HOLY HELPERS AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SAINTLY PATRONAGE AT THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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The term "patron saint" is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "[a] saint chosen or regarded as a protector of or intercessor for a person, place, occupation, etc."[1] And, indeed, a Google search of the term "patron saint" or browsing the related indices of printed dictionaries of saints, results in long and varied lists of categories that a saint can patronize. The list under the letter "A" on catholic.org, for example, begins with *AIDS care-givers*, *AIDS patients*, *Abandoned children*, *Abbeville (France)*, *Abdominal pains*, *Abingdon (England)*, *Abortion (protection against)*, *Abruzzi (region of Italy)*, *Academies (Roman Catholic)*, *Acadians (Cajuns)*, *Accountants* and so on.[2] The length and variety of such lists creates the impression that almost everything has a patron saint (or even more than one), and that patronage is quite a versatile relationship that can extend to a wide range of categories, including cities, regions, ethnic groups, organizations, professions, social conditions, and diseases.

The connection between saints and patronage is, of course, as old as their cult itself. But such all-encompassing lists are fundamentally a-historical. It is not that some of the items – like *AIDS patients* or *Cajuns* – cannot be pinned down to particular historical periods, but such lists tend to conceal the historical development of the concept and phenomenon of saintly patronage itself.

This paper focuses on one specific kind of relationship between saints and their worshippers, which I will call *auxiliary patronage* – patronage of people in need of help to survive a calamity, recover from an illness or resolve a more mundane problem like finding lost objects. The holy men and women who specialized in such particular forms of assistance will be called *helper saints* or *holy helpers*. The general category of helper saints has received little scholarly attention, even if

[1] This article is based on research I conducted at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton with the support of the Herodotus Fund and it was completed with the help of a grant I received from the Research Support Scheme of the Central European University in connection with a research project (NN 81446) of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA). I'm grateful to Gábor Farkas Kiss and Gábor Klaniczay for their comments on various versions of this text, as well as to Dorottya Uhrin for helping me with the literature on the cult of female martyrs. www.oed.com (last accessed April 8, 2016).

[2] www.catholic.org/saints/patron.php (last accessed April 8, 2016).

individual saints belonging to this category – or some of their groupings, like the fourteen holy helpers – are well-researched. Within the limits of this paper I will not be able to supply all the missing results, but I can at least attempt to clarify some of the conceptual and chronological issues involved.

After a short overview of the development of some of the major forms of saintly patronage in medieval Europe, I will jump to the very end of the period, when auxiliary patronage can be identified as a theological problem on its own, and then proceed back in time to show how this situation came about. Finally, I will look at the associations between saints and their supposed expertise in the cult of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, the *Legenda aurea* and other hagiographical sources.

Forms of Saintly Patronage

From the fourth century onwards, the saints in their newly emerging cults, orchestrated by local bishops, took on, in the already classic interpretation of Peter Brown,

> all the features of a late-Roman *patronus*. The saint was the good *patronus* … whose intercessions were successful, whose wealth was at the disposal of all, whose *potentia* was exercised without violence and to whom loyalty could be shown without constraint. The bishop could stand for him. Lavish building, splendid ceremonial, and even feasting at such a shrine washed clean the hard facts of accumulated wealth and patronage, as they were now practiced in real life, even by bishops, a short distance away within the walls of the city of the living.[3]

The clients of such a heavenly patron and his representative on earth, the bishop, were the residents of a city, or a part of a city, including some of the surrounding areas.

With the proliferation of rural monasteries having their own local saints and the emergence of landownership as the primary basis of power in the early Middle Ages, many of the inhabited territories were distributed among patron saints in an almost literal sense. As is well known, the landed properties of ecclesiastical institutions around the grave or some important relic of a particular saint were frequently called *his* lands, like *terra sancti Benedicti* or *patrimonium sancti Petri*, and donations to ecclesiastical institutions were frequently given to the saint

[3] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 41.

himself.[4] To be sure, one reason for this is that the saint stood for the institution as differentiated from the individuals constituting it, that is, for something like its *juridical person*, but such donations to the saint himself should not be seen as mere formalities. For instance, considerable land donations to some great monasteries of the Carolingian period were not connected to their foundation but to their reception of significant relics. Thus, the royal messengers who carried its foundation charter to the monastery of Fulda read it aloud to a gathering of local noblemen and exhorted them on behalf of the king to donate land to the monks. Based on charter evidence, however, the local nobility remained largely deaf to the royal exhortation until the arrival of the relics of St. Boniface after his death ten years later, in 754. In a similar vein, it was the immediate aftermath of the translation of the relics of the Roman martyr St. Nazarius to Lorsch in 765, and not the foundation of the monastery three years earlier that saw an upsurge in land donations.[5]

Apart from donations, such a territorial logic of patronage – as Thomas Head, for example, has shown concerning the diocese of Orléans between Carolingian times and the twelfth century – was modeled on reciprocal personal relationships. In the words of Head, it:

> relied on an explicit or implicit contract between the 'father' and his servants. The monks and canons who had vowed to serve their patrons had become the legal equivalent of serfs. Many of the inhabitants of the property of a monastery were also part of the *familia* of that community's patron. They were supposed to refrain from work on their patron's feasts. ... [They] were bound to the service of their saints just as they were to their overlords. When they did not render proper service to their patron, they were forced to pay a fine or an alternate form of service. ... If much was expected of both the monks and the *familia* of the saints, those saints were expected to uphold their end of the bargain as well. A formula copied at Fleury around the year

[4] Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century: Mentalities and Social Orders*, trans. Patrick J. Geary (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 326–327; Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 221–222.

[5] Matthew Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middles Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

> 1100 promised that the serfs who belonged to [St.] Benedict would be provided *securitas* [by the saint].[6]

Security – and similar legally binding promises found by Head in other contemporary documents – included all kinds of assistance to worshipers. Local patron saints were deemed to require personal loyalty in exchange for help in every trouble. Head compares this relationship to feudal ties, but it also seems to show a parallel with predominantly autarchic economies. Just as it was mostly local produce that inhabitants of a region lived on, it was the local saint they turned to with most of their problems.

This territorial concept of patronage did not disappear in later periods, of course, and it lives on until today in the cult of urban, regional, and national patron saints. Its intensity must have, nevertheless, diminished from the later Middle Ages onwards. In a sermon for the feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary/Thuringia in 1382, the renowned theologian Henry of Langenstein (1325–1397), made the following remark:

> It should be known that, in accordance with the general opinion of theological tradition, angels undertook the care and governance of regions and races, cities and men. Similarly, the saints of God are entrusted with the spiritual care of and power over peoples, regions, and cities where they happily lived and were buried, and [where] they left their relics, shined forth through miracles and bequeathed their examples of sanctity or, at least, where through the consecration of churches in their honour they had been received as patrons or patronesses. Consequently, when any race, city and country is placed under the rule of these leaders who immediately minister to the supreme governor, with good reason every race venerates its saintly men and women as its own gods and goddesses with enhanced solemnity, prays for them with greater devotion, and fears their anger and resentment more. Hence I am astounded with great wonder how it could happen that the most blessed Elizabeth, goddess of Hesse and divine patroness of Germany, is not venerated everywhere in these regions, and even where she is, is not celebrated as gloriously as she deserves.[7]

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[6] Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orleans, 800–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 188, 189, and 190.

[7] Henry of Langenstein, *Sermo de sancta Elisabeth in die natali, Darmstadt, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, 792, f. 117r–v: "Sciendum quod, iuxta communem theologice tradicionis assercionem, angeli susceperunt regionum et gencium, urbium et hominum curam et gubernandi presidenciam. Ita et*

Langenstein seems to suggest that in some way or another (not excluding the possibility of transferring relics from one place or church to the other) the assignment of territorial or ethnic units to specific patron saints follows some sort of a divine plan or fits into a divine order of the world.[8] His remark, however, also implies that the devotion to such patron saints, in spite of the pre-established harmony between the heavenly government and earthly territories, can wear out over time. The intensity of devotion to territorial patron saints probably lasted longer in those cases where the territory under the auspices of such "gods and goddesses" – as Langenstein put it – coincided with autonomous polities, as in the Italian city-states.[9]

Whether the cult of territorial patron saints remained intense or not, however, other forms of heavenly patronage were juxtaposed to it. I will leave aside dynastic patronage, which was as old as territorial patronage and frequently overlapped it, as well as the problem of personal patron saints, which also goes back to the times of the earliest martyr cults.[10] In contrast to these well-studied forms, the saintly patronage of crafts, trades, and professions remains as neglected as the cult of holy helpers, hence I can mention it here only briefly for the sake of conceptual precision. Released from specific territories

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sanctis Dei cura est spiritualis et commissa potestas super populos, regiones et urbes ubi feliciter conversati, sepulti sunt et reliquias dimiserunt, claruerunt miraculis, et exempla sanctitatis reliquerunt, aut certe ubi per ecclesiarum in honore ipsorum consecracionem in patronos vel patronas recepti sunt. Ergo cum his presidibus, summo gubernatori immediate subministrantibus, gens quelibet, urbs et patria subdatur regenda, racionabiliter quelibet gens sanctos suos et sanctas, tamquam deos et deas proprios, maiori solemnitate veneratur, ampliori devocione invocat et eorum iras et offensas plus formidat. Proinde est quod grandi ammiracione stupeo quomodo evenerit, quod beatissima Elyzabeth Hassie dea et Germanie diva patrona in eisdem regionibus nec ubique veneratur, nec ubi colitur, tam gloriose ut meruit celebratur. For a longer quotation and context, see Ottó Gecser, *The Feast and the Pulpit: Preachers, Sermons and the Cult of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, 1235–ca. 1500*, Medioevo francescano, Saggi 15 (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo [CISAM], 2012), 133–135. If not indicated otherwise, all emendations and translations of the sources are mine, O.G.

