

**José Antonio López Sabatel**

# Hagiography, Sanctity, Martyrdom and Monasticism in the 12th Century

An Anthology of Essays

**Essay**

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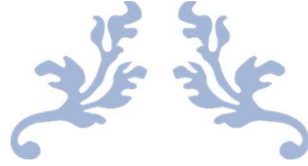
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**HAGIOGRAPHY, SANCTITY, MARTYRDOM AND MONASTICISM IN THE  
TWELFTH CENTURY  
AN ANTHOLOGY OF ESSAYS**



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There is no doubt that one of the most important institutions in medieval society was the Church, and its influence, authority, and doctrine marked the path to follow for both princes and peasants. To speak of twelfth-century Western society is to speak of a Christian society. Thus, the history of the Church must be framed within the general evolution of that society, including spiritual, cultural, political and economic aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the study of the religious beliefs and practices of the masses and the different popular groups. In this work, I have tried to bring together a series of essays that, in my opinion, can show common elements that were relevant when defining features of the history of the Church in this period, not only as an estate but as a spiritual guide for an entire society.

### **A BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

One could well start with the belief in the world of the supernatural. Humanity was not helpless against the forces of evil; it had the saints. The path to salvation consisted of touching their relics and making a pilgrimage to the places where their remains rested. Ultimately, these martyrs could intercede directly before God. The cult of the saints was one of the strongest constants of medieval religious practice. After martyrdom, miracles became necessary to define these extraordinary beings, the saints. When, at the end of the twelfth century, the papacy began to have the last word in the canonization of saints, miracles were included as an obligatory condition that the candidate must meet for the canonization.

On the other hand, hagiographic literature reaches its greatest splendour in this century. However, a change can be observed. The narration of the saints' biographies no longer focuses on the heroism of martyrdom or on a sacrificial ascetic and eremitic way of life. Now their proximity to God is recognized through the ability to work miracles, perform thaumaturgical prodigies, have supernatural visions or even be an instrument of divine punishment. The cult of the saint explains the fervour that the pilgrimage inspired. Living as they did with familiarity with the supernatural, the population of that time had an immediate faith in miracles. Since the sanctuary was so closely linked to miracles, everyone hoped to find healing of soul and body at the end of the journey. The first two essays of this study are meant to serve as a sample of all that has been said so far.