

The Faithful Departed: Roman Catholic Saints and Perceptions of Persons with HIV/AIDS

David Givens, *University of Pittsburgh, USA*

In December 1984, thirteen-year-old hemophiliac Ryan White was diagnosed with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), during a time that the disease was still poorly understood by both the public and the scientific community. In the years that followed, as White became a poster child for AIDS understanding, research, and increasing public support, societal perceptions about both White and the nature of AIDS slowly shifted. No longer branded as “secretly homosexual,” media accounts began instead to classify White as “an innocent victim” of AIDS.¹ The language of innocence and victimization—which White and his family consistently rejected—implicitly contrasts “innocent” people who are diagnosed with AIDS with those whom some perceived to be “guilty”—namely, homosexuals.² From the 1980s to the present, the struggle of Western society to conceptualize and understand HIV/AIDS and the variety of men, women, and children who contract it every year has been centrally important to the development of social attitudes, public policy, and perceptions of human sexuality.

There are a number of influences that shape public perceptions of disease, particularly HIV/AIDS, as the case of Ryan White as “victim” versus “homosexual” suggests. Susan Sontag has contended that people understand both diseases and those who contract them through metaphor. Indeed, for Sontag, “one cannot think without metaphors,” and human need for such metaphors when dealing with the largely invisible (and often

1. Alex Witchel, “At Home With Jeanne White-Ginder: A Son’s AIDS, and a Legacy,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1992, accessed March 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/09/24/garden/at-home-with-jeanne-white-ginder-a-son-s-aids-and-a-legacy.html?pagewanted=6&src=pm4>.

2. This perception and the implication of guilt were extended to those perceived to be promiscuous, drug users, or homeless, among others. See also Susan Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989), 24.

frightening and alien) world of germs, viruses, and mutations is especially great.³ Sontag is not alone in this analysis. Tamsin Wilton notes that for those who become ill, for their families and friends, and for societies in general, “representational practices [regarding how people think about disease] both reflect and construct social and psychological ‘reality.’”⁴ Medical historian Sander Gilman goes even further, concluding that all human understanding of “disease is...restricted to a specific set of images, thereby forming a visual boundary, a limit to the idea (or fear) of disease. The creation of the image[s] of AIDS must be understood as part of this ongoing attempt to isolate, [understand,] and control [it].”⁵ Given this pattern of human behaviour, the creation and continuation of various representations of AIDS has and will continue to have “profound consequences” in contemporary Western society.⁶ Both the inevitability of understanding disease through metaphor and the repercussions of such behaviour clearly demonstrate the need to identify factors that contribute to the formation of societal representations of HIV.

Key components in society that both shape and sustain perceptions of illness can stem from religious beliefs and institutions. The following analysis shows that the link between metaphor and religious symbolism is a largely unexplored but important component for understanding how segments of Western society may perceive diseases such as HIV and the people who contract them. Specifically, the evidence here demonstrates that the multiplicity of saints in Roman Catholic devotionalism who are believed to care for persons with HIV/AIDS represent divergent ways that some Catholics in North America⁷ conceptualize HIV and Persons with AIDS (PWAs).⁸ This analysis examines representations in Catholic publications

3. Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors*, 5, 9.

4. Tamsin Wilton, *Engendering AIDS: Deconstructing Sex, Text and Epidemic* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 6.

5. Sander Gilman, “AIDS and Syphilis: The Iconography of Disease,” *October* vol 43 (Winter 1987): 87–107.

6. Wilton, *Engendering AIDS*, 6.

7. The texts available for this analysis limit the present discussion primarily to English-speaking Catholics in North America; all subsequent references to Catholics should be understood in this context unless specifically noted.

8. I will consistently refer to persons living with AIDS with the abbreviation PWAs throughout this article. I have chosen this slightly older terminology for consistency, respect, and for the

and websites of Saints Peregrine Laziosi, Aloysius Gonzaga, Luigi Scrosoppi, and Damien de Veuster (aka Father Damien), each of whom is said to serve as the patron saint of PWAs. Examining the uses, descriptions, and expectations assigned to these saints highlights the ways in which some Catholic men and women may perceive HIV/AIDS and people who have contracted it. This argument proceeds from recognition of the continuance of saint veneration in North America, as well as from the analysis of saints as socio-religious symbols within the history of AIDS research and Catholic policy. It then analyzes the available literature surrounding each saint relative to the patrons they are said to favour. Associations between the primary or original patrons of a saint (such as young people, persons with cancer, or lepers) and the saint's subsequent adoption for or by PWAs strongly suggests that there are specific conceptual links perceived between each saint's primary patronage and HIV and/or PWAs. The evidence that follows linking saints and their patronage to wider perceptions of the disease and PWAs is an important step towards both understanding how segments of Western societies have been influenced by (predominantly English-speaking) Catholic perceptions of this devastating disease and identifying factors that influence these perceptions over time among Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Catholic devotion to saints is a prime example of how religious practice can shape adherents' worldviews regarding HIV/AIDS. Distinguished scholar of religion Robert Orsi argues (via theorist Clifford Geertz) that one of the primary functions and abilities of religion is to "concretize [for the human mind] the order of the universe, the nature of human life and its destiny, and the various dimensions and possibilities of human[kind]".⁹ Orsi feels that the religious lives and institutions of Catholics in particular exemplify this role of religion, and that one primary way that this impulse manifests itself in Roman Catholic life and devotion is through praying to

nuances that it encompasses. Unlike the most current nomenclature, Persons Living With AIDS (PLWA), Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), or People Living Positively (PLP), PWA is most appropriate for this discussion because many of the firsthand accounts in my sources clearly conceptualize persons with AIDS in a manner that extends to people who are all too often *not* living. For further history on the evolving terms for describing people with AIDS, see Wilton, *Engendering AIDS*, 65–70.

9. Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 73.

and identifying with saints.¹⁰ Indeed, Jerome Baggett argues that devotion to saints remains one of the most pious, “most Catholic” forms of expressing one’s faith among North American Catholics today, and as such, the influence of specific saints’ images and associations cannot be ignored.¹¹

Understanding diseases like HIV through symbol and practice is particularly relevant and necessary for parishioners in North America because of the stances and language used by the Vatican, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to describe HIV infection and PWAs. That is, both significant amounts of information, aid, and attention from the Vatican are directed (though not without some controversy¹²) to African nations, and the entire body of the USCCB’s public ministry concerning HIV has since 2007 been explicitly and almost exclusively directed towards African Americans and women.¹³ Catholic policy on HIV prevention itself remains problematic for many parishioners, health professionals, and advocates in North America. For instance, while Pope Benedict XVI has consistently called for compassionate responses regarding people with HIV or AIDS, he

10. See both Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude: Women’s Devotion to the Saint of Hopeless Causes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) and his later work *Between Heaven and Earth* for excellent examples of the continuance of American-Catholic devotionism in twentieth-century (including post-Vatican II) American religious life.