[8] For the translation of relics according to the intentions or with the permission of the saints and, thus, redrawing the map of *patrocinia*, see Patrick J. Geary, Furta Sacra: *Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, 2nd ed, rev. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), esp. 113–114 and 124–125.

[9] See Diana Webb, *Patrons and Defenders: The Saints in the Italian City-States* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996).

[10] For dynastic patronage, see Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, trans. Éva Pálmai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For personal patronage, see Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 50–68; and Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 233–238.

in a pattern of recurrent linkages between saints and craftsmen, tradesmen or professionals, occupational patronage was supported by and also contributed to the diffusion of certain cults as well as to the crystallization of occupational identities throughout Europe. Thus, St. Crispin was frequently the patron saint of cobblers or shoemakers, St. Eligius of goldsmiths or other metalworkers, St. Luke of painters, and St. Sebastian of archers, even if such correspondences between saints and occupations were colored by historical contingencies, local traditions, and the influence of more universal, all-encompassing cults. For instance, in 1508 at Saschiz/Keisd/Szászkézd in Transylvania, the altar of the Holy Cross and St. Sebastian belonged to the shoemakers' apprentices, while in late medieval Bruges the altars of the basket makers, coopers' apprentices, ships' carpenters, shoemakers' apprentices, tapestry weavers, and wine-measurers were all dedicated to the Virgin Mary alone.[11]

It is far more important for my argument, however, that the recurrent linkages between saints and craftsmen, tradesmen, and professionals presupposed the formation of similar occupational categories and associations everywhere and, hence, could not arise very early – probably not much earlier than the thirteenth century. The emergence of these linkages may have been related to the diffusion of centralized international religious orders like the Cistercians and the Carthusians, and later the mendicant orders, where the cult of the founder saint was reiterated in each local community and could serve as a model for similar patterns.

Criticisms of the Cult of Holy Helpers

Between the summer of 1516 and the beginning of the next year – not long before the completion of the ninety-five theses on the eve of All Saints in 1517 – Martin Luther delivered a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments in the castle church of Wittenberg. The German original of the sermons is now lost but a revised Latin version – in a form rather close to late medieval Decalogue commentaries for pastoral use – was published in Latin in the summer of 1518.[12]

[11] For Saschiz/Keisd/Szászkézd, see Fredrich Müller, *Deutsche Sprachdenkmäler aus Siebenbürgen: Aus schriftlichen Quellen des zwölften bis sechzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Sibiu/Hermannstadt: Steinhaussen, 1864), 161; for Bruges, see Andrew Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges, c. 1300–1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 321–328 (Appendix 5).

[12] Edited as *Decem praecepta Wittenbergensi praedicata populo. 1518*, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [henceforth: WA], 80 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–1929), 1:398–521. For Luther's preaching activity in Wittenberg between 1514 and 1517, see Martin Brecht,

By the beginning of the 1520s, it was available in six Latin, five German, two Dutch, and one Czech editions. It is the first work of Luther translated into a foreign vernacular.[13]

The text itself looks quite traditional. Just like a typical preacher of the later Middle Ages, Luther divided his subjects in parts and parts of parts through a range of interrelated conceptual distinctions, thus creating a labyrinth of arguments that his readers or listeners were to explore with his guidance. Even the fact that he preached in German but published his sermons in Latin aligns him with authorial strategies of preceding centuries.

It was much less usual, however, that in expanding on the first commandment, Luther considered not only superstition as a major concern within its purview, but the cult of the saints as well. His starting point is the following distinction: "The saints are venerated and invoked by us in two ways. In the first, for worldly and bodily things alone … In the second, saints are venerated truly and inwardly."[14] Those exhibiting the first kind of devotion "venerate the saints falsely – or, rather, [venerate] themselves in the saints – as they look for what belongs to them and not to God, and thus almost transform the saints into idols for themselves."[15] Luther then goes on to elucidate the nature of this false belief and practice by discussing "some of those saints whose superstitious cult is known to everyone."[16]

He examines, at shorter or greater length, the cult of twenty-two (from the second edition only twenty-one) saints divided into male and female groups: Anthony the Abbot, Sebastian, Martin, Roche, Valentine, Vincent, Christopher,

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Martin Luther: Sein Weg zur Reformation, 1483–1521 (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1981), 150–154. Examples of late medieval Decalogue commentaries include: Johannes Nider (d. 1438), *Praeceptorium divinae legis, sive expositio Decalogi* (Paris: Ulrich Gering, 1482); Hendrik Herp (d. 1477), *Speculum aureum decem praeceptorum Dei* (Mainz: Peter Schoeffer, 1474); and Gottschalk Hollen (d. ca. 1481), *Praeceptorium divinae legis* (Cologne: Johann Guldenschaff, 1481).

[13] See the editor's introduction in WA, 1:394–398. The published German version (see footnote 17 below) is a translation from the Latin.

[14] WA, 1:411 and 419: *Duobus modis coluntur a nobis et invocantur sancti. Primo propter temporalia et corporalia duntaxat. … Secundo coluntur sancti vere et interne*. For an analysis of the first sermon focusing not on the saints but on more traditional forms of superstition, see Uwe Rieske, "Glaube und Aberglaube: Luthers Auslegung des Ersten Gebotes 1516/18," *Lutherjahrbuch* 69 (2002): 21–46; for Luther's pre-Reformation views on saints in a broader context, see Jörg Haustein, "Luthers frühe Kritik an der Heiligenverehrung und ihre Bedeutung für das ökumenische Gespräch," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 124 (1999): 1187–1204.

[15] Ibid., 411: *hii false colunt sanctos, immo magis seipsos in illis, qua sua quaerunt, non ea quae dei sunt, ac ideo sanctos prope in idola sibi transformant*.

[16] Ibid., 412: *Atque quo haec clarius intelligantur, aliquot enumeremus sanctorum, quorum supersticiosus cultus omnibus notus est*.

Lawrence, Florian, Vitus, Erasmus, Lewis of Toulouse, Wendelin, Anne, Barbara, Katherine, Dorothy, Margaret, Juliana, Odile, Apollonia, and Scholastica.[17] The common characteristic of this diverse company is auxiliary patronage. Each of these saints is invoked against one particular problem: Anthony against the so-called St. Anthony's fire (usually identified with ergotism), Sebastian and Martin against the plague, Valentine against falling sickness (epilepsy), Christopher against sudden death, Lawrence and Florian against fire and so on.

In the eyes of Luther, their association with specific kinds of help dwarfs their real sanctity, their virtues, and exemplary lives, which should be the focus of their veneration. The demand for specialized intercession also diminishes the dignity of the saints: "We Christians are not ashamed to divide up worldly business among the saints in such a way as if they had been made our servants or craftsmen's apprentices."[18] Finally, the auxiliary patronage of saints creates the false impression that – instead of God – they themselves are responsible for the assistance they provide, which leads us to paganism: "We would go back to the chaos of Roman gods and rebuild some sort of a Pantheon, and all this for nothing else but to be well in his world."[19] In other words, the main target of Luther's most detailed (pre-Reformation) criticism of the cult of the saints was their alleged specialization, ultimately linked to paganism and an entirely materialistic conception of their significance.

