety, a desperate wish to believe in happy endings to the terrible stories of their lives. The all-powerful saint, made up by the people, reassured them that in the end, when all else failed, as it often had, there was still hope. The saints' reputation was greater than any one of them. It focused the hopes and fears of an entire society.⁷²

Today these "hopes and fears" are substantial in the desire for seeking new ways of living together, common among all religions and denominations and, of course, beyond religious communities. The longing for harmony, 'true identity' and peace is and has always been one of the leading motifs of humanity. In its specific manner a notion of sainthood, understood as the indication of God's attention to humanity and its

⁷⁰ Here it would be appropriate to take into consideration Luther's notion of justification or Barth's theory of redemption.

⁷¹ Weinstein/Bell, Christendom, p. 240.

need for redemption, can contribute to other, more secular attempts to cope with the question of identity and the determination of 'meaning' in a modern world.

As we shall see, soccer follows the traditional institutions and services of Christian churches and, to a certain extent, succeeds them in providing a modern framework with secular rituals that enable people to encounter the harmony of positive identity and intact social relationships.

3. Saints at the Pitch? An Unaccustomed Dimension of Football and its Protagonists

No doubt, football is *the* dominant mass sport that has conquered the world within the last two centuries (although its history reaches back into late Medieval times). Developed on the British Isles it spread over to Europe, mainly among the members of the working class, and still enjoys great popularity providing both exercise and entertainment for the 'football crazy' crowd.

One functional aspect of the Christian cult of saints has been left out by the portrayal above whose implications are rather similar to the occurrence of football. Its *entertaining* effects on the 'crowd' were possible because the authors of the saints' "vitae", written or oral reports on a saint's life, used certain 'secular' features to express someone's extraordinary status. Sacred literature and secular tales were not separable, and both were told to enlighten people as well as just to entertain.⁷³

Football is an easy game and does not require many accessories to be played. However, even though it appears to be a simple and secular amusement to the ordinary folk, its regulations have been shaped down through the centuries in ways closely related to Christian symbolism. Thus, from the early stages of this sport in the eleventh century relations to Christianity were established in a practical way, as the chronicle of a monastery in Normandy shows, where the number of 'football' playing monks (eleven!) corresponded to the number of Jesus' loyal disciples. The ball was

⁷² Kleinberg, Prophets, p. 163.

⁷³ See Alan Macqarrie (1997) *The Saints of Scotland. Essays in Church History, AD 450-1093*. Edinburgh: John Donald, pp. 231f.

considered the soul of the betraying disciple, Judas, and was punished for his betrayal. This might help explain the fact that this kind of 'football' was only played during Easter time.

With this example of early football performance one can see the religious importance of the players' role. At least in some Medieval practices the playing individuals embodied the archaic prototypes of all later Christian saints.

Nevertheless, the entire history of football and its Christian influences cannot be paid attention to satisfyingly here. Therefore, I shall go into further detail about modern football and its religious implications before we take a closer look at the players themselves and the positions they occupy nowadays.

3.1. Settings of a Religious Ritual: General Thoughts

All the ingredients of a ceremony - at least as conceived in traditional Christian practice - seem to be present (...): the 'faithful' who express their emotional effervescence according to a rigorous codification of gesture (...) and voice; 'brotherhoods' group together the most fervent (supporters associations); 'officiants' charged with the execution of the sacrifice, with which the 'faithful' commune; an organisation, the club, which is rigorously hierarchical, as with ecclesiastical organisations; (...) a closed space consecrated to the 'cult' - the stadium, and, at its centre, the pitch, inviolable by any other than the 'officiants', a regular 'liturgical' calendar which culminates at certain times of the annual cycle (...).⁷⁴

What sounds like the description of a certain religious - if not Christian - ceremony is nothing else than a religious perspective on the celebrations that take place every weekend in stadia across Europe. From Friday to Sunday the festivals of football take place, following a certain ritual protocol and performed by the twenty-two players on the pitch and uncountable masses, sitting and standing around. While numbers of churchgoers and even of people who call themselves 'loosely religious' are still declining, the boom on and around the 'holy pitch' is unbelievable, the popularity of the acting 'performers' immense. Because of the key role the individual player has gained through the commercialisation of the game and the monstrous sums of money they cost, a closer focus on the professional football playing part of the world

⁷⁴ Christian Bromberger with Alain Hayot and Jean-Marc Mariottini (1993) 'Allez l'O.M., forza Juve': The Passion for Football in Marseille and Turin, in: Steve Redhead (ed) *The Passion and the Fashion. Football Fandom in the New Europe*. Adlershot: Avebury, p.138.

population can provide insights helpful in understanding the religious side of this topical phenomenon.

Moreover, as Cristian Bromberger puts it, around the players other and more specific religious analogies can be found referring to the present subject, i.e. "the differential mechanisms of the idolisation of players (...) which recall the social, regional and professional specialisations in the *cults of the saints*".⁷⁵

3.2. 'Holy' Representatives of a Secular Phenomenon: Reputation, Means and Effects

As in earlier times, the reputation of an extraordinary person even nowadays require certain means to become renowned. While some nine hundred years ago "hearsay and rumour" were mainly responsible for making up a saint's name⁷⁶, a wide range of modern mass media has taken on this task. Whether the sports section of daily newspapers, football magazines or other specialist literature of any kind and quality, radio or TV, they all contribute to the 'production' and announcement of great names. Without these 'mouthpieces of the experts' the names of Pele, Beckenbauer and Platini would have never gained such world-wide glory.

3.2.1. Between Media and Crowds: How to become a Football Star

One must not forget other aspects of the promotion of football players. In fact, the decision-making process of who will become a football star and who will not, is essentially influenced by the media, depending on their coverage of games and players.

