

“Children’s prayers pervading the clouds”.

In connection with children’s voices, religious liturgy and charitable effects

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The expression “Children’s prayers pervading the clouds“ has been widely known until today. The lecture deals with the history of this expression. Since when and why have children’s voices been regarded as especially gifted to reach “God’s ear”.

The expression’s background is a word from Sir 35,21: “

Originally this prayer referred to the inner humble posture of the praying person. In patristic literature (Ambrosius of Milan, Paulinus of Nola etc.) Sir 35,21 was a word that described the right inner alignment of the praying. None of the patristic interpretations identify the children and the toddlers as the humble. The interpretations aim on the heart, not on the vocal qualities belonging to the praying.

From the 5th century on, when the Christians began to give children a high regard, children’s voices were identified with the “vox angelica” of angels and saints. The socio - cultural change – remembering the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west – lead to the vital change that Sir 35,21 wasn’t metaphorically interpreted any longer.

Now the phrase “children’s voices” was interpreted more in the realistic sense of real children’s voices. That was the start for the phrase “Children’s prayers pervading the clouds“ that made its triumphal march throughout the centuries. Especially in emergencies children sang the Kyrie Eleison and provoked God’s charity: as lecturers, singers, interceding children. The tradition of clear children’s voices was essential even leading to the custom of castrated boy singers which was only abolished in the early 20th century.