After expounding his detailed critique of auxiliary patronage, Luther examines and refutes three possible objections against his views. According to the last one, "some are convinced (as Jean Gerson thinks) that gifts of this sort are distributed among saints in heaven in the same way as they had different spiritual gifts on earth."[20] To this objection he gives the following answer:

> I know their new opinion [*nova opinio*], that just as in their lives the saints were given various spiritual gifts, so now in heaven, too, they have various capacities of help. But I cannot see how it could be proven if not by arguing from similarity, which is a very harmful [type

[17] Ibid., 412–416. Roche is in the first edition only but Sebastian Münster's German translation also includes him; see *Der x gebot ein nutzliche erklerung: Durch den hochgelerten D. Martinum Luther Augustiner ordens beschriben und gepredigt, geistlichen und weltlichen dienende; Item ein schoene predig von den vii todsünden, auch durch in beschriben* (Basel: Adam Petri, 1520), f. 14r.
[18] WA, 1:415: *non pudet nos Christianos ita in sanctos partiri negocia rerum temporalium, ac si essent nunc facti servi et mancipia artificum.*
[19] Ibid.: *Ut rursus Romanorum illud Cahos*[!] *deorum et quoddam pantheon denuo extruxerimus, atque hoc ipsum non pro alia causa, quam ut hic tantummodo bene habeamus.*
[20] Ibid., 417: *nonnullis sit persuasum (ut Ioannes Gerson sentit) sanctis in caelo sic esse distributa dona eiusmodi, sicuti in terris habuerunt dona diversa spiritus.*

> of] argument in matters of faith. For what else does the devil do, when he appears as an angel of light, if not arguing from similarity? ... Thus be it remarked that all saints can do everything.[21]

Apart from suggesting that specialization, if it exists, cannot be known save from misleading similarities, he also makes two chronologically interesting references: one to Jean Gerson, the great theologian and chancellor of the university of Paris, and another to the novelty of the opinion attributed to him and rejected here. Of course, *nova opinio* can also mean strange or unusual opinion, but at any rate Luther seems to think that the theological view of positing a division of labor among saints in heaven is new or unusual in his times; even its supposedly most famous advocate had died less than a hundred years earlier.

It appears, however, that regarding Gerson, Luther's memory betrayed him. In Gerson's sermon for All Saints' Day *Exultabunt sancti in gloria* ("The saints shall rejoice in glory," Ps. 149:5) an allegorical female figure, a certain *Studiositas Speculatrix* ("Speculative Curiosity") interrupts him and asks eighteen questions about the condition of saints in heaven. None of these questions or the answers given to them by Gerson formulates or implies the view attributed to him by Luther.[22] Moreover, in his treatise *De directione cordis* ("On the direction of the heart") Gerson explicitly mentions questionable practices related to the cult of saints, such as:

> That one gift or another, like a rooster for boys and a hen for girls, should be offered to St. Christopher and to St. John the Baptist; that countless particular rites are to be performed to St. Hubert against the bite of a rabid dog, which have no rational foundation whatsoever. And, hence, such ritual borders on superstition, because it is nothing else but false religion. It is called false because it is without reason or effect. It is a similar case that St. Anthony has more power to cure sacred fire than other saints. Or again that in this church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, her power is greater to perform miracles than in

[21] Ibid., 418: *Scio novam illam opinionem eorum, quod sicut in vita sancti diversis donis spiritus erant dotati, ita et nunc in caelo eosdem habere differentes gratias auxiliandi: sed ego non video, quomodo id possint probare nisi arguendo a simili, quod argumentum in iis quae sunt fidei est nocentissimum. Quid enim aliud facit diabolus, quum in angelum lucis sese transfigurat, quam quod arguit a simili? ... Ideo sciendum est, quod omnes sancti omnia possunt.*

[22] Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux, 11 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1960–1973), 5:265–278. For the context, see Brian Patrick McGuire, *Jean Gerson and the Last Medieval Reformation* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 65.

> another; and this is because of a certain image of hers, or because of a customary pilgrimage; and so on in countless similar cases.[23]

Thus, Gerson regards the invocation of holy helpers as superstitious but he lumps it together with a range of other questionable practices concerning the cult of the saints. For him it is not a phenomenon on its own. It is also striking in Gerson's approach that, in contrast to Luther, he regards these practices as irrational and not as sinful in the first place. In other words, Gerson seems to relegate the problem to the religiosity of the uneducated folk.

This is not the position Luther had in mind. But an important theologian much closer in both time and place to him did indeed advocate the view Luther attributed to Gerson. In his sermon for the feast of St. Sebastian, Gabriel Biel made the following general comment on the capacities of holy helpers:

> Saints, who were distinguished with unique gifts and victories by God on Earth, are endowed with specific privileges in the state of glory as well, in order to obtain similar gifts and victories for those who venerate them. Whence all saints may be universally invoked for each and every necessity, it is not less so that one may have recourse to specific [saints] in order to procure specific kinds of help, as is proven by the assistances and revelations in the most trustworthy histories written by the holy fathers.[24]

Interestingly enough, Biel does not attribute this view to Gerson or to any particular authority. In my interpretation this is because he provides here nontraditional theological justification for a practice that by the end of the fifteenth century had become quite widespread in all social milieus. That it was not a phenomenon restricted to the uneducated folk is already evident from

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[23] Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, 8:108: *quod offeratur tale munus vel tale, sicut gallus pro pueris, gallina pro puellis beato Christophoro et beato Joanni Baptistae; quod ad sanctum Hubertum pro morsu canis rabidi, fiant innumerae particulares observantiae quae nullam videntur habere institutionis rationem; et ita talis ritus transit in superstitionem quae nihil aliud est quam vana religio. Dicitur autem vana, quia caret ratione vel effectu. Similiter est de hoc quod sanctus Antonius habeat plus virtutis in curando sacrum ignem quam alii sancti. Rursus quod in hac ecclesia dedicata beatae Virgini, ipsius virtus sit potentior ad faciendum miracula quam in altera; et hoc ratione talis imaginis suae vel solitae peregrinationis; et ita de similibus absque numero.* See also McGuire, *Jean Gerson*, 272–273.

[24] Gabriel Biel, *Sermones dominicales de tempore tam hyemales quam estivales* ... (Augsburg: Rynman, 1515), f. 382r: *Sancti qui singularibus donis et victoriis in terris a Deo sublimati sunt, etiam in gloria specialibus privilegiis obtinenda similia suis cultoribus sunt donati. Unde licet omnes sancti per singulis necessitatibus catholice invocari possunt, non minus pro specialibus impetrandis auxiliis ad speciales recursus haberi potest, ut probant auxilia et revelationes in probatissimis historiis a sanctis patribus descriptis.*

Luther's sermon. With reference to St. Christopher and his alleged specialization in preventing sudden death through his images, usually placed on the outer walls of churches or other buildings, Luther quotes a Latin mnemonic verse:

> *Christophere sancte, virtutes tibi tantae:*
> *Qui te mane videt, nocturno tempore ridet,*
> *Nec Satanas caedat, nec mors subitanea laedat.*[25]
>
> (O Christopher the saint, your powers are so great:
> Who looks at you in the morning is cheerful at night,
> Satan does not smite him, nor sudden death hurt him.)

This verse is probably not the Latin version of an originally German one because the German translator of Luther's sermons on the Ten Commandments, Sebastian Münster, renders it in prose.[26] In other words, a belief in the protective capacities of images representing St. Christopher was also advertized for those on the higher rungs of the social ladder, presumably for school children, who by memorizing the verse could more easily develop the habit of looking devotedly at all such images when coming and going in the streets. As to the *origin* of certain auxiliary patronages, however, Luther suggested phonetic-etymological explanations which he contrasted with the written lives of the saints, implying a lowly birth for these beliefs:

> Sebastian [is called] 'Sanct Pastian' [or *Bastian*, which sounds like 'Pestian' from *Pest*] as if he worked against the plague alone, while nothing can be read about pestilence in his Life. … Now, St. Roche has a name that in German sounds like vengeance and anger [*Rache*], as if he were useful to avert God's vengeance. … Valentine, the prefect of falling sickness: Since we have not read about him to have had anything to do with this disease, I would almost swear that his being related to such assistance comes from an allusion in German. For *vallen* means 'to fall,' which alludes to Valentine as closely as possible. It is not surprising either that superstitious foolish women [*mulierculae*], led by the same [kind of] allusion, have similarly assigned St. Vincent to finding lost things, for in German 'to find' is *vinden*.[27]

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[25] WA, 1:413.

[26] *Der x gebot ein nutzliche erklerung*, f. 14v: "welcher in am morgen ansicht, der lachet zů obent, und mag im weder der Boeß find noch der gehe tod schaden thůn."