Although the media's role is crucial, this promoting process - or, in terms of forming sainthood, procedure of 'canonisation' - with all its contributors and participating 'institutions' (like supporters, critics, commentators and fellow players, etc.), however, appears more decentralised at a second glance. It is because people *attend* to games, because *local* supporters are so delighted by the skills of a Ronaldo or Owen that the media report on certain individuals. At least the regular crowd becomes aware of an extraordinary talent in the ranks of their own clubs at the same time as the commentators and observers. Since the media's 'omnipresence' on almost every large football event, an originally exclusive initiative on the part of the 'grass-roots' (as seen in the emergence of the cult of a local saint) can be ruled out.

⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 139 (emphasis ours).

Nevertheless, in order to promote a remarkably skilled player an unsaid interaction between supporters, media and experts can be assumed that makes the process more 'democratic' than the Vatican procedures of sanctification, while on the other hand the venerating initiative of local Christian communities would have been more important to the whole process.⁷⁷

Without the live coverage of World Cups the myth of playing legends could not remain alive. Football stars are not 'made in heaven', but inevitably become famous because of their skills, although a certain degree of ability should be expected from any professional 'kicker'. There must be more than 'just' skill that makes up the personal cult around football playing individuals. What else fascinates the crowd and casts a spell over them?

Before I suggest several approaches to this question, I shall investigate the language of this phenomenon by examining some arbitrary German and British newspaper articles written before and during the World Cup 1998 in France.

3.2.2. 'Redeemer', 'Saints' and 'National Heroes': A Closer Look on Reporting Language

One month before the first whistle for the opening match between Scotland and Brazil was blown, the *TIMES* published an article on the English national team concerning the World Cup that treated its super stars in a surprising way. Although it was probably meant to be read with a smile, it showed an aspect of personal cults among football stars that evokes associations with saintly individuals.

In preparation for the World Cup encounters Anthony Clare writes:

To do battle, the knights of old needed to be tested, purified of imperfection, cleansed of sin and honed to a cold steel of sanctity. Thus can be understood the personal odysseys of the likes of Merson and Adams, Gascoigne and Shearer, Wright and Rio Ferdinand.⁷⁸

All of these players endured "failure" through drug abuse or other addictions and lost control over their lives before they finally found "a peace of personal salvation", join-

⁷⁶ See Kleinberg, *Prophets*, p. 153.

⁷⁷ I am aware of the limits of this 'democracy', since the rise of prizes for Tickets and Pay TV fosters a selection of the crowds. For instance, not everybody can afford a season-ticket or a 'Sky' decoder and thereby the multi-headed jury on the terraces lacks members of the classes with a lower income ('as usual', I am tempted to say!).

⁷⁸ Anthony Clare (1998) And God said to Shearer, score me a goal, in: *The Times, Special Report: Football*. Monday, May 18. See appendix for details.

ing the way to the "canonised status of Charlton and Moore, Banks and Hurst, who are to be found in the glorious English litany of football saints".⁷⁹

Moreover, these football players redeem themselves on the pitch, becoming "truly blessed" (Merson) or the "most remarkable saint of the squad" (Adams) by playing the best football of their careers.⁸⁰ This unusual terminology indicates a social and even religious phenomenon behind these antagonists without mentioning directly any further legitimation of such an usage.

Furthermore, during the actual tournament many newspaper articles consciously focused on the personal stories, attitudes and fates of the celebrities, using a language that let them appear in the light of a 'heroic', if not 'holy' personality.

For instance, the Brazilian goalkeeper, Claudio Taffarel, was described as a "national hero" by Brasil's president Cardoso after his two successful saves in the penalty shoot-out against the Netherlands (Cocu and R. de Boer). Meanwhile, the Brazilian press called him a "saint", "St Taffarel" with the "divine hands" and a child, that was born during the shoot-out, was named after his first name by its mother.⁸¹

While some players, specially from Catholic countries, are reported to be particularly devout in a Christian sense⁸², others seek their fortune in more superstitious beliefs and practices. England's David Beckham is said to wear 'Spice Girl' Victoria Adams' underpants; the German Christian Ziege always puts on a shirt printed with a picture of his son; Luis Hernandez (MEX) has an amulet around his neck bearing a photograph of his daughter and the Italians Christian Vieri and Filippo Inzaghi value their boots most highly and did not change them during the entire season in anticipation of the World Cup.

All these personal talismen and rituals, be they from a Christian or 'superstitious' origin, have one thing in common: they stand for the belief in a higher source of protection and welfare, to be initiated by the observance of certain 'rules' (prayers, kissing crucifixes, certain garments, etc.).

Shortly after Germany's defeat against Croatia (0:3) in the Quarter-Finals the former captain of the national team, Lothar Matthäus, called his late and unexpected assignment to the World Cup a "gift of God". Although he was aware of the person

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See *ibid.* Why this fact should bring 'salvation' for player and if this 'salvation' can be transmitted to the spectators, remains unexplained.

⁸¹ For all the German articles see the appendix.

⁸² This assumption can be verified by rather obvious evidence, e.g. when stars like Cesar Sampaio (BRA) or Laurent Blanc (FRA) cross themselves before entering the pitch or after having scored a goal, not to mention the kissing of small golden crucifixes worn underneath the tops by many players.

who actually offered him this last international opportunity (he felt grateful to Berti Vogts), he was quoted in this religious terminology.

How deeply interwoven spiritual and secular aspects are, demonstrates another headline. In the German weekly newspaper DIE WOCHE a feature on France's star Zinedine Zidane was headed "Der gallische Erlöser" (i.e. "The Gallic Redeemer"), in which he was celebrated as a "national hero" who "bears the hopes of the multicultural society".⁸³ His skills seem to have touched the 'grande nation' as buses carried his portrait after his two goals against Brazil, which ensured the first title for France, and an uncountable crowd rejoiced on the streets of Paris. They were the biggest celebrations since Charles de Gaulle's return to the capitol in 1945.

Finally, all these observations should illustrate the increasing usage of religious terms in a truly secular context. As a result of this phenomenological approach one can state two implications from the 'saintly' characteristics which are attributed to some football stars:

First, they indicate a significance given to these individuals which goes beyond a fascination with skilled footballers. Essential issues of hope and fear, existence and national identity have been raised as well as matters of salvation and redemption.