11. Jerome Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live their Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 161.

12. The Vatican has frequently been criticized in relation to its views on condom use for HIV prevention. See Richard L. Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1994); Lisa L. Ferrari, “Catholic and Non-Catholic NGOs Fighting HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa: Issue Framing and Collaboration,” *International Relations* vol. 25, no. 1 (March 2011): 85–107; and Stephen Muoki Joshua, “A Critical Historical Analysis of the South African Catholic Church’s HIV/AIDS Response Between 2000 and 2005,” *African Journal of AIDS Research* vol. 9, no. 4, (2010): 437–447.

13. While many dioceses still continue their own local or regional HIV outreach and ministry, in 2007 the National Catholic AIDS Network was disbanded. This rendered The National African American Catholic HIV/AIDS Task Force as the only publicized and authorized nationwide Catholic outreach program in the US and is now the program to which all USCCB AIDS resources direct parishioners. “The National Catholic AIDS Network (NCAN) Records,” *University of Chicago Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007). <http://bmr survey.uchicago.edu/collections/2672>. See also the USBBC resource listing: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/hiv-aids-resources-cultural-diversity.cfm>

and other top Vatican officials have on numerous occasions denounced the use of condoms and comprehensive sexual education programs for fighting HIV. Medical professionals and the World Health Organization consider such measures to be an integral and successful part of HIV prevention and education.¹⁴

It is worth noting that the devotion of Catholics to a variety of saints—and the ongoing salience of this practice in their lives—in a post-Vatican II, twenty-first century society is an enduring, if at times less visible, tradition in many North American Catholic parishes. During the last twenty years, scholars of American Catholicism have identified new and continuing traditions of devotionism associated with the Virgin Mary and a multitude of saints. The persistence of this type of practice in Catholic life parallels the activities of Pope John Paul II, who served as pope from 1978 to 2005 and advanced the causes of more saints than all other Popes in the last five centuries combined.¹⁵ Work by Hopgood, Orsi, Kane, Savastano, Tweed, and others documents numerous forms of devotionism within a variety of Catholic communities, demonstrating that such practices remain relevant variables in the study of Catholic life in North America and beyond. In 1996, Robert Orsi published *Thank You, St. Jude*, a thorough examination—both historical and contemporary in focus¹⁶—of how the veneration of a virtually unknown saint became in the twentieth century one of the most important and widespread devotions in America. Less than a year later, the publication of Thomas Tweed’s influential work on Cuban Catholics’ devotion to Mary, *Our Lady of the Exile*, demonstrated (along with contemporaneous and subsequent work by scholars such as Sally Cunneen, Paula Kane, and Socorro Castaneda-Liles) that Marian devotionism was alive and well

14. One notable exception occurred during an interview with Benedict XVI in 2010, but that same year the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith “clarified” that no change in the Church’s stance had occurred. See Giuseppe Benagiano, et al, “Condoms, HIV and the Roman Catholic Church,” *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* vol. 22, no. 7 (June 2011): 701–709.

15. John Paul II celebrated 147 beatification ceremonies; he proclaimed 1,338 people to be Blessed and canonized 51 Blessed for a total of 482 saints. Holy See, “His Holiness John Paul II: Short Biography” (Vatican City: Vatican Press, no copyright date), accessed April 2012, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/documentazione/documents/santopadre_biografie/giovanni_paolo_ii_biografia_breve_en.html.

16. See in particular xiii–xviii for a summary of Orsi’s sources, fieldwork, and methodology.

in the United States, particularly in many immigrant churches.¹⁷ In 2005, Robert Orsi followed the success of *Thank You, St. Jude* with *Between Heaven and Earth*, a wider survey of saint veneration in the twentieth century in the United States. This research demonstrated both the history and the continuance of saint and Marian devotions as salient and persistent practices in Catholic lives that straddle “the break between the working class and rural immigrant church and the modern middle class culture.”¹⁸ Other scholars, such as James Hopgood, Donald Boisvert, and Peter Savastano, have added to this discussion with new arguments about who can be considered a saint in contemporary society and how some contemporary Catholics are finding novel ways to relate to saints, respectively.¹⁹ In fact, Hopgood argues that more research into the lived religion of those who venerate saints is needed and that the specific ramifications of saint veneration in Western culture remain understudied aspects of religious life.²⁰ These authors, along with others shaping the renewed interest and scholarship in this field, demonstrate that Catholic saint veneration and the fruitful study thereof remain important factors in significant pockets of Western society.

In addition to describing the continuity and evolution of Catholic devotionism in the twenty-first century, some of this recent scholarship uncovers ways in which practices and the people who perform them can influence, rather than simply reflect, larger Catholic perceptions and

17. Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Sally Cunneen, *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996); Paula Kane, “Marian Devotion since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?,” in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth Century America*, ed. James O’Toole, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 89–130; Socorro Castaneda-Liles, “Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Politics of Cultural Interpretation,” in *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*, eds. Gaston Espinoza and Mario Garcia (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 153–179.

18. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 107.

19. See James Hopgood, “Introduction: Saints and Saints in the Making,” in *The Making of Saints: Contesting Sacred Ground*, ed. James Hopgood (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), xi–xxi; Boisvert, Donald L., *Sanctity and Male Desire: A Gay Reading of Saints* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004); and Peter Savastano, “‘St. Gerard Teaches Him that Love Cancels that Out:’ Devotion to St. Gerard Maiella Among Italian American Catholic Gay Men in Newark, New Jersey,” in *Gay Religion*, eds. Scott Thumma and Edward Gray (New York: Altamira Press, 2005), 181–202.