[27] WA, 1:412 (Sebastian and Roch are missing from the second and subsequent Latin editions): *Sic et Sebastianus "sanct pastian" quasi pro peste idem valeat solus, cum nihil in eius vita de pestilentia legatur. ... Iam sanctus Rochius nomen habet, quod alemanice vindictam sonat et iram, quasi*

The superstitious *mulierculae* are not meant to represent the worshipers of holy helpers in general but those who need to find things at home on a regular basis. It seems that this is why the beneficiaries of auxiliary patronage are gendered here in contrast to other cases (with the exception of childbirth, of course).[28]

In an already mature phase of the Lutheran movement, in a passage of his *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* written in 1530, Melanchton makes explicit the point that the cult of holy helpers was a socially undifferentiated phenomenon: "Among theologians this error also prevails: that a special sphere of activity has been assigned to each saint. Thus Anne bestows riches; Sebastian fends off the plague; Valentine heals epilepsy; George protects knights." Melanchton's words seem to echo Luther's invective in the *Large Catechism* of 1529 against "what *we* used to do in our blindness under the papacy," in terms of which "[a]nyone who had a toothache fasted and called on St. Apollonia; those who worried about their house burning down appealed to St. Laurence as their patron; if they were afraid of the plague, they made a vow to St. Sebastian or Roch."[29]

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ipse ideo utilis sit vindictam dei avertere. ... Valentinus, morbi caduci praefectus: quem cum nihil legimus egisse cum hoc morbo, prope iurarem ex allusione germanica eum in huius auxilii sortem venisse. Nam cadere "vallen" significat, quod ad Valentinum quam proxime alludit. Nec mirum, cum et sanctum Vincentium supersticiosae mulierculae deputaverint rebus perditis inveniendis, eadem ductae allusione: Germanice enim invenire "vinden" dicitur.

[28] The same holds for a comparable passage in Thomas More's *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), where a series of first person plurals ("we") is broken by a reference to "women" – again in the context of finding lost objects: "Saint Eligius we make a horse-doctor, and must let our horse run unshod and injure his hoof rather than shoe him on his feast-day, which in that respect we must more religiously keep high and holy than Easter day. And because one smith is too few at a forge, we set Saint Hippolytus to help him. And on Saint Stephen's day we must bleed all our horses with a knife because Saint Stephen was killed with stones. Saint Apollonia we make a dentist and may speak to her of nothing but sore teeth. Saint Sitha women appoint to find their keys. Saint Roche we appoint to attend to the plague because he had a bubo." Modernized version quoted from a longer excerpt in Brett Edward Whalen, ed., *Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 360; for the original version, see *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies,* ed. Thomas M. C. Lawler, Germain Marc'Hadour, and Richard C. Marius, bk. II, ch. 10, in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, 15 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 6:226–227.

[29] Philipp Melanchton, *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, art. 21, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles P. Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 242; Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, ibid., 387 (the italics are mine, O.G.). For early Protestant views on the saints, see Carol Piper Heming, *Protestants and the Cult of the Saints in German- Speaking Europe, 1517–1531*, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 65 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2003).

The pronoun in the first person plural, *we*, used by Luther is not accidental. In a table talk of 1539 he himself tells the story of how he became an Augustinian friar. On the way to Erfurt, being a student there, he was caught by a terrible storm close to his destination near Stotternheim in 1505; he was so afraid that he cried out to St. Anne, who was believed to protect from tempests: "Help St. Anne, I want to be a monk!" But fortunately, at least in Luther's retrospective rationalization, God understood his vow not in German but in Hebrew with the word "Anne" meaning "by grace, not by law" (*sub gratia, non legaliter*) and thus he was right in leaving the cloister later.[30]

It may well have been a vertical diffusion of the cult of holy helpers up the social hierarchy that provoked more focused criticism of this phenomenon from the turn of the fifteenth century onward. Luther's argument in his sermon on the first commandment was probably informed by the opinion of Erasmus in *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier* published in 1503:

> One person greets Christopher each day, but only if he sees his image. To what end? Evidently because he is convinced that thus he will be preserved from a violent death that day. Another worships a certain Rocco, but why? Because he thinks that this saint will ward off the plague from his body. Another mumbles special little prayers to Barbara or George to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. Someone else fasts in honour of Apollonia so that he will not have toothaches. Still another makes visits to statues of holy Job to escape the itch. Some assign a certain portion of their profits to the poor so that their merchandise will not be lost in shipwreck. A candle is lit to Hiero for the recovery of lost goods. In short, in this way we

[30] *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe; Tischreden*, 6 vols. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1912–1921), no. 4707, 4:440: *16. Iulii, in die Alexii, dicebat:* Heute ist die jerige zeit, do ich in das kloster zu Erffurt gezogen. — *Et incipiebat recitare historiam quomodo vovisset votum, nam cum fuisset vix 14 diebus ante in itinere et fulmine prope Stotternheim non longe ab Erphordia ita consternatus, ut in terrore dixisset:* Hilff du, S. Anna, ich wil ein monch werden! *Sed Deus tum Hebraice meum votum intellexit: Anna, id est sub gratia, non legaliter*. Johannes Agricola also recalled that in his youth, when he was afraid, he turned to the saints: "Wenn ich in Aengsten war, so lief ich zu den Heiligen. … Da mußte mich St. Barbara, wenn ich ihren Abend fastete und ihren Tag feierte, schützen, daß ich nicht ohne das Sacrament stürbe. St. Rochus mußte dienen für die Pestilenz, St. Sebastian für die Schüsse, St. Anna selbdritte, wenn ich ihr Lichtlein aufsteckte, und St. Erasmus mußte reich machen. St. Gertrud beschert gute Herberge, St. Leonhard und St. Niclas helfen vor Gefängnis." Quoted in Gustav Kawerau, *Johann Agricola von Eisleben: Ein Beitrag zur Reformationsgeschichte* (Berlin: Hertz, 1881), 9.

> have appointed certain saints to preside over all the things we fear or desire. These differ with each nation, so that in France Paul has the same importance that Hiero has for us, while James and John are not equally powerful in all places. If this sort of piety is not turned from mere consideration of material advantages or disadvantages and redirected towards Christ, then far from being Christian it is not much removed from the superstition of those who pledged a tenth part of their substance to Hercules so that they might become rich or a cock to Aesculapius in order to recover from some illness or sacrificed a bull to Neptune for a safe crossing.[31]

Just like Luther, Erasmus separates the cult of holy helpers from other forms of superstition and sees the main problem with it in materialism and paganism; but unlike the later reformer, he is either ignorant of or uninterested in denouncing the theologians who endorse the belief in auxiliary patronage. Erasmus, however, makes it clear that the phenomenon was not restricted to the German-speaking territories and that the same function could be assigned to

[31] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, trans., ann. C. Fantazzi, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 66 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 8–127, at 63–64. Erasmus was not against the invocation of saints in all its forms. In a letter written from Paris in 1497, six years before publishing the *Handbook*, he claims to have recovered from quartan fever "not by a physician's help (though I had recourse to one) but by the aid of Ste Geneviève alone, the famous virgin, whose bones, preserved by the canons regular, daily radiate miracles and are revered: nothing is more worthy of her, or has done me more good." In the same letter he also attributes the end of an unceasing rainfall in the city to the intercession of Geneviève. In another letter, three years later, he writes with reference to his fears of relapsing into the same fever that "I trust in Ste. Geneviève, whose ready help I have more than once enjoyed." See Hilmar M. Pabel, *Conversing with God: Prayer in Erasmus' Pastoral Writings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 74–75. Erasmus may have considered personal or territorial patronage easier to "redirect toward Christ" (as he urged in the *Handbook*) than auxiliary patronage, because focusing on one saint provides a higher chance of identifying with him or her and, thus, of not seeking intercession alone but trying to follow his or her saintly example as well. "No devotion is more acceptable and proper to the saints than striving to imitate their virtues. Would you like to win the favor of Peter and Paul? Imitate the faith of the one and the charity of the other, and you will accomplish more than if you were to dash off to Rome ten times. Would you like to pay the greatest homage to Francis? You are arrogant, you are a worshipper of money, you are quarrelsome. Make this gift to the saint: Control your feelings and be more modest after the example of Francis; despise sordid gain and covet the goods of the mind. Abandon your contentiousness and conquer evil with good. That saint will value this honour more than if you were to light a hundred candles before his shrine." Erasmus, *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier*, 71–72.

different saints depending on local customs as in the case of the Frisian (originally Irish) St. Hiero in the Netherlands and St. Paul in France.