Second, it becomes apparent that the players themselves do not deny their own faiths and convictions practising them on and off the pitch and thereby functioning as 'archetypes' whose patterns are easily imitated.

Having briefly presented the extents of this phenomenon, further investigations on historical aspects of 'playerhood' as well as on fandom and the game itself shall attempt to clarify what actually produces those images of players and how they effect the crowds.⁸⁴

3.3. *Businessmen and Artists: Personalities in the Public Eye*

Like the cult of the saints the status of professional football players has undergone significant changes since football became a popular sport exercised and watched by the crowds. Rules of the game have been altered and various tactical systems have likewise evolved. However, the main principle has remained untouched so far, i.e. to score goals by shooting or heading the ball beyond the line. The following passages

⁸³ See Die Woche (1998), July 17, p. 3 (appendix).

⁸⁴ I invented the expression 'playerhood' only to transfer the structural analogies with Christian sainthood to a

try to name both historical developments of the players' role and continuing 'truths' of the game itself.

3.3.1. "On-the Field-Heroes": From the Beginning of Professional Football in England to Contemporary European 'Playerhood'

Since with the establishment of England's first "F.C.s" and the introduction of a 'League' by the F.A. (founded in 1883) the main protagonists were traditionally drawn from the working class of the manufacturing centres because football at that time was the ordinary man's sport.

While today the media watch out for any information and would-be scandals about a player's private life, at that early stage it was just the skill that counted and was seen worthy to report about.⁸⁵ Instead, the press gave rise to an image of "on-the-field heroes"⁸⁶ who practice hard beside their daily work in the coalmines, factories and other heavy industry, creating the myth of the player as 'one-of-us', which is still alive in current fandom.

From the beginning of professional football the players were considered representatives of their original communities, i.e. the social classes from which the crowds came, and bearers of a local imagery, which the fans could identify with.⁸⁷ Furthermore, players embodied the presence of something extraordinary within the ordinary itself. Because they lived and worked among them, players served as credible examples of the experience of an ordinary life, shared by the spectators, even though the wages paid to them were higher than the salary of most of the supporters. As Steven Tischler puts it:

Professional players and other workers functioned within a wage relationship, and their wages represented only a fraction of the income which they produced for their employers. Moreover, footballers had little control over work schedules, conditions, or strategies and they would ultimately accept the protection by trade union organization.⁸⁸

terminological level.

⁸⁵ Steven Tischler (1981) *Footballers and Businessmen: The Origin of Professional Soccer in England*. London: Holmes and Meier, p. 89: "Formal player biographies noted a player's height, weight, and which foot he kicked with but rarely indicated his family and occupational background".

⁸⁶ See *ibid.*

⁸⁷ See Christian Bromberger and others (1993) Fireworks and the ASS, in: Steve Redhead (ed) *The Passion and the Fashion. Football Fandom in the New Europe*. Aldershot: Avebury, p. 92.

⁸⁸ Tischler, *Footballer*, p. 95.

Nevertheless, it was not only the corroboration of the well acquainted labourer's reality that made up the growing attraction but also a certain kind of 'transcendental feeling'. According to Tischler, soon a player was not only negotiating the terms of contracts with their employers like elsewhere. He became both "operator and the 'machine', and his labor was somewhat different from that of other workers".⁸⁹ With the opportunity to sell their own labour to the best offer, these people achieved something their supporters could only dream about: working self-determination. In a way, they became thereby focal points where, again, two different realities met. The dependent existence of labourers on the one side and the self-chosen conditions of artisans on the other, both were united in and embodied by early English football players.

However, this 'free labour market' led also to the termination of the primary principle of a player's belonging to a local club. Extraordinarily good players were offered more money and working opportunities from bigger clubs, such as Manchester United or Liverpool, which could afford to accomplish their demands, and therefore moved away to improve their own perspectives. The sums paid for those moves were initially seen as compensations for a "lost identity" that was accompanied by the parting from a home club, which meant to leave family and friends behind.⁹⁰ With the development towards a 'full-time professionalism' the amounts of such money grew incredibly fast and its growth has not stopped yet. In fact, nowadays millions of pounds are paid for good players from all over the world in order to keep the football attractive.⁹¹ Therefore regional ties no longer apply, while the actors are not part of the working class long since.

Instead, they embody the well adjusted individual of the late capitalist era, going through merciless selection and demanding athletic education. With the pressure from the substitutes on the bench, who could take their position any time, they accomplish a life oriented on competitive principle, social disciplination, self control and have a privacy that recalls life in a Medieval cloister. Moreover, most of the teams take some time of "contemplation" in preparation for a big match, usually without wives and girlfriends. Meals and time are shared in the 'holy circle' of a monklike

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 90.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 92. Tischler also mentions many players who failed in seeking their fortunes away from home and returned more or less soon again.

⁹¹ And it can be doubted that this money serves as a substitute for "lost identity". If someone like Jürgen Klinsmann earns up to £ 69,000/week at Tottenham, then it seems very likely to be a matter of business acumen rather than identity problems that allows him to accept the 'inconvenience' of an engagement abroad.

community on such a ritualised day, and not only the sexual abstinence indicates the parallels to the ascetic existence of a hermits, one group of canonised saints in early Christianity.⁹²

Football's 'credibility', an important aspect for its attraction to the fans, continues through the development of the roles a player accomplishes. From the early role as a good example (heroes) to the embodiment of an entire society with its good and bad parts (playing businessmen and "bad boys"), the change through the past hundred years emphasised various aspects of their significance.⁹³ Footballers have always been a central focus of the public eye, like politicians, functioning as athletes, entertainers, social workers and showmasters, in a nutshell as 'figures of integration and polarisation', what, again, links them to the characteristics of Christian saints.

