The men of the baroque age must have differed basically from their mediaeval and renaissance ancestors to have carved and painted the same scenes with such striking changes. In the typical mediaeval or renaissance Annunciation the angel makes his presence known so quietly that Mary’s meditation seems deepened rather than disturbed. While she looks up from her book she might be thinking:

“As lightning, or a taper’s light,
Thine eyes, and not thy noise waked me.”

In the typical baroque Annunciation Jehovah’s ambassador, piloting a cloudful of winged instrumentalists and singers, commandeers the room to present his credentials in correct Hebrew.

Nativities show another sort of change. The ox and the ass that in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance breathed on the Babe to temper the December draughts were driven out of the stable in baroque times, because, as Charles Le Brun explained to the French Academy in the seventeenth century, the ox and the ass “have a brutish stamp, whereas so holy a subject should be shown with figures and actions worthy of the sanctity of the mystery.”

As for the saints, when they moved from the bustle of the mediaeval market place into a noble elsewhere during the baroque age, they took on another aspect not only in pictures and statues but also in the accounts of their lives. The two most famous collections of lives of the saints are probably the mediaeval Golden Legend and the baroque Acta sanctorum. The Golden Legend, or Legenda aurea (legenda being understood as “things for reading”), is a stout but unmanageable book compiled in the late 1200’s by James of Voragine, archbishop of Genoa. “Simple enough to be understood, eagerly copied off, thumbed by everybody, and, after the invention of printing, often refuted,” thus The Golden Legend was put in its place by its imposing successor, the Acta sanctorum.

The Acta was compiled by a society of archivists who, replacing Abelard and Aquinas as defenders of orthodoxy, aimed to confute the questionings of Protestantism and of the new spirit of science by organizing nothing less than the whole documentation of Christendom. The resulting official hagiographical encyclopaedia of Catholicism began publication in 1643 and reached its sixty-fourth, but not final, folio volume in 1925. This monument of baroque erudition resembles the mediaeval stories only in that both were written in Latin and both arrange the saints’ lives in the calendar order of the saints’ days. But whereas The Golden Legend is one of the most often reprinted, translated, and illustrated of all early books, the Acta sanctorum has never been completely reprinted, translated, or illustrated. Inevitably the defensive criticism that elaborated the Acta sanctorum had to reject The Golden Legend as naif and crude. Thus the compilers of the Acta endorsed an earlier jibe at their predecessor: “How unworthy of God and Christian men are those tales of the saints called The Golden Legend—though why golden is past explaining, being written by a man with a mouth of iron and a heart of lead.”

When the scholars of the great age of ecclesiastical research are at such odds with the mediaeval popular storyteller, it is no wonder that some saints’ lives differ in the two accounts. Take, for instance, a homely, earthy page out of The Golden Legend: “Pope Leo which favored heresy called a council of bishops, but he sent not for Saint Hilary that he should come thereto; notwithstanding Saint Hilary came thither. When the pope saw him come, he commanded that no man should arise against him, nor give him a place. Then said the pope to him: Thou art Hilary the cock [gallus, a cock or a Gaul]. And Hilary an-
answered: I am not the cock that is born of a hen, but a bishop in Gallia, that is in France. Then said the pope: Thou art Hilary Gallus, and I am Leo [lion] of the Papal See, Judge. To whom Hilary said: If thou be Leo yet art thou not of the Tribe of Judah. Then the pope had great indignation and said to him: Abide thou a little and I shall pay to thee thine hire; and Saint Hilary answered: And if thou come not again who shall pay me for thee? And the pope answered: I shall come again and shall beat down thy pride." 1 The pope then left the council chamber and died miserably.

The men of the Middle Ages had taken this wrangle as a kind of family joke that could hurt a good Christian about as little as the ribald contortions of monks and nuns on their choir stalls and on the margins of their books. But to the Catholics of the Counter Reformation, fighting for the very existence of their Church, the concentration of power in the person of the pope was too newly established and too much like martial law to brook a jest. The Acta sanctorum does not refute Saint Hilary's bicker with the pope, which even Voragine will not vouch for, but simply loses it in a shuffle of references that establish the sequence of various early French councils.

Saint Hilary embarrasses the saints' calendar with his salty Gallicanism because he became a saint while saints were still being made by popular demand through local bishops. Saint Francis was canonized at Assisi less than two years after his death, and in another instance the process was pushed through in two months. Local authorities continued to make saints at will until 993, when the papacy conducted its first canonization. Once under way, the centralizing of authority in Rome was quickened by Protestant doubts about "piggies' bones" and miracles. Urban VIII established definitive papal control over beatification and canonization and made the entrance requirements strict and uniform by decrees in 1625 and 1634. In

1 Adapted from Caxton's translation.
1649 he lent his authority to the publication of the first volume of the *Acta sanctorum*.