Before Erasmus, the status of auxiliary patronage as a problem in its own right does not seem evident. Gerson was not the only one who tended to lump it together with other forms of superstitious beliefs and practices in the cult of saints. At the diocesan synod of Brixen/Bressanone in 1455, Nicolaus Cusanus forbade, that "*superstitiosa* about St. Blaise, Barbara, Katherine, Dorothy, Margaret, and so on, contained in the *legenda lombardica* be preached to the people."[32] Sherry Reames has pointed out that the Lives of these five saints in the *Golden Legend* seem to have only one "superstitious thing" in common: All of them attribute auxiliary patronages with divine approbation to the saints.[33]

Whether this is the only possible interpretation or not, the synod returned to the problem of saints and superstition once again. According to a note appended to the constitutions, Cusanus, having experienced great uncertainty among the priests of his diocese about which feasts of saints are to be observed and how, made a thorough inquiry into local ways and came up with a scheme of four types of feasts. The first type is observed "by written law, the second by general custom of the clergy and the people, the third by a particular custom of certain places, the fourth by one's own consideration or superstition rather than some kind of divine adoration."[34] This scheme was meant to reflect local norms and to serve as a basis for Cusanus' rather strict guidelines in the matter. The first two types are mandatory. The feasts of

> the third [type] are neither mandatory nor is their observance to be encouraged; but those who entrust themselves devoutly to God through

[32] Gustav Bickell, ed., *Synodi Brixinenses saeculi XV* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1880), 41: *Item inhibemus ... ne populo praedicentur superstitiosa, quae in legenda lombardica habentur de S. Blasio, Barbara, Catharina, Dorothea, Margaritha, etc.* For Cusanus' activity in Brixen/Bressanone, see Brian A. Pavlac, "Nicolaus Cusanus as Prince-Bishop of Brixen (1450–1464)," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 21 (1995): 131–153.

[33] Sherry L. Reames, *The* Legenda aurea: *A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 50 and 234, n. 15: "they promise in unequivocal terms that acts of devotion to the saints in question will magically guarantee one's deliverance from certain evils, among them illnesses, poverty, and damnation itself. … Typically these guarantees are requested by the saint just before his or her martyrdom and ratified at once by a voice from heaven." I will return to the role of the *Legenda aurea* in the proliferation of auxiliary patronages below.

[34] Bickell, ed., *Synodi Brixinenses*, 44–45: *prima ex jure scripto, secunda ex generali consuetudine cleri et populi, tertia ex particulari quadam consuetudine certorum locorum, quarta ex proprio sensu et superstitione potius, quam ex aliquo cultu latriae.*

> the intercession of these saints in their prayers, when participating in the divine office at least in the morning, before going to work, are regarded as acting laudably. ... The feasts of the fourth [type], however, must not be observed at all; should anyone observe them against this prohibition, he is not to be absolved by any priest but, as if having a wrong conception of the Catholic faith, is to be submitted to episcopal authority.[35]

The strictly forbidden fourth type looks like a mixture of problematic cases: (1) new or unusual holidays (in the sense of workless days) like the Fridays after Ascension and Corpus Christi; (2) relocations or repetitions of established feasts like celebrating St. Stephen, St. John and the Holy Innocents in the days after Resurrection and Pentecost; and (3) the observance of certain saints, occasionally through specific rituals (such as fasting), *because* of the auxiliary patronage connected to them, like the octave of St. Valentine against animal diseases and falling sickness, the octave of Epiphany and the feast of Sts. John and Paul against tempests, or St. George's day against fever.[36] Interestingly enough, none of the five saints whose Lives in the *Golden Legend* are said to contain "superstitious things" belong to the fourth type: Katherine is put in the second, Barbara, Blaise, and Margaret in the third, and Dorothy is not mentioned at all.

Thus, even if superstitious beliefs and practices in the cult of saints are a more serious issue here than in Gerson, for example, the problem of helper saints is not separated from its cognates – it is not a problem in its own right, let alone the main problem with attitudes to sanctity. Three years after the synod, in his arguably most important text on church reform, the *Reformatio generalis*, it is merely

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[35] Bickell, ed., *Synodi Brixinenses*, 45–46: *Tertia nec mandentur nec ad observandum exhortentur; laudabiliter tamen, facere perhibentur, qui saltem in mane, antequam ad labores divertant, divinis officiis interessendo per intercessionem illorum sanctorum precibus suis se Deo devote commendent. ... Quarta vero festa observari omnino prohibet, quae si quis contra hujusmodi prohibitionem observaverit, tamquam male sentiens in fide catholica non absolvatur ab aliquo sacerdote, sed ad auctoritatem episcopalem mittatur.* According to Adolph Franz, *Die Messe im deutschen Mittelalter: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Liturgie und des religiösen Volkslebens* (Freiburg: Herder, 1902), 297–298, Cusanus was exceptionally strict in this respect among his fellow German bishops.

[36] Bickell, ed., *Synodi Brixinenses*, 45: *Quarta, ut puta: octava S. Stephani et inventio eiusdem, [in cod. alt. deest:] OCTAVA EPIPHANIAE contra tempestates, Valentini contra morbum bestiarum et morbum caducum, feriae sextae post Ascensionis et Corporis Christi festa pro requie Domini, [in cod. alt. add. Johannis et Pauli contra tempestates,] sed et dies post dies Resurrectionis et Pentecostes in honore S. Stephani, Johannis et Innocentium, etiam observationes jejuniorum S. Gregorii contra febres et Achatii pro toto anno et similia.* The small caps and the additions in square brackets are mine (O.G.) but follow the critical apparatus of Bickell's edition.

the authenticity of relics and the material or worldly motivations behind their exhibition and worship that Cusanus highlights in connection to saints and their cults as issues to be investigated in the course of ecclesiastical visitations. Helper saints or auxiliary patronages are not even mentioned.[37]

In sum, by the beginning of the sixteenth century focused criticism of the cult of holy helpers, with recurrent arguments and saints adapted to local circumstances, became visible in various places in northern Europe. As noted above, Luther perceived the theological justification of the phenomenon, the theory of similarities, as new or unusual. Likewise, the criticism focused on auxiliary patronage itself seems to have been a novelty in the times of Erasmus and Luther as far as a set of arguments clearly distinguished from general objections against superstitions is concerned.

The reason behind such more focused criticism may well have been the wider diffusion of the cult of holy helpers, especially vertically, up the social ladder. An initially folkloric belief may have gradually become generally accepted, even among those of higher standing. Gerson still connected auxiliary patronage with the uneducated; Luther saw its origins in misinterpretations of saints' names based on vernacular words, but in his own times he – like Melanchton – seems to have regarded it as a socially undifferentiated phenomenon justified by theologians as well. In addition, Luther and other reformers tended to talk about the erroneous cult of holy helpers, with reference to the recent past, in the first person plural.

Such an upward spread of venerating saints for their specialized assistance is, however, not the only conceivable change that could have provoked more focused criticism. Another option was the proliferation of holy helpers, the increasing number of saints who were believed to exercise auxiliary patronage. This option is not incompatible with the upward spread hypothesis, but it is different. It implies that saints who had no specialization earlier gradually became holy helpers as well, or became holy helpers in the first place. I argue below that this is precisely what happened in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The Proliferation of Holy Helpers

According to an anonymous account first published in 1519, Hermann Leicht, the son of the shepherd of the Cistercian monastery of Langheim in Upper

[37] Nicholas of Cusa, "A General Reform to the Church," in *Writings on Church and Reform*, ed. and trans. Thomas M. Izbicki, The I Tatti Renaissance Library 33 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 550–591, at 572–575 (§.22).

Franconia, had a series of four visions in 1445–1446.[38] In the first two he merely saw a child out in a field who laughed at him and disappeared as he wanted to get closer, but in the third the child was already surrounded by fourteen other children who, responding to Hermann's inquiry, told him that: "We are the Fourteen Holy Helpers and we want to have a chapel and to rest there graciously, and should you be our servant, we want to be your servant, too."[39] This answer seems to have been enough for Hermann, as he posed no further questions about their identity. Shortly after the reported date of the visions, in 1448, a local chapel – the predecessor of the still extant eighteenth-century *Basilika Vierzehnheiligen* – was dedicated to the saints, who were by no means unknown in the area, even if membership in the group was not entirely stable. The most typical selection, the so-called *Normalreihe*, appeared in the extant sources around 1400. A Bavarian manuscript written in 1408, for example, contains the following prayer:

> George, Blaise, Erasmus and Pantaleon,
> Vitus, Christopher, Denis and Cyriacus,
> Achatius the Great, Eustace and Giles,
> With Margaret, with Barbara, with Katherine,
> Let them pray for us and make heavenly favors pour forth.[40]

It was also in the period around 1400 from which the earliest pictorial representations of the entire group have survived, but even the earliest incomplete image which may have been conceived as a representation of the group, in the

[38] The anonymous account is reprinted in the appendix of Klaus Guth, "Vierzehnheiligen und die Anfänge der Nothelferverehrung: Anatomie einer Wallfahrtsgenese," in *Kultur als Lebensform: Aufsätze und Vorträge*, 3 vols., ed. Elisabeth Roth (St. Ottilien: EOS, 1995–2009), 1:305–324.

[39] Guth, "Vierzehnheiligen," 323: "wir sein die viertzehn nothelffer/ vnd wöllen ein Cappeln haben/ auch gnediglich hie rasten/ vnnd biss unser diener/ so wöllen wir dein diener wieder sein."