20. Hopgood, “Introduction,” xvi.

worldviews. Robert Orsi's account of women's devotionism in *Thank You, St. Jude* reflects the historical reality that parishioners both shaped and reacted to their Catholic faith traditions. Orsi describes "how these women created and sustained [their] world in relation to Jude... imagined reality and its alternatives, and how they lived in this imagined and reimagined world through their devotions."²¹ These women took in Catholic perspectives, practices, and teachings, and then "re-imagined" them in ways that fit their lives and experiences. In regards to contemporary spirituality, Peter Savastano's ethnographic work in a Newark, New Jersey, Catholic parish exemplifies this same trend. Savastano explicates how some gay Catholic men in his study had become devotees to saints such as Sebastian and Gerard. The men began their devotionism, the author concludes, because this practice validated and reinforced their own experiences, sexuality, and spirituality.²² That is, Catholic iconography²³ and devotionism was adopted and transformed into an affirming validation of both faith and sexuality within this community. As Savastano points out, and as many artists from the Renaissance onward²⁴ seem to have known, religious images "have the power to stimulate the creative imagination, arouse the emotions, and inflame [desires]," but they can also be re-created, interpreted, and manipulated.²⁵ Savastano's research strongly suggests that gay men may use Catholic imagery and devotional practice to both buttress their interpretations of their Catholic faith and validate their own perceptions, experiences, and desires. Similarly, the analysis in the pages that follow assumes that the associations

21. Orsi, *Thank You*, 186.

22. Savastano, "St. Gerard Teaches Him that Love Cancels that Out," 184.

23. Savastano suggests that it is the icons, rather than the hagiographies, that are most relevant in the imaginations of the men who become devoted to them; indeed, the often effeminate images of these saints have encouraged the viewers to project their lives, desires, and experiences onto the saints (see 186 and 188). The author reports this type of devotion to Saints Sebastian, Gerard, Anthony of Padua, Paulinus of Nola, and the Madonna del Carmine. A similar example of one's religious worldview influencing behaviour is McGuire's suggestion that churchmen, such as the abbot Aelred of Rievaulx, subsumed homosexual desires "into 'agapetic love'...to the body of Jesus" (see Savastano, "St. Gerard Teaches Him that Love Cancels that Out," 187, quoting Brian McGuire, *Brother & Lover: Aelred of Rievaulx*, (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1994), 142 and 148).

24. See Valentina Liepa, "The Image of Saint Sebastian in Art," *Acta Humanitarica Universitatis Saulensis*, T. 8 (2009), 546–547.

25. Savastano, "St. Gerard Teaches Him that Love Cancels that Out," 186.

that have developed around Saints Peregrine Laziosi, Gonzaga, Scrosoppi, and de Veuster both reflect and influence Catholic perceptions of sexuality, disease, and stigma.

In public spheres, people and institutions frequently “deploy religious powers [in order to] make alternate characters” that fit into their worldview or beliefs.²⁶ The creation of such characters is relevant because these types of religious symbols influence not only perceptions of sexuality and diseases like HIV/AIDS, but also affect Catholics’ assumptions about the “type” of person that has contracted HIV. Indeed, the surprising variety of saints purported to attend to PWAs represents the continuing ambiguity regarding who can and should be thought of as living with or having died from AIDS. Is the PWA the young African man, woman, or orphaned child? Is he homosexual? Should she or he be thought of as similar to someone suffering from any other serious illness, such as cancer? Or do the saints intercede for young victims, such as Ryan White, who was often portrayed in North American media as antithetical to gay people and culture?²⁷ In contemporary Catholic culture, a multitude of saints are said to attend to people with AIDS; four of the most frequently invoked are Saints Luigi Scrosoppi, Aloysius Gonzaga, Peregrine Laziosi, and Damien de Veuster. In significant ways, these different saints are being used as symbols that speak to and about different populations with HIV/AIDS. While on some level the appropriation of saints or near-saint figures²⁸ as representatives for PWAs stems from a need for individuals to identify and cultivate a sense of “personal connection” and identification with a patron saint,²⁹ the fact remains that certain saints who are purported to represent and care for PWAs reflect overtly politicized views of the disease and PWAs. Arguing that Saint Peregrine Laziosi, not Saint Damien, for example, is the appropriate saint to which PWAs and their loved ones should pray inevitably invites comparisons to each saints’ original patronages; should PWAs be perceived to be in some

26. Mark Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love: How Christians Talk about Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 209; see also Calhoun, 122–124.

27. Jordan, *Recruiting Young Love*, 190.

28. See Hopgood, *The Making of Saints*, for a full discussion of near-saints and their creation in American culture.

29. Orsi, *Thank You*, 18.

way like Saint Peregrin's principal demographic—cancer patients—or are they more in accord with Saint Damien's concern for lepers and outcasts?

Since 1726, Saint Peregrine Laziosi has served as the patron saint of those suffering³⁰ from cancer. His hagiography—that is, the sanctified story and myth surrounding and interpreting his acts and life—recounts that he suffered from a cancerous growth or infection of the leg, which was miraculously cured the night before the leg was to be amputated.³¹ Such stories of overcoming (or succumbing to) illness often feature significantly in establishing the patronage of saints who represent those with illnesses; it is indeed cited as the (obvious) reason why Saint Peregrine is presumed to intercede for people with cancer.³² However, following public awareness of the emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, some lay Catholics have begun to pray to Peregrine for healing, comfort, or other favours for those with HIV/AIDS. In fact, much Catholic literature that refers to the patrons of Saint Peregrine often conflates “those with cancer or HIV/AIDS.”

The association between cancer and AIDS likely stems from several sources. First, some Catholic communities or individuals may have encountered or have remembered some of the earliest labels for AIDS-related illnesses; in the 1980s, one common informal term for the mysterious illnesses that were affecting young gay men was “gay cancer.”³³

30. Here and in the following sections, terms such as “sufferer” and “victim” are employed as language present within the context of the many sources that use it specifically. While acknowledging a certain amount of judgment or bias implicit in such labels, I have found it cogent to represent such terms as they are found in the source material; they function as important reflections of the ways in which the people who use the terms may themselves perceive PWAs.

31. Philip Noble, *The Wakkins Dictionary of Saints* (London: Wakkins Publishing, 2007), 192.

32. “St. Peregrine: Mass and Novena for those with Cancer and HIV/AIDS” BrotherMichael.com (Servants of Mary, no copyright date), accessed April 2012, www.brothermichael.com/saints/Peregrine.html; “Shrine of St. Peregrine: The Cancer Saint” (Cross in the Woods.org, 2004), accessed April 2012, <http://www.crossinthewoods.org/peregrine.htm>; “Chaplet of St. Peregrine: The Saint for Cancer and HIV/AIDS” (Ave Maria's Circle, Rosary Making Supplies, Chaplets, no copyright date), accessed April 2012, <https://avemariascircle.com/zencart/chapletpix/StPeregrine.htm>; Nancy Hartnagel, “Saints Connected to Health,” *Catholic News Service*, accessed April 2012, <http://www.catholic.org/health/story.php?id=218362>.