As this brief glance at the evolution from their early occurrence to their current status as professional players attempted to show, structural analogies between the popularity of outstanding Christians and talented footballers are discernible. Both came from distinctive backgrounds (mortal humanity and working class) and embodied the features of their origins, while, at the same time, they transcended the inherent (existential and economic) boundaries exemplarily for all their followers (the faithful and the crowds). Furthermore, both led to an encounter with another reality or dimension of reality, be it a Christian notion of Paradise or just the 'heaven of football', where the sorrows of mortal life would not have the last word.⁹⁴ In this context the saying from the "pilgrimage to Old Trafford" on Saturdays appears in clarifying light as well as the German description of a stadium's pitch as *heiliger Rasen*, 'holy turf'.⁹⁵

⁹² See Schümer (1996) *Gott ist rund. Die Kultur des Fußballs*. Berlin: Berlin Verlag p. 71 and Bromberger, Passion, pp. 139f.

⁹³ See Schümer, Gott, p. 86: "Fußballspieler sind für den Rest der Gesellschaft keine Vorbilder mehr. Sie verkörpern die Gesellschaft im ganzen, im guten wie im bösen. Wenn der von den Medien inszenierte und ausgeschlachtete Fußball nur brave Harmonie wohlerezogener Jungmänner, würde er für die konfliktfernen Fans bald unglaubwürdig."

⁹⁴ One could speak about coincidence in the case of Celtic's Parkhead, however, in the light of these thoughts the meaning of its nickname, "Paradise", used by the supporters to describe the place where they spend most of their Saturday afternoons, gains a new dimension. Accordingly, "Paradise" is not only in biblical tradition a place of eternal carefreeness but also the location where Celtic supporters might find 'redemption' (apart from the pains of a goalless draw that might cost Celtic F.C. the championship...) and 'protection' from the "Forces of Darkness" (Rangers F.C.). In addition, all-seater stadia in Britain have become sites of security, protecting the crowds from the threat of chaos as displayed in various disasters (Heysel, Sheffield).

⁹⁵ Nowadays stadia not only function as targets for sport 'pilgrims' or secular places of 'worship' but their architecture can also dominate the skyline of a city as cathedrals did in earlier times.

3.3.2. The 'Truths' of the Game: Secrets of a Fascination

Sepp Herberger, the first coach of the German national team after World War II and World Cup winner in Bern 1954, once summarised the 'philosophy of football' in three tenets: By the time his statements "The ball is round", "A match goes on for 90 minutes" and "The next opponent is always the hardest" have become a cultural heritage among German football experts, a precise summary of the only few truths, players, managers and supporters can count on. However, there are a few more statutes in this sport that might explain its appeal to modern secular society.

Football, according to Schümer, remains an unpredictable event, against all calculation and well considered tactics.⁹⁶ Its fascination is seen in the analogy with *Lebenswirklichkeit*, the unforeseeable 'ups and downs' in the reality of life. The entire behaviour of a player towards the ball, his movements in time and space, his treatments of the central object are the only 'secrets' of success and mirror the restrictedness of temporary beings. Rare opportunities to score are either wasted or taken by the strikers, showing the "difference of success and downfall", because failure and defeat are 'ubiquitous' and always possible.⁹⁷

In a way, the game itself represents social structures and makes transparent a society's framework of alleged constraints and chances. This mirroring of society as a 'true' and amazing consequence of football is described by Bromberger in the subsequent words:

In general, if a match fascinates it is because it condenses, like a philosophical drama, the essential values that model our society: it speaks of merit, successful enterprise, solidarity (team spirit), the role of luck in individual and collective destinies, of promotion and recession; it reminds us of some essential truths and that basically the misfortune of some is the condition of happiness for others (your death, my life); ultimately it offers an expressive support for the affirmation of collective identity and local, regional and national antagonisms.⁹⁸

Because the main regulations have not been altered, the unpredictable gains an unknown quality in which the players are facing their 'fate' representatively for all spec-

⁹⁶ See Schümer, Gott, p. 248.

⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 253f.

⁹⁸ Bromberger, *Fireworks*, p. 90f.

tators, fighting their way as idols of a technical age by the only means of pre-civilisational gifts of human motor functions.⁹⁹

This latter limitation of football opens the phenomenon to a religious viewpoint. Not only the physical set back to primary human abilities deals with the well being and survival of individuals and collectives but also the emotional scope which all participants, both active and passive, have to cope with. From the overwhelming joy after a scored goal, a sense of 'simply being happy', to the existentialist despair and disillusionment of shameful defeat, the range of such sensations is wide and marks the passion with which people take their part in a match.

In general, the flow of the game plays on an abundance of never ending hope, i.e. hope for victory. During the match players and supporters of the team behind experience a kind of irrational 'salvation' that is unlikely to happen and yet never entirely impossible. An equalising goal in the ninetieth minute or, ultimately, a victory in injury time can still be achieved by observing all regulations properly, while even after the most devastating defeat supporters, players and manager are looking forward to the next fixture with a hope that takes on a rather religious dimension. This hope for 'deliverance' enabling all those involved to keep on playing and supporting is similar to the confidence that encourages human beings to wake up every morning again and to face a life full of uncertain expectations.¹⁰⁰ Necessary comfort is given by the institution of a league modus.

3.4. A Sense of (Comm)Unity - Sideglance at the Crowds

And yet (...) for all the puffing and panting and pushing and shoving, all the crushing and discomfort, the wringing wet clothes and tired aching limbs, all the sheer, spent exhaustion which threatened to swamp us, this was no claustrophobic nightmare; no trip to hell and back. In fact, (and why else would we go through it?), it was quite the opposite; it became a truly exhilarating and unforgettable occasion, inducing an overwhelming sense of oneness and attachment: the very essence and core of fandom - the shared experience and identity which every fan has been through at some time or another; everyone as one with the crowd; complete strangers as close to each other as it is possible to get - physically and emotionally. The crushing and discomfort and sodden clothes became the

⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 256. : "Der Fußballsportler, Idol des technischen Zeitalters, ist wieder zurückgeworfen auf die vorzivilisatorischen Gaben der Körpermotorik."