[40] Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 26926, half title (the hand is identical to that of the main, dated content of the ms.): *Georgius Blasius Erasmus / Pantaleonque Vitus Christophorus / Dyonysius et Cyriacus Achatius / magnus Eustachius Egidiusque / Cum Margareta cum Barbara cum Katharina / Pro nobis orent et celica munera rorent*. Quoted in Josef Dünninger, "Sprachliche Zeugnisse über den Kult der Vierzehn Nothelfer im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert," in *Festschrift Matthias Zender: Studien zu Volkskultur, Sprache und Landesgeschichte*, 2 vols., ed. Edith Ennen and Günter Wiegelmann (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1972), 1:336–346 at 345. Two variants of the same prayer – once without the last line, once with an additional line and slight changes in the order of saints – have also survived in Clm 23435 and Clm 22237, both of which are difficult to date but are either contemporary or later; see Dünninger, "Sprachliche Zeugnisse," 344–346. For the interpretations of *magnus* in the prayer as a separate saint (a St. Magnus) or as an epithet, see ibid., and Walter Pötzl, "Die Verehrung

Dominican church of Regensburg, is no older than the 1320s.[41] It was primarily pilgrimage to *Vierzehnheiligen*, as the place of the visions came to be called, that contributed to a relatively speedy diffusion of the cult in Central Europe from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards.[42]

In the long-lasting research on the Fourteen Holy Helpers much effort has been invested in identifying the source of their cult with the method of finding the place where each individual saint of the *Normalreihe* was venerated before the middle of the fifteenth century. A rather widespread consensus holds Regensburg to have been this place but even this hypothesis seems to be rather sensitive to the way the veneration of the individual helpers is demonstrated and to what counts as veneration in this or that case.[43] For the present argument, however, it is not the birthplace of the *Normalreihe* that matters but the association of each saint with various auxiliary patronages.

The earliest references to the fourteen helpers as a group do not yet attribute any specialized assistance to them. Each of them could be invoked in any kind of trouble. In the vernacular legendary, *Der Heiligen Leben*, composed in Nuremberg around 1400, the Life of St. Erasmus ends with the following remark: "He is one of the fourteen helpers and may come indeed to the rescue of all people in all their necessities of the soul and the body."[44] Erasmus was not yet the helper specialized in intestinal diseases; he was one of the fourteen helpers who still help in everything – which, by the way, all saints are supposed to do. In other words, the constitution of the group and the beginnings of its veneration preceded the emergence of the auxiliary patronages associated with the member saints or, at least, these associations were not known to the early adopters of the cult and the original criterion behind the selection of saints was different. According to the hypothesis of Walter Pötzl, the cult of the Fourteen Holy Helpers may have originated in a list of relics placed in an altar in the course of its consecration.[45] Comparing the *Normalreihe* with the twenty-two saints discussed by Luther in his

der Vierzehn Nothelfer vor 1400," *Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* n.s. 23 (2000): 157–186, at 182–183.

[41] Engelbert Kirschbaum, ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, 8 vols. (Rome: Herder, 1968–1976), 8: 548.

[42] Guth, "Vierzehnheiligen," 320–322.

[43] For the most mature version of the Regensburg hypothesis, see Guth, "Vierzehnheiligen," 306–311; for a criticism, see Pötzl, "Die Verehrung."

[44] *Der Heiligen Leben: Der Sommerteil*, ed. Margit Brand et al., Texte und Textgeschichte 44 (Tübingen: Niemeyer,, 1996), 136: "wan er is der vierzehen nothelfer ainer vnd mag avch alln menschen wol zv helf kvmen jn alln irn noten an sel vnd an leib, alles daz si begern."

[45] Pötzl, "Die Verehrung," 185–186.

first Wittenberg sermon on the Decalogue, only six names are common to both lists: Christopher, Erasmus, Vitus, Barbara, Katherine, and Margaret. Thus, even in early-sixteenth-century Germany, not very far from its possible places of origin, the *Normalreihe* was not a ready-to-use set of examples for the phenomenon of auxiliary patronage.[46]

If the cult of the Fourteen Holy Helpers as a group seems neither to have originated in the phenomenon of auxiliary patronage nor to have been particularly representative of its late medieval scope, then one must look for the supposed growth of helper saints elsewhere. Of the forty-two men and women mentioned in various lists of holy helpers discussed above (see *Tables 1a* and *1b* for details), twenty-five appear in the original version of the *Legenda aurea* reconstructed by Paolo Maggioni.[47] Out of these twenty-five saints, only five are connected to some sort of auxiliary patronage in the same legendary: Blaise, Giles, Katherine, Leonard, and Margaret.

In the chapter *De Sancto Leonardo* – which, in fact, tells the lives and deeds of two closely related saints of the same name, Leonard of Limoges and Leonard of Corbigny – the first Leonard achieves his expertise, eventually demonstrated in many miracles, with royal support but without any single act of divine authorization, while the second Leonard is said to "have obtained [it] from God" without any specification of how or why. The martyrs (Blaise, Katherine, and Margaret) pray for it before their death and a celestial voice announces a positive answer. Giles receives it as an extra, without asking for it, as he is praying for the remission of a horrible unnamed crime of King Charles (the Great).[48]

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[46] In fact, I could find no medieval source that lists the auxiliary patronages of each and every saint of the *Normalreihe*; sources referred to in the literature are much later.

[47] Iacopo da Varazze, *Legenda Aurea: Con le miniature del codice Ambrosiano C 240 inf.*, rev. ed. and commentary Giovanni Paolo Maggioni (Florence: Sismel, 2008); henceforth: LA.

[48] Blaise (LA, 1:294): *Ipse autem orauit ad dominum ut quicumque pro infirmitate gutturis uel alia quacumque infirmitate eius patrocinia postularet, exaudiri continuo mereretur. Et ecce uox celis ad eum uenit quod sic fieret ut orauit.* Giles (LA 2:988): *Sequenti igitur dominica dum Egidius celebrans pro rege oraret, angelus domini eidem apparens cedulam super altare posuit in qua scriptum erat per ordinem regis peccatum et Egidii precibus iam dimissum, si tamen penitens et confitens ab illo deinceps abstineret. Adiunctumque erat in fine quod quisquis sanctum Egidium pro quocumque commisso inuocaret, si tamen ab illo desisteret eius meritis sibi remissum non dubitaret.* Katherine (LA, 2:1356 and 1358): *Que cum ad locum deducta fuisset, erectis in celum oculis orauit dicens: 'O spes et salus credentium, o decus et gloria uirginum! Ihesu, rex bone, obsecro te ut quicumque passionis mee memoriam egerit seu in exitu anime uel in quacumque necessitate me inuocauerit tue propitiationis consequatur effectum.' Factaque est vox ad eam dicens: 'Veni, dilecta mea, speciosa mea! Ecce, tibi celi ianua est aperta. Nam et hiis qui passionem tuam celebrauerint optata presidia promitto de celis.'* Leonard (LA, 2:1188): *Qui* [i.e., *Leonardus*] *a deo similiter impetrauit ut quicumque in carcere teneretur mox inuocato suo nomine*

Table 1a: Male saints included in various lists discussed here. For the 14 Holy Helpers (Normalreihe)*: see the text at footnote 40; for Agricola see footnote 30; for Erasmus see text at footnote 31; for Gerson see footnote 23; for the Legenda aurea (original version) see footnotes 47-48; for Luther see footnote 17; for Melanchton see footnote 29; for More see footnote 28; for the Synod of Brixen (Cusanus) see footnote 36. I have omitted saints whose auxiliary patronages were not named in the respective source with the exception of the Fourteen Holy Helpers* (Normalreihe). *A black dot preceding the name of the saint means that his or her Life is included in the original version of the* Legenda aurea *(without auxiliary patronage, in most cases).*

	MALE SAINTS	MENTIONED AS HOLY HELPERS BY/IN
1.	Achatius	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
2.	• Anthony	Gerson, Luther
3.	• Blaise	*Legenda aurea* (original version), 14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
4.	• Christopher	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*), Erasmus, Luther
5.	• Cyriacus	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
6.	• Denis	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
7.	Eligius	More
8.	Erasmus	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*), Luther, Agricola
9.	• Eustace	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
10.	Florian	Luther
11.	• George	14 Holy Helpers (Normalreihe), Synod of Brixen (Cusanus), Erasmus, Melanchton
12.	• Giles	*Legenda aurea* (original version), 14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
13.	Hiero	Erasmus
14.	Hippolytus	More
15.	Hubertus	Gerson
16.	Job	Erasmus
17.	• John and Paul	Synod of Brixen (Cusanus)
18.	• Leonard	*Legenda aurea* (original version), Agricola
19.	• Lawrence	Luther
20.	• Louis of Toulouse	Luther

solueretur." Margaret (LA, 1:692): *Illa autem impetrato orandi spatio pro se et suis persecutoribus necnon et pro eius memoriam agentibus et se inuocantibus deuote orauit addens ut quecumque in partu periclitans se inuocaret illesam prolem emitteret; factaque est uox de celo quod in suis se nouerit petitionibus exauditam.*

	MALE SAINTS	MENTIONED AS HOLY HELPERS BY/IN
21.	• Martin	Luther
22.	• Nicholas	Agricola
23.	Pantaleon	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*)
24.	Paul	Erasmus
25.	Roche	Erasmus, Luther, Agricola, More
26.	• Sebastian	Luther, Agricola, Melanchton
27.	• Stephen	More
28.	• Valentine	Synod of Brixen (Cusanus), Luther, Melanchton
29.	• Vincent	Luther
30.	• Vitus	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*), Luther
31.	Wendelin	Luther

Table 1b: Female saints included in various lists discussed here (see details of reference in Table 1a caption).