33. Joe Wright, interviewed by Melissa Block, “Remembering The Early Days of ‘Gay Cancer,’” *All Things Considered* (National Public Radio) May 8, 2006; Russell, Sabin, “Unsettling Re-emergence of ‘Gay Cancer,’” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 11, 2007.

The perceived relationship between cancer and AIDS has likely been reinforced by the prevalence of the AIDS-related illness Kaposi's sarcoma, which is a cancer that presented in roughly eighty percent of all early AIDS cases and was commonly fatal. Sometimes referred to as the "AIDS rash" or the "gay cancer" in the early 1980s, Kaposi's sarcoma, with its many discoloured spots on the person's skin, was long considered one of the most visible signs of AIDS; it remains the most common malignancy associated with HIV infection.³⁴ Popular knowledge of Kaposi's sarcoma has increased since its inclusion in the 1987 CDC identification of diseases; its diagnosis may also signify the presence of HIV/AIDS, and was prominently depicted in the influential 1993 film *Philadelphia*.³⁵ A 2008 study found that nearly three-fourths of gay or bisexual men surveyed in California had heard of Kaposi's sarcoma, and that HIV was most commonly (incorrectly) cited as the cause of this cancer.³⁶ However, none of the Catholic literature cited references Kaposi's sarcoma or any of the early labels for the disease in their discussions of cancer patients or PWAs. If the Catholics who are equating cancer and HIV/AIDS do so because they are aware of the prevalence of Kaposi's sarcoma or think about HIV/AIDS as "gay cancer," they are not explicitly stating it. For this reason, until specific communities devoted to Saint Peregrine can be engaged more closely, the degree to which these historical and clinical associations affect communities praying to Saint Peregrine will remain unclear.

Yet, the fact remains that a number of lay-Catholic websites, parish websites, shrines, and news reports now refer to Saint Peregrine as the saint for those "afflicted with HIV." A second possible explanation for this association can be culled from the language and associations between HIV and cancer in Catholic literature; it is possible that priests and lay Catholics

34. Wright, "Remembering the Early Days of 'Gay Cancer'"; Russell, "Unsettling Re-emergence of 'Gay Cancer,'" 2; Abigail Phillips, et al, "Awareness of Kaposi's Sarcoma-associated Herpes Virus Among Men Who Have Sex with Men," *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* vol. 35, no. 12 (2008): 1011–1014.

35. "Revision of the CDC Surveillance Case Definition for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome," Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists; AIDS Program, Center for Infectious Diseases. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 36, Supplement 1 (August 1987): 1S–15S; Russell, "Unsettling Re-emergence of 'Gay Cancer,'" 2.

36. Phillips, et. al., "Awareness of Kaposi's Sarcoma-associated Herpes Virus Among Men Who Have Sex with Men," 1013.

identified Saint Peregrine as appropriate for PWAs specifically because they perceived or wished to project HIV in a less stigmatized context.³⁷ Susan Sontag and others note multiple examples of comparisons between the experience of being diagnosed with cancer and with HIV.³⁸ By the early 1990s, there was evidence that some patients, ministers, and caregivers were beginning to view PWAs without the intense stigma so often attached to the disease, instead opting to view it as a terminal “disease like cancer.”³⁹ Indeed, by 2007 the Catholic News Service had no qualms about concluding, after describing Peregrine’s miraculous healing from cancer, that “naturally [because of his experience with cancer] he is the patron saint of . . . those with AIDS and other diseases.”⁴⁰ While there are likely diverse motivations⁴¹ for portraying both HIV/AIDS and cancer as diseases that are equally “life-threatening serious illnesses,” the normalization or reduction of stigma commonly associated with HIV/AIDS cannot be discounted as one possible motivation for, or result of, this association. The fact that the National Shrine of Saint Peregrine (located in Chicago, IL), as well as other⁴² parishes and

37. “Friday Mass and Novena for those with Cancer and HIV/AIDS and All the sick,” (Monson: St. Patrick Church, no copyright date), accessed April 2012, www.stpatrickmonson.org/stperegrine/stprform.html; “Saint Peregrine Laziosi: Patron Saint of Cancer Patients” (Via Rosa Rosaries, Devotional Chaplets, Rosary Beads, and Catholic Gifts, 2006), accessed April, 2012, <http://www.viarosa.com/VR/StPeregrine/Rosaries+Chaplets.html>; “St. Peregrine: Mass and Novena for those with cancer and HIV/AIDS”; “Shrine of Saint Peregrine: The Cancer Saint”; “Chaplet of St. Peregrine: The Saint for Cancer and HIV/AIDS”; “St. Peregrine, The Cancer Saint” The Grotto, (Portland: The National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother, 2012), accessed March 2012, <http://www.thegrotto.org/liturgies/st-peregrine-devotions-the-cancer-saint/>.

38. Sontag, *AIDS and its Metaphors*, 15–17.

39. Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church*, 97; see also Richard Hardy, *Loving Men: Gay Partners, Spirituality, and AIDS*, (New York: Continuum Press, 1998), 74–77.

40. Hartnagel, “Saints Connected to Health,” 2.

41. A full third of all websites reviewed actively market and sell Saint Peregrine items for those with cancer or HIV/AIDS, while less than one-in-eight referenced websites do so for each of the other three saints in this analysis.