¹⁰⁰ All of these 'metaphysical' aspects of football are discussed in Schümer, Gott, pp. 255ff.

common factors binding everyone together in turn breeding an instant camaraderie and an utterly intoxicating feeling of unity.¹⁰¹

This experience from Liverpoolian Alan Edge is not restricted to Anfield Road only. A "feeling of unity" is a universal 'fact' and speaks for many kinds of supporters and clubs in victory or defeat. According to Gerry Finn, it is the identification with the local club that provides a security within a group of like-minded as a substitute symbol for an "imaginary community" in secular life.¹⁰²

Furthermore, the local team becomes a "most substantial embodiment of the local community", represents it in the league and thereby enables the supporters to identify with its style, victories and defeats, in promotion and relegation, to an extent that the club "symbolically becomes part of their own identity".¹⁰³

And the players, though they usually join the club with the best prospectus and the most money, play a certain role in this 'production' of identity. Because of their skills and personalities they function as ambassadors and representatives of the 'football community' (i.e. the club) and as personifications of an entire region. Their actions finally bind all supporters together in a joint 'fate', united with them through the belonging to the club whatever the motives are.¹⁰⁴ These aspects recall the functions of Medieval saints for their original communities, enabling a collective identity and strengthening as well as opening the community through their feasts.

Moreover, the relation between fans and players in southern European countries and on the 'football crazy' British Isles show even more parallels with the Christian cult of saints. As Bromberger puts it, some supporters...

(...) transform their private universe into a sort of domestic altar, where they conserve the precious relics of their attendance (...) and witnesses to their presence next to their idols (autographs, photos). In such a *context of veneration*, one great feat - rich in grace? - is to approach and touch a player after several hours waiting outside the changing rooms - a virtue of contact which recalls that attributed, in popular religion, to the act of touching, or kissing the statue of *relics of a saint*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Alan Edge (1997) *Faith of our Fathers. Football as a Religion*. London: Two Heads Publishing, pp. 161f.

¹⁰² See Gerry P.T. Finn (1994) *Football: A Societal Psychological Perspective*, in: R. Giulianotti, Norman Boney and Mike Hepworth (eds) *Football, Violence and Social Identity*. London: Routledge, p. 100.

¹⁰³ See *ibid.*, p. 101, also Bromberger, *Fireworks*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁴ Finn, *Perspective*, p. 108f: "Flow experiences allow an open expression of shared, collective emotionality: an outpouring of joy or sadness, strengthening a common social identity." However, as Finn adds, this "flow experience" is not an inevitable part of every match.

Praying for their own team to win has not only been seen before the final of the Champions League 1996/97 between Juventus and Dortmund, as supporters of both sides entered churches in the city centre of Munich to ask for divine intervention in favour of their squads. In the case of the Italian supporters of SSC Naples, veneration of Diego Maradona reached a shape that let him appear in the light of the city's actual patron saint, Gennaro. One day fans even altered the Lord's prayer into:

Our Maradonna, who descends onto the field, we have sanctified your name, Naples is your crown. Do not lead us into temptation but lead us to the championship. Amen!¹⁰⁶

Again, like with the feasts of the saints, celebrating a victory, a title or any other achievement of a club's side implies the celebration of their own identity, embodied, manifested and even fostered by the club's playing staff. Even in today's commercialised football landscape the players are linked to the region of their clubs, 'quasi-adopted' by the crowds and involved in a mutual relationship to them, a reciprocal deal that gives 'support for dedication'.¹⁰⁷ These ways of interaction in their similarities to cultic veneration of saints seem to be clarified by taking a closer look at the circumstances of the affair around Eric Cantona.

3.5. *Where Opinions Differ: The Personalities of Cantona and Effenberg*

3.5.1. The Anti-Hero from Old Trafford or The Cult of Eric Cantona

I play with fire. You have to accept that sometimes this fire does harm. I know it does harm. I harm myself. I am aware of it, I am aware of harming others.¹⁰⁸

When it came to the equally outrageous and sensational events of Selhurst Park on Wednesday 25 January, 1995, a foreseeable development reached its peak. Long before "Eric, the King" jumped over the barriers in order to knock down a Crystal Pal-

¹⁰⁵ Bromberger, *Passion*, p. 143 (emphasises mine).

¹⁰⁶ Bromberger, *Fireworks*, p. 95.

¹⁰⁷ It does not seem necessary to stress the analogy to the connection between the faithful and a saint, where the 'deal' consists of an exchange of 'veneration and protection' (see above). While sanctified relics were mistreated in order to force a saint into action, fans nowadays turn their support into a certain kind of humiliation of a player who, in their eyes, lacks commitment to the club.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Gardiner (1998) *The Law and Hate Speech. 'Oh Ah Cantona' and the demonisation of the 'other'*, in: Adam Brown (ed) *Fanatics! Power, Identity and Fandom in Football*. London: Routledge, p. 253.

ace supporter, who was apparently shouting racist slogans at him, his footballing career was marked by a lot of troublesome incidents.

However it was not mainly the series of scandals reported from France, like the spitting at supporters there, throwing his shirt at a referee or calling his manager "a bag of shit" and football officials "a bunch of idiots", that made up his reputation as an extraordinary striker.¹⁰⁹

His outstanding skills were reason enough for Leeds United to sign the Frenchman who fell out of favour in France because of those events. The instantly occurring success in the English Premiership justified the initial risk and let Cantona's signing appear as the foundation of Leeds' title win. He came as the 'enfant terrible' of French football but with him also success made its entrance and "a celebratory cult developed around him".¹¹⁰ His popularity grew rapidly and took the shape of a unique cult that evoked various chants praising him ("Ooh Aah Cantona") and his abilities; Leeds supporters wore French accessories on the terraces as signs of their veneration and children were called 'Cantona' as their middle name. In religious terms, Cantona's presence at the Leeds side, which spent most of the 80s in the second division, was somewhat salutary, a miracle or - even further in Anthony King's words - a "resurrection" of the club, that could mean the club's return to the glorious days of the early 70s.¹¹¹

According to Simon Gardiner, for the supporters the flair emerging with Cantona represented the hopes for a new international reputation of the club while his declared preference for the Premier League gave rise to claims of the superiority of English football.¹¹² Thus, in terms of self-understandings, both on the local stage and with regard to the wider community people drew a potential of identity and affirmation from his appearance. Yet the benefit was mutual: At the same time Cantona's settling at Elland Road was a new chance for him, perhaps the last one, to get back into the game by presenting his skills.¹¹³

Moreover, the relationship between him and the Leeds supporters gained a sexual connotation through his usage of language when he declared his love in re-

¹⁰⁹ For all those incidents and their marketing effect see the 'Nike' advertisement, cited in Ian Ridley (1995) *Cantona. The Red and the Black*. London: Victor Gollanz, p.12.