	FEMALE SAINTS	MENTIONED AS HOLY HELPERS BY/IN
32.	Anne	Luther, Agricola , Melanchton
33.	• Apollonia	Erasmus, Luther, More
34.	Barbara	14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*), Erasmus, Luther, Agricola
35.	Catherine	*Legenda aurea* (original version), 14 Holy Helpers (*Normalreihe*), Luther
36.	Gertrudis	Agricola
37.	Dorothy	Luther
38.	• Juliana	Luther
39.	• Margaret	*Legenda aurea* (original version), Luther
40.	Odile (Othilia)	Luther
41.	Scholastica	Luther
42.	Sitha	More

A closer look at these auxiliary patronages clarifies that not all of them imply specialized assistance to worshippers.[49] Katherine granted the gift of help "at the end of life or in any necessity." Anyone could invoke Giles for the remission of "any crime" if not committed again. Blaise has a more specific field of intercession, "diseases of the throat," but he is also a generalist who can be petitioned "for any other disease" as well. It is only Leonard and Margaret who

[49] See the quotations in footnote 48.

are endowed with real specializations: Release from captivity and protection of the newborn during birth.

In spite of not always being specific enough, all auxiliary patronages attached to these five saints in the *Legenda aurea* are rather old. The most widespread Latin *Passio* of St. Katherine (BHL 1663), composed between 784 and 1052/1087, already contains the pre-execution prayer for those who ask her intercession "at the end of life or in any difficulty."[50] The tenth-century Life of St. Giles (BHL 93), just as in the *Legenda aurea*, gives the story of the saint's receiving a letter from heaven with the postscript that "whoever invokes St. Giles because of any crime, as far as he does not commit it again, he can believe to have been pardoned by the Lord beyond doubt."[51] In the Latin Acts of St. Blaise, considered the oldest by the Bollandists (BHL 1370), the saint implores God before his death to ensure his capacity of help, if "some kind of prickle or a bone were stuck in the throat of any person or, similarly, if he were assailed by various diseases, distress, or danger, or suffered persecution."[52] The Latin Passion of St. Margaret called the

[50] "Passio S. Katerine: 'Vulgate' Version," in *Seinte Katerine: Re-Edited from MS Bodley 34 and other Manuscripts*, ed. S. R. T. O. d'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson, Early English Texts Society, Supplementary series 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 132–203 at 201–202: *Quod cum spiculator annueret, ipsa, eleuatis in celum oculis, orauit, dicens: 'O decus et salus credentium, o spes et gloria uirginum, Iesu bone, gratias tibi ago, qui me intra collegium ancillarum tuarum connumerare dignatus es. Fac ergo hanc cum ancilla tua, obsecro, misericordiam, ut quicumque in laudem et gloriam tuam passionis mee memoriam egerint, siue in exitu anime sue aut etiam in quacumque angustia me invocauerint, celerem propitiationis tue obtineant effectum …' Necdum orationem compleuerat, et ecce uox huiusmodi, de sublimi nube emissa, ad eam redditur: 'Veni, dilecta mea, speciosa mea. ... Veni ergo, et ne solliciteris de donis que postulas; nam his qui passionem tuam deuotis mentibus celebrauerint, et qui in periculis et necessitatibus te inuocauerint, presidia optata et opem celerem de celo promitto.'* For the dating of the text, see Tina Chronopoulos, "The Date and Place of Composition of the Passion of St Katherine of Alexandria (BHL 1663)," *Analecta Bollandiana* 130 (2012): 40–88.

[51] E.-C. Jones, *Saint Gilles: Essai d'histoire littéraire* (Paris: Champion, 1914), 109: *Proxima namque Dominica, dum vir sanctus missam de more celebrans, pro jam dicto rege Dominum in canone deprecaretur, apparuit ei angelus Domini, super altare scedulam ponens, in qua descriptum erat ordine et ipsum regis peccatum, et Aegidii precibus ei dimissum, si poenitens tantum ab illo desisteret. Adjunctum quoque cernere erat in fine, quod quisquis sanctum Aegidium pro quolibet commisso invocaret, si tantum ab illius perpetratione* [in ed. *perpretatione*] *cessaret, remissum esse sibi a Domino procul dubio crederet.*

[52] Jean Bolland et al., ed., *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur*, 68 vols. (Antwerp: Société des Bollandistes, 1643–1940) [henceforth: AASS], Febr. 1:339, §. B (modernized punctuation): *Sanctus autem Blasius orauit dicens: 'Domine Deus meus ... exaudi me seruum tuum, et si quis procidens adorauerit hoc sacrificium, qualiscumque spina, aut etiam os in guttur cuiuscumque personae impegerit, si etiam et in diuersas infirmitates inciderit, siue in tribulationem aut periculum, aut si persecutionem patitur, suscipe, quaeso, petitionem fideliter petentium te, Domine.' Haec autem eo orante*

Mombritius version (BHL 5303), with its oldest known manuscripts written in the ninth century, contains a pre-martyrdom prayer of the saintly woman for all those who cherish her memory by reading her legend or listening to it, lighting candles at their cost in her church, building a church in her honor, writing or buying a book of her passion, and so on. The divine benefits Margaret pleads for in exchange are mainly disregarding sins and release from post-mortem suffering, but in the case of church builders and book providers she asks God to "fill [them] with his holy spirit, the spirit of truth, and in [their] home[s] no child may be born lame, blind, or dumb." As she finishes her prayer, a dove with a cross comes down from heaven and lets her know that "all that [she] asked for are heeded to."[53] According to his eleventh-century *vita* (BHL 4862), St. Leonard of Limoges – inspired by the example of St. Remigius – obtained royal authorization that any prisoner he visited was to be released from captivity. Later this – initially legal – capacity took on miraculous form so that "if someone put in prison invoked his name, his chains having been broken he was set free."[54] In the *vita* of St. Leonard

descendit nubes de caelo, et infulsit in eum, dixitque ei Dominus: 'Omnem petitionem tuam adimplebo, athleta dilectissime.'

[53] Boninus Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae sanctorum*, 2 vols., ed. Benedictines of Solesmes (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), 2:195 (modernized punctuation): *Tunc beata Margarita coepit orare et dicere: Deus ... exaudi deprecationem meam, ut si quis legerit librum gestae meae, aut audierit passionem meam legendo, ex illa hora deleantur peccata eorum. Et quisquis lumen fecerit in basilica mea de suo labore, non imputentur peccata eorum. Et quisquis lumen fecerit in basilica mea de suo labore, non imputetur peccatum illius ex illa hora; quisquis fuerit in illa hora in iudicio terribili, et memor fuerit nominis mei, libera eum de tormento. ... Adhuc peto domine, ut qui basilicam in nomine meo fecerit, et scripserit passionem meam, uel qui de suo labore comparauerit codicem passionis meae, reple illum spiritu sancto tuo, spiritu veritatis, et in domo illius non nascatur infans claudus aut caecus vel mutus ... Tunc facta sunt tonitrua, et columba venit de caelo cum cruce et loquebatur beatae Margaritae: ... quidquid petisti exauditae sunt.* For the Latin legends of St. Margaret, see Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7–23.