42. Examples include the Shrine of Saint Peregrine in Portland, Oregon, St. Patrick Parish in Monson, Massachusetts, and St. Bartholomew Parish in Wissinoming, PA. See Beverly Johnson Roberts, “St. Peregrine Shrine,” accessed April 2012, <http://st-peregrine-medal.com/st-peregrine-shrine.htm>; “St. Peregrine, the Cancer Saint,” “Friday Mass and Novena for those with Cancer and HIV/AIDS and All the Sick”; and David O’Reilly, “Shrine to be Dedicated to Patron Saint of Those with Cancer” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 25, 1998, A14.

shrines to Saint Peregrine, recognizes “those with cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other chronic or life threatening illnesses” together during Mass suggests an impetus towards at least some socio-cultural and religious normalization of the disease among specific subsets of Catholics.⁴³

Saint Aloysius Gonzaga is also often cited as “the Patron Saint of People with AIDS.” Gonzaga’s hagiography, like Peregrine’s, includes details about the saint’s encounter with disease; at the age of 23, he contracted and died of the plague while treating plague victims with his fellow Jesuits in Rome.⁴⁴ However, the patrons originally assigned to this saint were not necessarily ill in any way; Saint Gonzaga is first and foremost the patron saint of youth.⁴⁵ He was canonized in 1726 and was declared the patron saint of all students in 1729.⁴⁶ It is likely that the story of the end of Gonzaga’s life—dying of the plague—drew some Catholics to make comparisons between the specifics of that disease and the experiences of PWAs. Indeed, no cure was known for the plague during Gonzaga’s lifetime, and it (like the onset and spread of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s) often resulted in an excruciating death that frequently included separation from or abandonment by one’s loved ones.⁴⁷ Thus, Catholic perceptions of HIV/AIDS as a “plague” similar to the Black Death could have led some communities to identify Gonzaga with PWAs. In

43. The perception that having cancer and having HIV are comparable is clearly not uniform among lay Catholics and Catholic organizations. As of April 2012, for example, there were no references to HIV/AIDS or PWAs in any online literature about the Peregrine Ministry for “people with cancer and other chronic illnesses” published by the Servite Center Mission (headquartered in Omaha, NE). See “Saint Peregrine Ministry,” (website: American Province of the Servants of Mary, Omaha, NE, 2012), accessed April 2012, <http://osms.org/st-peregrine-ministry/st-peregrine-ministry>.

44. “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,” 304; Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 193.

45. “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga,” *New Catholic encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., ed., Berard Marthaler (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America/Gale Publishing, 2003), vol 6, 304; David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th ed. rev. (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011), 193.

46. “St. Aloysius Gonzaga, SJ (1568–1591)” Ignatian Spirituality.com (Website, Loyola Press, no copyright date), accessed April 2012, <http://ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-voices/16th-and-17th-century-ignatian-voices/st-alloysius-gonzaga-sj/>.

47. For example, see Hardy, *Loving Men*, ch. 3; Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church*, ch. 4.

fact, such associations could stem in part from another early title for AIDS in the 1980s—the “gay plague.”⁴⁸

Of course, highlighting this aspect of the hagiography of Aloysius Gonzaga also draws attention to the courageous and self-sacrificing roles of the Jesuits and the Catholic Church in tending to the sick during the sixteenth century. While there were some Catholic organizations, particularly Jesuit ones, caring for PWAs in North America during the late 1980s and 1990s, significant criticism arose during this period regarding the Catholic Church’s response (or lack thereof) to HIV/AIDS.⁴⁹ For this reason it is also possible that the selection of Gonzaga to represent people with AIDS could have been an effort to encourage positive associations between the Jesuits (and thus the Catholic Church) and compassionate responses to HIV/AIDS. Designation of Aloysius Gonzaga as a caring friend to—and fellow sufferer with—the terminally ill could be a small effort by some Catholics to rehabilitate or boost the image of the Church in the face of criticism relating to its concern for PWAs.

There is yet another possible interpretation as to why many Catholics identify Saint Gonzaga with PWAs. Because the hagiographic information about a saint is often cited as justification for establishing patronages, it is significant that Gonzaga is said to have been only⁵⁰ 23 years old at the time of his death and is consistently portrayed as a “young, doe-eyed novice” in hagiographic art.⁵¹ The perception of Saint Gonzaga as a sick but courageous child or teenager is salient because of the emergence of teenager Ryan White as one of the most notable faces of people with AIDS until his death in 1990 at the age of 18.⁵² A significant number of the North American-based texts

48. Merrill Singer, “The Politics of AIDS,” *Social Science Medicine* vol 38, no. 10 (1994): 1321–1324.

49. See Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church*, 65–68; Hardy, *Loving Men*, 115–128; *Gay Religion*, eds., Scott Thumma and Edward Gray (New York: Altamira Press, 2005); and *Queer and Catholic*, eds., Amie Evans and Trebor Healey (New York: Routledge Press, 2008). Susan Henking, “Patron Saint of AIDS/HIV, Father Damien, to Be Canonized,” *Religion Dispatches*, Oct. 9, 2009. <http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/politics/1895/>.

50. Twenty-three years old, while nothing to scoff at by 16th century standards, would undoubtedly be seen as quite young by Western twentieth-century interpreters of his life.

51. See Hartnagel, “Saints Connected to Health,” 1–2; “St. Aloysius Gonzaga, SJ”, esp. 1 and 6.

52. Witchel, 4; Dirk Johnson, “Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18: His Struggle Helped Pierce Myths,” *The New York Times*, April 9, 1990, 2.

that identified Saint Gonzaga with PWAs was published in Jesuit literature in 1989;⁵³ White, as an unusually young and outspoken advocate for AIDS research and “poster boy” for PWAs, held tremendous “celebrity status,” which endured even after his death in 1990.⁵⁴ Evidence that at least some Catholics were associating Ryan White with Saint Gonzaga can be found in the words of one Jesuit author who (after recounting Gonzaga’s death from the plague) explicitly invokes Gonzaga’s “patronage of youth...asking him to embrace all...youth and children suffering from AIDS.” He elaborates further on the relationship between children and teenagers with AIDS and Saint Gonzaga, claiming that, “For six years I have been privileged [to] work with people with AIDS, and have seen...[Gonzaga] bring a gentle brotherhood to the young who find him so comforting.”⁵⁵ As many devotees explicitly regard the young saint as a “timeless example for our youth [and as a saint who] faced the same kinds of challenges” that youth face today,⁵⁶ it may well be that they had young people like Ryan White in mind when they began to talk of Aloysius Gonzaga as an appropriate saint for PWAs.

If, for some Catholics, those who suffer from HIV or AIDS are innocent, young people, then for others the term “AIDS sufferers” calls to mind both Africans and those who pray for a cure. These are the people said to be heard by Saint Luigi Scrosoppi, another saint classified by some Catholics as “the patron saint for those living with AIDS.”⁵⁷ Interestingly, several lay-Catholic websites dedicated to this saint claim specifically that

53. See, for example, William McNichols, “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga: Patron of People with AIDS,” *Jesuit Bulletin* (Summer 1989): 3, accessed April 2012, www.puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/andre/gonzaga_poem.html; and William Hart McNichols, “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga: Patron of Youth,” *Jesuit Bulletin* (Summer 1989): 5, accessed April 2012, www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/703948/posts. They are both about PWAs and were published in a Jesuit journal in 1989.