If the Counter Reformation rewrote the stories of early saints, it remade even more drastically the lives of its own candidates for sainthood. The new determination to regiment men into a safe conformity was heard as early as 1512, when the Lateran Council opened with a sermon that said: “Men must be changed by religion, not religion by men.” Only a generation later Saint Ignatius was vowing that if he lived five hundred years he would still say “no innovations.” But this dread of change was itself a change as deep as could be. The mediaeval Church had felt secure enough to allow local irregularities under its universal establishment, but the secession of the Lutherans, the Sack of Rome in 1527, and the political shocks that continued through the conclusion of the Council of Trent in 1563 forced Catholicism to fall back on prepared positions. This brilliant and bitterly disputed rear-guard action called forth fighters who had all the professional soldier’s conservatism. Distrustful of the figure arts, lest they excite and disrupt, these soldiers did not go to Islam’s militant extreme of absolute prohibition, but their influence must have tended to empty pictures of emotion. The decorative acrobatics of mannerism and learned artistic theorizing both appeared while the civil war in Christendom was a battle confusedly fluctuating. When Catholicism finally triumphed by establishing the boundaries it still holds, it celebrated by creating the art of that triumph, the baroque.

The originality of the soldiers who prepared victory for the Counter Reformation becomes clear when a man like Saint Ignatius is compared with mediaeval saints who were also active in the world. The attitude toward money, for instance, altered when the flow of gold and silver from America created Europe’s first fluid currency and changed money from hoarded, scarce metal to a circulation that creates work. Thus, while Saint Francis of Assisi despised money as worth less than pebbles, Saint Igna-
Saint Ignatius Loyola is beaten by demons. Engraving from Vita beati Ignatii, Rome, 1609. Dick Fund, 1946

tius, who was a year old in 1492, used money like any other power that can be converted to the greater glory of God.

The transition from the Middle Ages to the Counter Reformation is even clearer in politics. Back in the mid-eleven-hundreds it seemed as though Europe could not make war, peace, or alliances without first submitting the plans to Saint Bernard for his opinion or arbitration. From his cloister at Clairvaux he not only evaluated events as a kind of news commentator but shaped them as a diplomat. Saint Ignatius, four centuries later, labored extensively in the world to invigorate the Church. The political center of gravity had indeed shifted since the days when a pope could summon an emperor to do penance barefoot at Canossa.

Many things show that the Counter Reformation separated the clergy more sharply from the laity than the Middle Ages had done. Take such an obvious indication as clothes. While it sometimes requires sharp scrutiny to make sure if a lady in a Van der Weyden painting is an abbess or a duchess, a glance tells the difference in a Veronese or a Van Dyck. The determination of the clergy of the Counter Reformation to make themselves distinct from the world was voiced by Saint Ignatius when he instructed his followers that "they must all try to think alike and to look alike." To perpetuate this solidarity, he founded the first Jesuit seminary, which exerted military discipline to break natural variations of temperament and standardize a type.

The will thus forced into special channels acquired special powers. After a seventeenth-century seminarist had followed Saint Ignatius's Spiritual Exercises by withdrawing into a shuttered room to ponder how Hell must look, sound, smell, taste, and feel, or to study a skull while he imagined himself dying, dead, and buried, he emerged equipped with an experience whose intensity could be recalled in after years for preaching or persuading. Saint Teresa of Avila had to begrudge like a miser every thought or glance that she did not direct to God, if she were to gather strength for her "soul to take leave of itself like a flame flung up from a fire." Out of the visions that possessed her as readily as daydreams steal over the rest of us, she was able to describe more exactly than anyone else the obscure adventure that can lead the soul to union with God. Saint Teresa wrote so clearly because she felt with a woman's keenness and sharpened her perceptions by comparing notes among a wide circle of mystics.

Despite the Church's official reserve, popular opinion then held that to achieve a trance was to be scratched with the lion's claw of sainthood. So general was the ambition to attain mystical experience that the Spaniards coined a verb for faking ecstasies. Saint Philip Neri realized that hypnosis is often induced by staring at something and warned anyone praying against gazing too fixedly at a pious image lest his head turn. This might be what once happened to Saint Teresa during Mass at Avila. She says: "I saw the Mother of God, surrounded by angels, descend toward the prioress's stall and take the place of a statue of Our Lady of Carmel that was there. At that moment the statue vanished from my sight and all I saw was the Holy Mother herself. She looked rather like the image that the countess gave me."
Saint Teresa of Avila, "despising fiends as though they were flies, arms herself with the Cross and summons them to battle." Engraving by Adrian Collaert and Cornelis Galle in Vita B. Virginis Theresiae, Antwerp, 1613. Dick Fund, 1943