¹¹⁰ Anthony King (1995) *The Problem of Identity and the Cult of Cantona*. Manchester: Salford University, p. 1.

¹¹¹ See King, *Identity*, p. 18.

¹¹² See Gardiner, *Speech*, p. 257.

¹¹³ See his own description in: Eric Cantona (1994) *Cantona. My Story*. London: Headline, p. 103: "I would like Howard Wilkinson to know, and the public of Elland Road with him, that Leeds had given me back my life. I came back to football thanks to him and that incomparable welcome which was given to me when I arrived at

sponse to the fans during the championship parade: "Thank you very much. Why I love you, I don't know why, but I love you." Yet King has a notion of why he did love them, as he puts it:

The Leeds fans did not merely admire Cantona's manliness or his style but loved him in the way that someone might love their partner. (...) Admiration, respect, even adoration has been transformed in post 60's culture into a personalised and deeply visceral attachment. Cantona enhanced this relationship by reciprocation: 'I prefer the atmosphere (...), you are closer to the public, it is warmer, there is room for love' (...).¹¹⁴

For King, the intensity of Cantona's "cult" can be explained further from the surrounding cultural context. His appearance served certain desires, evoked by economic changes since the 1960s, when a liberalised consumer market 'freed' and produced needs in order to ensure accumulation. Cantona was aware of "this culture and the identities that went with it"¹¹⁵ and created a "room for love" with his response to the fans' veneration in scoring goals and giving such statements, though they were rare. Furthermore, his troublesome reputation and 'mystic' aspects of his character functioned as a screen on which those 'consumer identities' could project their modes of self-understanding in differentiation to other clubs as well as other countries. The extroverted 'enfant terrible' was always at odds with the hierarchy of football, while his public appearances were scarce and the few interviews he gave remained rather mysterious.

His attitude towards the 'establishment' found its correspondence in the supporters' opposition to the increasing commercialisation of the game. Growing ticket prices, caused by the introduction of all-seater stadia after Heysel and Hillsborough, changed the 'social consistency' at the terraces and the expansion of marketing took place. A particular affinity between both sides was possible in their relations to authorities. Cantona served as something like the supporters' advocate, "seen to embody and articulate the sentiments of many fans and he constantly became a symbol for those fans".¹¹⁶

Leeds."

¹¹⁴ King, *Identity*, p. 15f.

¹¹⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 17. The whole economical aspect of the Cantona's cult cannot be treated here extensively, but the reference to King's study at least indicates the wider context.

¹¹⁶ King, *Identity*, p. 20; also see Gardiner, *Speech*, p. 257: "Cantona was initially supported for his anti-establishment attitudes, his professed love for the values of the traditional English game mirroring the fans' con-

In 1992, Leeds' arch rivals, Manchester United, signed the troublesome striker. It was inevitable that this would evoke new Cantona 'cults'. On the one hand ManU supporters continued the veneration of his skills and Frenchness in a similar way, celebrating the series of victories in the Premiership (English title in 1993, 1994, 1996 and 1997) while, on the other hand, in Leeds an "Anti-Cantona-Cult" emerged.¹¹⁷ His joining of Manchester was seen as a "betrayal" of the supporters who, then, turned against him on any occasion by singing insulting chants (e.g. "He's gay, he's French, he's always on the bench!") and other abuse. The occurring nationalism and sexual defamation illustrate again the special relationships Cantona had established with the fans and also demonstrates the higher value of a club in a supporter's eyes. The Leeds supporters' response took shape in correspondence to their own self-understandings because of the vital role Leeds United play "at the very centre point of their identities as the focus of their love, despair and pride".¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, not only Cantona's success continued at Old Trafford but also his "fire" of little self-control was manifested in five send-offs during the five years at Manchester. Owing to the ongoing "mysticism" that surrounded him, the rather quiet football star with his few interviews and miraculous sayings, he was perceived by the media as "poet" and "philosopher king", having a declared interest in literature and art that let him stand out of his profession.¹¹⁹ This reputation even expanded after the incident at Selhurst Park in January 1995. At a press conference after his conviction to 120 hours of community work, one of the most grotesque sayings of British sports was fashioned when he tried to translate a French proverb into English and actually said: "When the seagulls follow the trawler, it is because they think sardines will be thrown into the sea".¹²⁰ The press treated him as a heretic, who brings 'disgrace' to the game, but the support from ManU fans remained unbroken, cheering him for "his role as the anti-hero".¹²¹

After he had served the sentenced penalty, he came back with a changed character, having recognised the problems of controlling his 'fire' in the game without

cerns about transformations in contemporary football: the move to all-seater stadiums, and the increased alienation from the owners of clubs. *Cantona's difference was an issue of celebration*" (emphasis mine).

¹¹⁷ See King, *Identity*, p. 23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ See Gardiner, *Speech*, p. 253.

¹²⁰ Quoted in Ridley, *Black*, p. 130.

¹²¹ See Gardiner, *Speech*, p. 258.

losing success.¹²² This change also contributed to his reputation and Gardiner does not hesitate to call him the canonised "St. Eric".¹²³

Cantona retired from football in May 18, 1997, miraculously enough at the peak of his career with the age of thirty.