54. His fame, for instance, carried over into the passing of major national legislation (the *Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act*) for the treatment and care of low-income persons with AIDS. See Johnson, “Ryan White Dies of AIDS at 18,” 3.

55. McNichols, “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga: Patron of Youth,” 1.

56. “St. Aloysius Gonzaga, SJ,” 1.

57. He is also, some sites claim, the patron saint of football (soccer) players. John Whitehead, “St Luigi Scrosoppi,” accessed April 2012, <http://onceiwasacleverboy.blogspot.com/2011/10/st-luigi-scrosoppi.html>; “San Luigi Scrosoppi: Schutzpatron Der Fussballer,” accessed April 2012, <http://www.luigiscrosoppi.com/index.php?formular>; Robert Stuffleter and Filip Stuffleter, “Research and Creation: Saint Luigi Scrosoppi, patron Saint of all footballers,”

Pope John Paul II declared Scrosoppi to be “the patron of AIDS sufferers”; however, the Holy See’s official description of Luigi Scrosoppi includes no official patronage, stating instead that he, “through his efforts on behalf of the little ones, of the poor, of young people in difficulty, of those who are suffering, of all those living in trying circumstances...still continues today to show everyone the path of union with God.”⁵⁸ Despite this lack of establishment of any official patronage, “hope for AIDS sufferers” in Africa and beyond is a dominant, explicit theme among internet sites and Catholic literature about Scrosoppi. The clear reason for this interest stems not from his (rather unremarkable) hagiography as published by the Holy See but instead from the process through which he was canonized. The Catholic Church investigated and accepted reports from 1996 which claimed that, while dreaming that he was placing a crown upon Luigi Scrosoppi’s head, a Zambian priest-in-training with terminal AIDS was miraculously cured.⁵⁹ This event cleared the way for Saint Scrosoppi’s canonization in 2001. Since then, a number of shrines, websites, and prayers for Saint Scrosoppi have emerged, and most focus on the theme of hope for a cure from “this terrible curse.”⁶⁰ These websites, several of which reference a “never-ending flow of letters, telegrams, and telephone calls” to the Oratorian Fathers in South Africa (i.e. the Oratory of S. Philip at Oudtshoorn, where the priest in question is reportedly a member), exhort their readers to take heart. “There is hope and consolation for persons with AIDS” one lay-Catholic website reads, “because there is now one in heaven who intercedes” for people—and Africans specifically⁶¹—with AIDS.⁶² The connection between PWAs

accessed April 2012, <http://www.stuffesser.com/en/studio/saint-luigi-scrosoppi-patron-soccer-football/>.

58. Holy See, “Luigi Scrosoppi,” *Vatican Press*, accessed April 2012, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20010610_scrosoppi_en.html, 5.

59. “Saint Luigi Scrosoppi,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 846.

60. James, “Healing of HIV,” Totus Tuus, accessed March 2012, www.all-about-the-virgin-mary.com/healing-of-hivsids.html.

61. Clemente-Arnaldo specifically invokes Scrosoppi as an intercessor for those suffering from AIDS in “our country,” which (though not explicitly stated) is suggested to be South Africa where the Oratory is located; see Nora Clemente-Arnaldo, “Luigi Scrosoppi, Patron Saint of AIDS Sufferers,” Totus Tuus, accessed March 2012, www.all-about-the-virgin-mary.com/scrosoppi.html, p 2.

62. See “Scrosoppi, the Patron Saint of Persons living with HIV,” Positivism.com, accessed April 2012, <http://www.positivism.ph/comments.php?post=20&cid=329>; Clemente-Arnaldo,

and the perception that HIV is an “African disease” has a long history with colonialist and racist undertones that has influenced the implementation of preventative education and treatment of HIV.⁶³ The aim of many sites focused on the miracle attributed to Saint Luigi Scrosoppi, then, is two-fold: these lay-Catholic sites are explicitly invested in establishing an identity with and for Catholics and those with HIV/AIDS in parts of Africa, while also communicating a message of hope in communities that have been particularly ravaged by (and often still have little or no effective means of protection from) the disease.⁶⁴

Lastly, the saint who has undoubtedly received the most North American publicity as “the patron saint of people with HIV/AIDS” is Damien de Veuster, also known as Father Damien. Recognized as the patron saint of Hawai‘i and of people with Hansen’s Disease (leprosy), Father Damien died in 1889 after contracting leprosy during the sixteen years he spent serving the neglected leper colony on the Hawaiian island of Moloka‘i.⁶⁵ Many authors have written about Father Damien as the “unofficial patron saint of HIV/AIDS sufferers” but, interestingly, most of these descriptions stem from scholarly or journalistic publications. That is, contrary to the pattern of lay devotion and identification seen among websites and publications for Saints Peregrine, Gonzaga, and Scrosoppi, most authors who speak of Damien as “the saint of AIDS” do so as reporters or scholars.⁶⁶ Given the pattern of devotion and identification with the life of saints and illness outlined above, it is notable that there is a measurably smaller amount of available lay literature and online devotion to a man

1; “Miraculous AIDS healing,” accessed April 2012, http://www.mindlight.info/maitreya/miracle_aids_healing.htm.

63. Wilton, *Engendering AIDS: Deconstructing Sex, Text and Epidemic*, 54, 67.

64. For references to this ongoing crisis, see especially Ferrari, “Catholic and Non-Catholic NGOs Fighting HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 85–107; Joshua, “A Critical Historical Analysis of the South African Catholic Church’s HIV/AIDS Response Between 2000 and 2005,” 437–447. See also Beth Haile, “Articulating a Comprehensive Moral Response to HIV/AIDS in the Spirit of St. Damien of Molokai,” *Catholic Moral Theology* (May 2011), accessed April 2012, <http://catholicmoraltheology.com/articulating-a-comprehensive-moral-response-to-hiv-aids-in-the-spirit-of-st-damian-of-molokai/>.

65. “Blessed Damien de Veuster,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12, 846; vol. 14, 467; Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 122.