Since visions, however induced, are made up of things seen in a normal state, Saint Bridget of Sweden, who died in 1373, describes visions that differ from Saint Teresa's two centuries later in the same ways that mediaeval art differs from baroque art. In one vision Saint Bridget saw John the Evangelist, who showed her "a balance standing on the earth, its fulcrum and beam touching the clouds." "One pan," she says, "held a fish, his scales as sharp as razors, his glance like a basilisk's, his mouth like a unicorn's spurring poison, his ears like sharpened lances and steel blades. The other pan held a beast with a hide like flint, his wide mouth belching flames, his eyelashes like tempered swords, his hard ears shooting sharp arrows like a tough bow bent." The edged intricacies of these beasts might be carvings from a viking ship writhing into a dream.

Saint Teresa saw in sofer focus. "When a blind man or a man in the dark talks with someone, he knows and believes that the other person is with him, even though he cannot see him. So was it with me when I thought of Our Lord. For this reason I have so loved pictures." Elsewhere she actually states that she saw Christ as artists showed him. "On St. Paul's day during Mass all His most holy Humanity appeared to me as He is painted at the Resurrection." What sort of paintings were in her mind? Tempting as it is to think that they might have been El Greco—especially when she says, "The Lord was pleased one day, while I was praying, to show me His unspeakably beautiful hands"—chronology will not allow it, for she wrote this before El Greco arrived in Spain.

Saint Teresa's visions appear also to have
differed from Saint Bridget's in going beyond seeing and hearing to shake her entire body. She exhausted the resources of passion in the smarting sweetness and delicious anguish of her celebrated ecstasy of the transverberation. Long before Bernini carved this trance, it was painted on a vast banner in St. Peter's for that great March day in 1622— the high holiday of the whole baroque age—when Saint Teresa was canonized along with Saint Philip Neri, Saint Francis Xavier, and Saint Ignatius. She had described it herself as follows: "The angel was
not big, but little, and most lovely. The burning of his face showed him to be one of those spirits of a very high order who seem all flame and are probably cherubs, though they never tell me their names. I saw in his hand a long golden dart whose steel tip burned a little. This he thrust again and again through my heart and forced into my very bowels, which I felt him pull out with the dart, leaving me flaming with the love of God. So keen a pain made me groan, yet so sharp was the sweetness of this pain that I would not exchange it for anything less than God.”

Saint Teresa was not the only baroque mystic who suffered the brunt of such visitations of grace. Saint Philip Neri, one of the most human and sympathetic of saints, was overwhelmed to the point of crying: “Lord, enough! I implore Thee, hold back the cataract of Thy consolations! Leave me, Lord, leave me!” No wonder that such impacts sent human frailty drifting helplessly through sights and sounds into a sightless and soundless immersion in God, into that “cloud of unknowing” that Saint Francis of Sales called the soul’s liquefaction, Saint Teresa the rapture (or state of being plundered), and Saint John of the Cross the thick night of the soul.

How should an artist represent such experiences? Visions presented no problem to the Middle Ages, when the apparition was made more real than the beholder by the belief that the world is only a shadow cast by the rational reality shining beyond. At the end of the Middle Ages Giotto painted Saint Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata through a cat’s cradle that connects him with a big six-winged being overhead. This set a pattern for the entire Renaissance up to about 1580, when Barocci, the contemporary of Shakespeare and Cervantes in the most human age of letters, invented a model for all baroque painting by etching the event with the emphasis on the man. In order to fix attention on the theoplastic exhaustion of the seer he reduced the thing seen to a vanishing residue somewhere in the zenith. By suppressing the vision altogether and showing only the witness, some baroque painters used their unequaled mastery in por-

Sain Francis of Assisi receives the stigmata. Anonymous Florentine woodcut from Saint Bonaventura’s Aurea legenda beati Francisci, Florence, Giunta, 1509. Dick Fund, 1925

traying subtleties of expression to suggest what cannot be painted because it cannot be seen. At a time when newly discovered scientific laws were beginning to make this world seem more real than the world beyond, the artist’s safest course was to show only heaven or earth. But when he was obliged to include both of these ever more divided and irreconcilable worlds in the same picture, he had, as a Christian, to insist that the apparition was factual by focusing a strange, distinct light on every eyelash and button. The baroque painter had to bring evidence to prove what the mediaeval painter took for granted: that the vision is as real as the visionary.

El Greco’s Burial of the Count of Orgaz expresses once and for all the clash of absolutes between this world and the next. In the bottom half, among the earthy umbers and blacks and golds of chasubles and doublets, the body of the count, which sags inside its dark armor, is being lowered into its tomb. But aloft, in that other light that Saint Teresa could stare into wide-eyed, though it shone brighter than the sun, up aloft swirls and blows the terrible, cold, mauve storm that is Heaven.