[54] François Arbellot, *Vie de Saint Léonard solitaire en Limousin: Ses miracles et son culte* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1863), 278 and 286: *Ad imitationem ergo boni magistri Remigii, Leonardus, / bonus discipulus, / Hoc ipsum expetiit a rege humillimis precibus, / Quatenus omnes qui in ergastulorum custodia detinerentur, / Si eos ipse voluisset visitare, omnino solverentur. / Quam rem rege cum benivolentia impetravit, / Et, ubicumque incarceratos esse audiebat, / Non piger ad eorum absolutionem totis viribus concurrebat. ... In tantum denique magnificabat Dominus Sanctum suum, quod / si quis in carcere positus, / Invocasset nomen ejus / Ruptis catenis liber fiebat.* The much shorter version of the Life in Bruno Krusch, ed., *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici et antiquiorum aliquot*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum 3 (Hannover: Hahn, 1896), 396–399 omits the reference to releasing prisoners by a miracle. For the cult of St. Leonard in the later Middle

of Corbigny (BHL 4859) there is no trace of any specialization in releasing prisoners.[55]

Thus, if the *Legenda aurea* is a good indicator of broad interests in the cult of saints in the thirteenth century, then these interests included much less specialized assistance than two centuries later. In the few cases where a saint is explicitly associated with some kind of auxiliary patronage in the *Legenda aurea*, however, such an association was essentially not of James' making. It is true that no expertise is mentioned in the oldest Life of Leonard of Corbigny, but the added reference to it in the *Legenda aurea* is simply meant to underline the similarity of the two Leonards and, thus, to justify their inclusion in the same chapter. The most extensive changes in the above cases were made – by James or someone before him – to the pre-martyrdom prayer of St. Margaret, where all divine benefits to worshippers, with the exception of giving birth to healthy children, were left out and the whole scene was remodeled according to its counterparts in the Passions of Blaise and Katherine with a celestial voice approving of the requests instead of a dove with a cross. As a consequence (intended or not), Margaret received a real specialization, in contrast to the divine promises obtained by Katherine and Giles, which remained very general in the *Legenda aurea*, while the auxiliary patronages of Leonard and Blaise were already quite specific in their earlier hagiographic dossier. In fact, a Byzantine doctor, Aëtius of Amida, enlisted the expertise of Blaise as early as the sixth century. In a chapter of his handbook on medicine dedicated to bones or other sharp objects stuck in the throat, after describing some medical solutions in a stricter sense, Aëtius adds this further advice:

> Turn immediately to the seated patient, and tell him to pay attention to you, and say: 'Come out bone!' In case the bone, or straw, or whatever else finally arises, [add:] 'Just as Christ led out Lazarus from the grave, and just as Jonas from the whale.' Additionally, having grasped the throat of the patient, say: 'Blaise, martyr and servant of Christ, says: ascend or descend!'[56]

Ages, see Michael Goodich, *Violence and Miracle in the Fourteenth Century: Private Grief and Public Salvation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 137–140.

[55] AASS, Oct. 7:47–47.

[56] Quoted from the Latin translation by Giano Cornario: *Aetii Medici Graeci Contractae ex veteribus medicinae sermones XVI* (Venice: Gryphius, 1549), VIII, L, f. 435r (modernized punctuation): *Aliud. Ad eductionem eorum, quae in tonsillas devorata sunt. Statim te ad aegrum desidentem converte, ipsumque tibi attendere iube, ac dic: 'Egredere os!' Si tamen os, aut festuca, aut quicquid, tandem existit: 'Quemadmodum Iesus Christus ex sepulchre Lazarum eduxit, et quemadmodum Ionam ex ceto.' Atque adprehenso aegri gutture dic: 'Blasius martyr et servus Christi dicit, aut ascende, aut descende!'*

The recommended practice closely resembles exorcism and it is not impossible that relics of Blaise were frequently used for such a purpose in his – otherwise very obscure – early cult.

At any rate, if holy helpers were indeed as insignificant in the contemporary cult of saints as their frequency in the *Legenda aurea* suggests, and if James of Varazze – as noted above – felt little or no urge to multiply their number or make their promised assistance more specific, then auxiliary patronage must have increased enormously between his time and Luther's. But if it is true that most holy helpers as holy helpers (that is, with their own auxiliary patronage) only came late, then – supposing that dangers, diseases, and other troubles existed previously as well – what explains this late appearance? Eamon Duffy tentatively connects the increasing association of saints with particular kinds of help in late medieval Europe to "the impact of successive waves of epidemic disease."[57] Huizinga points to the iconography of the helper saints, to their "sensational attributes that stimulated the imagination" and contributed to associating them with the kinds of assistance which are suggested by their signs of identification.[58] Luther supposed, that auxiliary patronages had originated in vernacular allusions of the names of holy helpers.

All these suggestions may cover elements of a more comprehensive explanation, but they are insufficient in themselves and it is unclear how – in what proportions – they should be combined. Epidemics can hardly explain specializations like helping to find lost things, which are unrelated to diseases. Even Luther might have found some of his phonetic-etymological interpretations of the names of helper saints unconvincing and this was why he left them out of the second edition of his Wittenberg sermons on the Ten Commandments.[59] Iconographic attributes did sometimes result in the formation of auxiliary patronages; sometimes they did not. It is a striking feature of the saints who became holy helpers in the later Middle Ages that only a few of them were canonized *sancti moderni*. With the notable exception of St. Roche – who was new but not canonized – most holy helpers were old saints who had lived, or were supposed to have lived, in Late Antiquity or the Early Middle Ages. If Huizinga were right, why did St. Elizabeth of Hungary, usually represented with a beggar,

[57] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 178.
[58] Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 198.
[59] See footnote 27 above.

not become a protector against poverty or St. Peter Martyr, usually represented with a knife in his head, a protector against assassination?

Auxiliary patronage was different from other forms of saintly patronage in its focus on problems instead of social affiliations. Previously, saints were credited with offering special favors to various firmly entrenched social groups, including residents of cities and towns, members of religious orders, aristocratic clans and ethnic groups, serfs and tenants of various overlords, or practitioners of crafts, trades, and professions. The worshippers of helper saints did not constitute any such group. Those who happened to have contracted the plague or feared tempests did not belong to stable communities or social organizations. They just happened to have the same problems which cut across all social affiliations. It may be the case that saints strongly associated with certain social groups, like mendicant saints, did not lend themselves easily to this new function of help.

Conclusion

Patronage was at the heart of the cult of saints right from the beginning and, in consequence, it was more than a thousand years old around 1500. Its long history up until then cannot be covered easily in any single publication, not to mention a short article. In addition, given its essentially traditional nature, radical changes – with the final disappearance of certain elements and the emergence of entirely new ones – are unlikely to have ever occurred. Such difficulties notwithstanding, I have argued in the preceding pages that a major shift took place in saintly patronage in late medieval Europe. In terms of this shift, auxiliary patronage became far more prominent than it had been in the thirteenth century. I did not consider parallel changes in other forms of relationship between saints and their worshippers but probably the growing importance of holy helpers coincided with a similar growth in occupational patronage and together they point to a general trend of functional differentiation in the cult of saints.

What I have tried to do in order to substantiate my claim is, first, to reconstruct the advent of more focused criticisms of venerating saints for their specialized assistance – venerating them as holy helpers. Theologians with strong pastoral concerns from, at least, Gerson onwards were aware of this phenomenon, but before the sixteenth century they relegated it to more general categories of superstitious practices. It seems that auxiliary patronage as a problem in its own right first appeared in Erasmus' *Enchiridion*. As to the causes of why this became a separate problem and why then, I have suggested that by ca. 1500 the cult of holy helpers had become widespread all over Europe and in all social strata, including the highest ones, and thus, it became far more visible with all its

contradictions than before. Apart from the (vertical) diffusion of their cult, such growing visibility of specialized helper saints could also have followed from their proliferation through more and more saints becoming assigned to specific kinds of assistance. Among the saints who were mentioned as holy helpers in various sources at the beginning of the sixteenth century very few were regarded as such already by James of Varazze in his *Legenda aurea*, and initially even the Fourteen Holy Helpers – frequently considered the paradigm case of saintly specialization – had little or nothing to do with auxiliary patronage.

The wide range of specialized helper saints venerated at end of the Middle Ages implies an extensive division of labor in heaven. This, in turn, presupposes that the worshipers of saints were commonly knowledgeable about a sufficiently high number of different holy men and women. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to distribute so many specific kinds of assistance among them in relatively widespread and stable patterns. Certainly, ecclesiastical calendars were full of saints right from the beginning, but this does not imply that their feasts were observed by broader circles of the population. That these broader circles did indeed become better informed about heavenly intercessors (not necessarily holy helpers) in the later Middle Ages is also suggested by their multiplication in last wills. As has been pointed out by Jacques Chiffoleau, testators in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (in the diocese of Avignon, at least) tended to name more and more saints whose benevolence they wanted to secure for themselves and the members of their families.[60] Therefore, the most essential question to answer in any systematic explanation of the proliferation of holy helpers is: Why did locally venerated saints multiply? This, however, raises the broadest questions of cult diffusion, which cannot be addressed within the limits of this article.

[60] Jacques Chiffoleau, *La comptabilité de l'Au-Delà: Les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Age (vers 1320 – vers 1480)*, Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome 47 (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1980), 386–387.