66. “Patron Saint of AIDS to be Canonized in October.” *The Salt Lake Tribune* (February 27, 2009).

whose life in several ways closely mirrored the experiences of PWAs and their caregivers. That is, Father Damien spent roughly the second half of his adult life compassionately ministering to people who were both literally and figuratively outcasts because of a disease that was at the time seen as being caused by one's own immorality.⁶⁷

There are several likely reasons for this divergent pattern in devotionalism. The first and most innocuous reason is that Father Damien is among the most recently recognized saints, having been canonized in 2009 by Pope Benedict XVI.⁶⁸ Such novelty, combined with the more established devotions already underway to the other saints described above, could conceivably be limiting his appeal among the Catholic faithful. However, the late hour of the saint's arrival has clearly not hindered all Catholics; the self-declared "first and only" Roman Catholic shrine in the world dedicated to persons living with HIV/AIDS and those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses (located in Montreal, Quebec) is consecrated to Saint Damien. Similarly, St. Damien of Molokai, in Pontiac, Michigan, became the first church in the United States to be named in the saint's honour upon his canonization in 2009.⁶⁹

If some Catholics and non-Catholics⁷⁰ are recognizing the patronage of Saint Damien for those with AIDS, why then are so many of the references to this ecclesiastical relationship academic or journalistic in

67. See especially Haile, "Articulating a Comprehensive Moral Response," 1–3; and "St. Damien of Molokai," 7.

68. Henking, "Patron Saint of AIDS/HIV, Father Damien, to Be Canonized," 1; Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 122.

69. Haile, "Articulating a Comprehensive Moral Response," 1; Henking, "Patron Saint of AIDS/HIV, Father Damien, to Be Canonized," 2; "Father Damien, Aid to Lepers, Now a Saint," *CBS News*, (Associated Press, October 11, 2009), accessed April 2012, http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-202_162-5377123.html.

70. Commentators on the eve of Damien's canonization included even U.S. President Barack Obama. Having heard stories of Father Damien in Hawai'i as a child, he said on the eve of the saint's canonization that Damien was an example for Americans and all people regarding how one should care for all those who are "suffering from disease, especially HIV/AIDS." However, it is unclear whether such an opinion should be viewed as consistent with or distinct from scholarly and journalistic statements about the saint. It is also unclear whether this statement by such a high-profile figure has had any subsequent effect on the development of devotion to the saint. "Obama Expresses Admiration for Father Damien," *America's Intelligence Wire* (October 9, 2009).

nature? This distinction could stem from the contemporary relevance perceived in the Catholic Church's treatment of both lepers and AIDS sufferers. There is insufficient space here to recount the lengthy and often contentious relationship between PWAs (particularly, and some have argued disproportionately,⁷¹ PWAs within the gay community) and the Catholic Church,⁷² nor the strikingly similar relationship that the Church once enforced with lepers. However, these historical comparisons are clearly not lost on those who now reference Damien as the appropriate saint for PWAs. During Saint Damien's canonization, some Catholics acknowledged the historical similarities between how lepers and PWAs have been treated. Parishioners noted that "the way leprosy was perceived then is how AIDS is perceived today," and that "there is a connection between Damien and the AIDS problem today" when questioned by reporters after Damien's canonization.⁷³ Additionally, Catholic moral theologian Beth Haile recognizes that "just as Saint Damien's lepers were ostracized from society and dehumanized by systematic discrimination against them, so too do we see this same discrimination taking place against those with HIV/AIDS."⁷⁴ Others note the "paradoxical" nature of canonizing a man whose life-work calls to mind chapters of "the Church's...own horrifying history" for both lepers and PWAs, and the "obvious parallels between how leprosy was viewed in the nineteenth century and how HIV/AIDS is seen today."⁷⁵ Because these types of comparisons seem to be evident to many Catholic observers, it is logical to assume that other Catholic communities might wish to differentiate between the past and present actions of the Church regarding these diseases. If some Catholic communities desire to dissociate themselves

71. For example, by 1990 the Center for Disease Control reported that 61% of HIV infections in the United States stemmed from unprotected male-male sex (with another 7% linked to both male-male sex and sharing needles). See Gregory Herek and John Capitanio, "AIDS Stigma and Sexual Prejudice," *American Behavioral Scientist* 42 (1999): 1136–1143.

72. For an excellent history of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the American LGBTQ community, see Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), particularly 34–57 for its intersection with AIDS.

73. "Father Damien, Aid to Lepers, Now a Saint," 1.

74. Haile, "Articulating a Comprehensive Moral Response," 2.

75. Henking, "Patron Saint of AIDS/HIV, Father Damien, to Be Canonized," 2; Jan De Volder and John Allen Jr., *The Spirit of Father Damien: The Leper Priest* (London: Ignatius Press, 2010), x.

from Father Damien and the inarguably mixed history of Catholic outreach to those with Hansen's disease and HIV/AIDS, then perhaps it is no surprise that this devotion has been taken up comparatively less frequently among laity seeking an appropriate Catholic symbol for those with HIV/AIDS.

From the evidence above, it is clear that there are serious negotiations of identity and shifting perceptions of disease and stigma occurring within the discourses surrounding saint veneration today. The manner in which both HIV/AIDS and PWAs are thought about by Catholic communities is being shaped and contested by the kinds of analogies invited by competing patron saints. Humans understand disease through analogy, and the saints outlined here are clearly being used as salient identifiers and lenses through which Catholics and non-Catholics alike may perceive and conceptualize PWAs and HIV. It need hardly be noted that the manner in which Catholics view these important and sensitive topics is of no small import; Catholic leaders in the United States, Canada, and around the globe frequently enter into the political sphere to debate numerous issues relating to both AIDS and sexuality.⁷⁶

Indeed, the specter of sexuality hangs over the saints in this analysis, and it adds yet another dimension to the uses and meanings these saints may have for different congregations. The Church, the CCCB, and the USCCB have all championed the practices of abstinence for those outside of marriage and celibacy for gay and lesbian parishioners; it is possible that Catholic leaders could also hold up some of the saints analyzed here as models for PWAs or persons at risk for HIV. As previously noted, one longstanding primary role of saints in Catholic tradition has been to serve as sanctioned examples of virtuous behaviours, and accounts of saints' chastity and resistance of sexual temptation are often highlighted. Such rhetoric could easily be applied to the saints in this analysis; Saint Gonzaga was commended for having taken a vow of chastity at age nine, Saint Scrosoppi is said to have taken a number of female orphans and "less reputable young women" from the streets and inspired them to become chaste nuns, and