3.5.2. An Almighty Middle Finger? The 'Cult' of Stefan Effenberg

In order to find a cross cultural comparison of football players, the case of Stefan Effenberg seems to serve this purpose, although the story of this bothersome but brilliant German midfielder does not appear to be as equally profound as Cantona's glory. However, his particular career and the reactions he provoked can tell us something about intrinsic German football 'playerhood' and its support.

During the World Cup 1994, Stefan Effenberg suddenly forfeited the sympathies of almost all supporters of the German national team. Up to the match Germany vs South Korea (3:2) he was venerated for his extraordinary skills with which he filled the position of a key player predominantly in his club's side, Borussia Mönchengladbach, and later in the national squad. Furthermore, he was seen to have the potential for being a new Franz Beckenbauer, the symbol of the greatest times of German football. Yet all those hopes had been disappointed as Effenberg, after a clash with the national manager Berti Vogts, was the target of some whistles and booing at the next match. After the final whistle he went to the terraces and showed the German supporters his middle finger in a vulgar pose. Shortly after the incident he was suspended from the national team and stepped back from the squad for good.

Nevertheless, his popularity grew among the fans of his local club in Mönchengladbach, and by the time he evolved an image of a blunt interview partner, frankly giving his opinions on games and fellow players into microphones or cameras. Even some unpleasant broadcasting, e.g. of an incident at Christmas 1996, when he and his wife were accused to have beaten up a homeless man outside in their backgarden or even his outrage over some supporters blaming him for a current sporting crisis, seemed to foster the veneration he earned.

¹²² In fact, the achievements of this particular season were great: ManU won the 'Double'.

¹²³ See Gardiner, p. 258.

In his case as well as in Cantona's the dialectic of a bad image becomes apparent. Among hundreds of other - more or less faceless - professional players he gained a face, regardless that this face was associated with a bad behaviour. In the midst of all the trouble he caused he remained authentic, non-conformed to an establishment that produces silent but efficient players, 'good boys' who talk only when they are asked and give the opinion of the manager, the chairman or anyone else's but their own. This has been tolerated and even appreciated by the fans, yet only as long as the skills were convincing enough, of course.

Another incident conquered the supporters' hearts, when he shed tears on the pitch after a defeat that could have meant the relegation of Mönchengladbach, although he had already signed a contract for the next season for Bayern Munich. This sharing of grief and sorrow for a club he intended to leave made it easier for the fans to cope with his farewell, even though both clubs are connected in a similar thread of hatred and hostility as are Manchester and Leeds United.¹²⁴

However, like Cantona's preference for culture and philosophy, Effenberg shows certain features of a horizon that goes beyond the average Bundesliga player. For instance, his curious sermon at a Catholic mass in Mönchengladbach in November 1995 gained a lot of attention from the media. "He got more matured", the newspapers remarked the following day and enabled a process of 'public reconciliation' for him.¹²⁵

After the German national team failed again in the quarter-finals of France '98, his abstinence from the national team came to an end. Berti Vogts abandoned his ban and offered him a key role in the new build up of the squad. Newspapers celebrated him as the "saviour" of German football and the chairman of his new club Bayern Munich, Beckenbauer, praised his skills as the only solution for the current problems.¹²⁶ Yet shortly after his comeback in the "DFB" dress after the World Cup in September 1998 against Malta, he stepped back again, disappointed with the team and having tactical differences with the manager. His assignment to Bayern Munich,

¹²⁴ One could ask if the shedding of tears might be a rather common means for scandalous football players to gain "mercy", as Paul Gascoine also demonstrated such an 'emotional commitment' during the World Cup 1990 in Italy.

¹²⁵ See Jörg Stratmann (1997) Die Predigt des Stefan Effenberg in der Pfarrkirche Sankt Franziskus, in: Christian Möller/Hans Georg Ulrichs (1997) *Fußball und Kirche: wunderliche Wechselwirkungen*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, p. 72.

¹²⁶ See appendix.

though, will ensure his appearance on the international stage of football while his middle finger will remain as a national gesture of a controversial celebrity.

3.5.3. Authority Through Authenticity: Personality in the 'Playerhood' of Modern Football

It should be apparent from the presentation of the different dimensions that veneration of Cantona and Effenberg have taken, that cultural similarities and variations between English and German receptions of football culture can be assumed. Yet it seems to be difficult to remain removed from an unacademical generalisation in the scope of this treatment. Therefore it might be appropriate to list only a few aspects.

The case of Cantona shows that English fans justify the stereotypes of being a 'football crazy' people that is equally as passionate as critical for and with the achievements on the pitch. Otherwise the enthusiasm with which Cantona was received, adored and hated would not be explainable. His extraordinary skills were the starting point of the occurring cult but the decision to join ManU provoked an anti-cult. Effenberg, also popular for his footballing abilities, instead earned hatred because of his behaviour in the squad and towards the crowds. Particularly in his case, a shift of the opinion can be observed. At a first glance, the anger around him arose because he disturbed the *harmony* in the national team with his extroverted character. However, in the aftermath of the incidents he gained a new popularity through his resolution to bear the consequences without losing the quality of his style. On the contrary, he was valued so much that the most wealthy Bundesliga - club, Bayern Munich, eventually signed him as a key player. Finally the odds that someone could accuse him of having betrayed himself were as slim as in the events around Cantona.

This newly gained authenticity of some football playing personalities distinguishes them from the vast majority of well playing, yet unobtrusive professional players. The difference with characters like Cantona and Effenberg is that they are hated and loved at the same time, by different communities, because they are controversial and polarise the crowds.