76. Such political involvement is additionally noteworthy because Catholic perceptions and discussions of "same-sex desires have been decisive in European and American histories of what we now call 'homosexuality,'" and Catholic policies and interpretation continue to influence perceptions of sexuality and how best to address the AIDS pandemic. Jordan, *Silence*, 7.

detractors of Father Damien were very publicly and resoundingly disgraced for falsely accusing him after his death of sexual impropriety with lepers in his community.⁷⁷

Indeed, there are some suggestions that these saints may be used in certain circumstances to further the Church's vision of sexual ethics. For instance, the African Jesuit AIDS Network (AJAN) specifically promotes Saint Gonzaga and the Blessed Anuarite Nengapeta as the protectors of the AJAN. Alongside the more well-known (and chaste) Saint Gonzaga, AJAN publications specifically highlight that the African nun Anuarite Nengapeta's martyrdom occurred while she was defending her virginity.⁷⁸ However, such uses of saints as models of sexual restraint within North American contexts remain speculative. Though the Church does openly and frequently utilize other saints to promote chastity,⁷⁹ there are no direct references to sexual practice or orientation in any of the sources cited. It is most likely, therefore, that if any discussions on this topic are occurring, they are taking place at local levels rather than being disseminated as Catholic policy.

While "understanding the iconographic references of [AIDS] images...[and] the extraordinary power the images have to reflect (and shape) society's response to individuals suffering from disease" is of vital importance, the various depictions and uses of saints are not beyond "cultural influences and political interests."⁸⁰ Rather, images and perceptions of saints function in these instances as "social actors whose [involvement in] defining and treating disease can express and legitimate" beliefs, perceptions, and worldviews.⁸¹ Engaging cultural constructions, including the religious,

77. "Saint Aloysius Gonzaga," 304; and Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 193; Holy See, "Luigi Scrosoppi," 1; "St. Damien of Molokai," 7.

78. Paterné Mombé, SJ, ed, "AJA News – August-September 2011," *African Jesuit AIDS Network*, accessed November 2012, <http://www.jesuitaids.net/htm/news/102ENG.pdf>.

79. One of the most notable of these is Saint Thomas Aquinas; he serves as the patron saint of the Angelic Warfare Confraternity. Endorsed by the Catholic Apostolate Courage International, which aims to offer support and guidance for homosexual Catholics, the Confraternity uses the hagiography of Aquinas to try to inspire young Catholics to abstinence and lesbian and gay members to celibacy. Fr. Brian T. Mullady, "The Angelic Warfare Confraternity," pamphlet (New Hope: St. Martin de Porres Lay Dominican Press, 2001).

80. Gilman, "AIDS and Syphilis: The Iconography of Disease," 88.

81. Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church*, 8.

allows one to better understand and appropriately respond to the variety of perceptions that the metaphors about HIV/AIDS and PWAs encourage.

The present study demonstrates that further research is needed regarding the relationships among representations of saints, the communities that sustain them, and perceptions of PWAs. For instance, examining communities that favour these saints will clarify the extent to which the saints chosen represent divergent points in time, politics, gender, sexual preference, culture, community differences or perceptions, and the like. These communities and respective shrines, additionally, can illuminate said parishioners' views on HIV/AIDS and PWAs, any roles Catholic leaders have played in these transformations, and influences that these developments have had on parishioners' devotionalism or faith. Such information will likely also clarify the extent to which these developments have permeated larger segments of Catholic culture and communities; the work of scholars of Catholicism from Orsi to Savastano suggest that devotional practices can range from the extremely isolated—captivating only a limited subset of a single parish—to inspiring large numbers of Catholics around the world.⁸²

Identifying and engaging the people and communities behind these patron saints for HIV/AIDS and PWAs will also likely explicate more precisely the nature and range of Catholics' choices of saints for PWAs. After all, the list of saints discussed herein is not exhaustive. Rather, these saints were chosen because they represent four of the most substantial devotional followings for saints for PWAs.⁸³ Further investigation into other HIV/AIDS patrons and patronesses—such as St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Lazarus, or Anuarite Nengapeta—will undoubtedly yield valuable insights of their own into the ways in which people have come to conceptualize HIV/AIDS and PWAs. Engaging such communities and individuals may also clarify the range of motivations and experiences that have led to said associations.⁸⁴

82. Savastano, “St. Gerard Teaches Him that Love Cancels that Out,” 184; and Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude*.

83. This estimation is based upon the number of websites that reference the particular saint as related to HIV/AIDS or PWAs, the existence of shrines for the patron, and the frequency and volume of Internet traffic directed to each site (compiled and reported by Google, November 2011–March 2012).

84. Several clues about Catholic motivations and experiences with PWAs emerge from the sources presented here. For example, William McNichols, “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga: Patron of People with AIDS” and “Saint Aloysius Gonzaga: Patron of Youth” both provide evidence of

Understanding how these representations have developed in Catholic and non-Catholic communities over specific periods of time relative to the rise and development of the AIDS epidemic both in North America and worldwide will be useful in understanding if and how these perceptions of PWAs contributed to reduced stigmatization in larger societal trends.

The struggle to understand, live with, and hopefully one day overcome the challenges of HIV/AIDS plays out in a multitude of ways, both publicly in societies across the globe and privately within individuals. Yet from its inception, HIV/AIDS has been “a heavily politicized disease.”⁸⁵ In neither “our political life nor our everyday experience...is religion merely private...[nor is] the public sphere neither a realm of straightforward, rational deliberation nor a smooth space of unforced assent.”⁸⁶ The scholarship surrounding saint veneration shows that devotion to saints and the ways in which they influence adherents’ lives is at times the space where private belief spills over into public speech and action. Such beliefs can be influenced by something as seemingly straightforward as choosing a saint to represent people with AIDS, and the perceptions involved in such decisions easily translate into ways in which disease, stigma, and entire groups of people can be viewed.

Jesuit work among PWAs. Also telling is the fact that no appropriated saints in North America come from existing patrons of groups especially at risk for HIV, including African Americans, the homeless, Haitians, or intravenous drug users. Finally, the fact that one third of all websites reviewed also sell icons or images of Saint Peregrine cannot be ignored as a possible reflection of some individuals’ motivations for promoting this saint.

85. Singer, “The Politics of AIDS,” 1.

86. Eduardo Mendieta and Vanantwerpen, “Introduction: The Power of Religion in the Public Square,” in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, eds., Mendieta and Vanantwerpen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.