Their authenticity, i.e. a 'true' representation and transcendence of a social reality, between commercialisation and competition of the market, can be experienced by the crowds every day. Hence, in this feature German and English perceptions agree. Schümer states, that a player who suffers and gives everything for the club and its success serves as a figure of identification, is accepted by the spectators as

an example and stands out of the team collective.¹²⁷ It is this outstanding skill that makes players like Effenberg and Cantona 'visible' in the public eye and contributes essentially to the creation of their cults, as Gardiner writes on Cantona:

He lives for football and it is this persona that contributed to the polarisation of opinion as to Cantona's behaviour. It is his visibility that allows him to be constructed as the hero on one hand and the anti-hero on the other.¹²⁸

4. Conclusion: Identity and a Glimpse of Redemption

This study tried to give an account of the Christian notion of sainthood by stressing certain sociological functions that 'holy people' accomplished in the eyes of their faithful. At the same time it used a religious perspective on the emergence and transformations of professional football in Europe.

Between these two objects, though they are different in time, shape and intention, two terms seem to be useful and permit a dialogue, i.e., first, the idea of saints who re-establish a *harmony* imagined to be corresponding to heavenly existence and, second, the conception of *authenticity* in behaviour and skills which let certain football playing personalities appear particularly fascinating to the crowds. The communicative 'interaction' can be made workable through the applicability of both terms for the respective opposite. While the appearances of Christian saints can also be described as embodiments of true (i.e. determined) identity, as the example of Thomas Becket shows, the emotional and social fulfilment mediated by a footballing celebrity like Eric Cantona is experienced as a restored harmony.

However, the aspect of a saintly *counter reality* complicates the analogisation. Because it is the genuineness of life conditions common to both players and supporters that entitles players to a certain significance for the lives of their fans, the encounter with a different presence offered by the saints' 'supernatural' powers seems to oppose a close parallelisation.

This difference becomes apparent, for instance, through the ways both religious and football rituals work. As Schümer admits, the unforeseeable football sce-

¹²⁷ See Schümer, Gott, p. 94: "Denn das Publikum liebt einen Spieler, der leidet und alles gibt - wie es selbst. Ein solcher Spieler (...) wird als Vorbild akzeptiert, fällt aus dem Kollektiv heraus und kann sich selbst vermarkten, sogar wenn er in Mannschaften ohne zählbare Erfolge spielt."

¹²⁸ Gardiner, Speech, p. 253.

nario does not promise either any kind of 'redemption' or comfort, but guarantees just itself.¹²⁹ While the cult of saints points to a greater context which includes covenant of God's people and promised redemption, football players remain committed to the club and the supporters they signed for, as long as the contract lasts and the wages are paid. Furthermore, the football rituals are containing only a belief in "symbolic efficacy" instead of offering a real transcendence to the crowds.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, the boundaries lie closer together than imagined. A closer look at the festivals and rituals dedicated to the saints has shown the 'human purpose' of those rites, i.e. strengthening and opening social community in the name of Christ. Supporters, on the other hand, gather to 'worship' in the 'name of football' with the players having multiple roles to play: For the supporters they can be mediators of 'grace', representatives of the faithful and 'gods' at the same time, because of the status given by the game itself.

When fan shops sell 200,000 Manchester United tops with Cantona's number 7 and his name printed on it, then this indicates not only the club's successful advertising strategy. By buying a top of a significant football personality supporters take part in his skills and identity as well in the history and tradition of the club. An ongoing process of identification can be observed, regarded to have an effect comparable to Medieval relics which, as we have seen, enabled participation in the saints special relationship to God.

Despite the Christian transcendental participation in God's reality, professional football remains bound to the economic laws of money and the market. Yet in a way, successful football players also offer a kind of 'transcendence', by showing the opportunity to overcome social classes through their skills (as seen in the historical development of professional 'playerhood' from labourers to self-determined employees) and by contributing to the whole scenario with all its social dynamics that transcend prevalent modern values of the consumers' individualism.¹³¹

In a nutshell, both saints and players enable social ties within the categories of a smaller group (congregation and club) as well as a nation-wide or even world-wide community (Catholic Church and the community of football fans). Both stand for an idea that goes far beyond their individual persona (Christianity and football) but relies

¹²⁹ See Schümer, Gott, p. 248.

¹³⁰ See Bromberger, Passion, p. 141 and 145.

¹³¹ I am aware that this point would require further explanation. However, I cannot discuss this matter here in

on their service of mediation, and both act as 'screens' of their contemporaries' hopes and fears.

One of the tasks set in the introduction was to investigate the human needs behind both cults. The emergence of these cults has been marked by several structural similarities which arose out of a common motive: the matter of *identity*. The key words *harmony* and *authenticity* describe in their own intrinsic ways the contexts in which both were and are settled, i.e. an inharmonious time of persecution starting in early Christianity and the secular age of 'modernity'. Both are reactions to the challenge of identity, and both show how people respond with their challenged beliefs and modes of self-understanding. The need for a freely evolved selfhood that is incorporated in a community providing a framework of meanings and determinations can be seen as a driving force behind those developments. Theologically speaking, such an identity corresponds to God's will apparent in the early tradition of the *communio sanctorum* of all Christians which the particular saints were believed to establish and restore, as the most harmonious status of human being. They followed Jesus Christ in taking away natural threads by healing the sick as well as in interceding behaviour to God for humanity's cause.

Whoever experienced the joy and exultation among football fans when their likes score a goal (and it does not have to be a particularly important one),¹³² can understand the dynamics that come from the pitch and take over the terraces. Thereby, the Christian term of 'grace' gains new dimensions as well as the despair ('sin' or damnation) when important games are lost.

In spite of all the established differences, the personal cults of saints and football players are based on the vital striving to catch a glimpse of redemption, harmony, reconciliation, security and well-being.

Finally, the study attempted to open a door in both directions to enable a dialogue between sociological and theological thoughts on the topics of sainthood and football. However, deeper studies have still to be undertaken in order to improve the value of such interdisciplinary efforts and to enable a valuable crossing of methodological boundaries. The presented historical, linguistic and phenomenological approaches

sufficient detail, but a reference is made to King, *Identity*, p. 13ff.

¹³² This event of encountered unity is often expressed in supporters' language as "*We* have scored!".

are only a few opportunities among many others to access this aim, to which this treatment has hopefully contributed.

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