Ninon Dubourg

Disabled Clerics in the Late Middle Ages

Un/suitable for Divine Service?

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Amsterdam
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Preface

This research began in Montpellier, in the south of France. I wanted to work on medieval disability, following a long family history that made me very curious about this issue in pre-modern times. A meeting with Mr. Julien Théry, who introduced me to supplications and papal letters, in which I found a formidable cache of material for the cultural history of the medieval period, marked the beginning of the long path that is the writing of a book. I 'go up' to Paris to meet Mr. Henri-Jacques Stiker, whose book, *Corps infirmes et société*, was always at my bedside. He introduced me to Mr. Didier Lett, in whom I found a thesis director, in the noblest sense of the word. His help and advices allowed me to give substance to my ideas. I would also like to thank Mrs. Maaike van der Lugt, Mrs. Irina Metzler, Mr. Charles de Miramon, and Mrs. Myriam Winance, who did me the honor of reading and discussing this work.

This book would never have seen the light of day without the financial, but also human and logistical support of the University of Paris Diderot, and more particularly of the ICT laboratory and its successive directors, Mrs. Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, Mrs. Anna Caiozzo, and Mrs. Charlotte de Castelnau-l'Estoile as well as Mrs. Laurence Griffoul. I particularly thank the ED 382, its former director, Mr. Jean-Pierre Guilhembet, and its former co-director, Mrs. Florence Binard, for the training I received during the thesis. I would also like to thank the students of the University of Paris Diderot for the pleasure I took in teaching them medieval history, historiography, and historical methodology. I feel honoured to have seen them grow and flourish in contact with the teaching staff and their nascent or already affirmed passion.

My research benefited from three grants from the École française de Rome, during which I was able to build up my corpus of documents. I would like to thank Mrs. Catherine Virlouvet, Mr. Pierre Savy, and Mr. Stéphane Gioanni for having welcomed me, as well as those in charge of the library of the French School, Mrs. Annie Coisy and Mr. Clément Pieyre, for their letters, which allowed me to enter the Vatican Apostolic Archives. I took great advantage of the ideal setting offered by the French School, which gave rhythm to my research during my stays. The staff of Vatican Apostolic Archives and Library have always been of great help in consulting the primary material of this research. I thank them here for their precious advice, as well as the archivists of the National Archives of Paris and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

I must mention the names of all those who answered my questions as I worked on this book: Mr. Olivier Canteaut, Mr. Arnaud Fossier, Mr. Armand Jamme, Mrs. Élisabeth Lusset, Mr. Olivier Richard, and Mr. Laurent Vallière. I would also like to thank Mr. Jean-François Ravaud and Mrs. Isabelle Ville who welcomed me to their workshop *Handicap et Sociétés* and to the network of the same name. I am also grateful to the members of the *Homo Debilis* network for the fruitful meetings they have organized periodically: Mrs. Bianca Frohne, Mrs. Jenni Kuuliala, Mrs. Irina Metzler, Mrs. Cordula Nolte, Mrs. Wendy Turner, and so many others, have contributed greatly to the theoretical and practical framework of my research. My warmest thanks also go to my editor at Amsterdam University press, Mrs. Shannon Cunningham, and to the editors who kindly proofread my text, namely Mrs. Alicia Spencer-Hall and Mrs. Vicki Blud.

The writing of this book allowed me to meet wonderful people, of whom it is impossible to make a complete list. Each of them, in his or her own way, has helped me to carry out this research and has served as a reference point in both happy and difficult moments. The unfailing support of my friends and my family and in-laws, far from the world of research, must be underlined. May they all find in these anonymous thanks my most sincere gratitude and affection. Finally, the immeasurable support of Kevin (and Windy) could only be sketched. I will therefore remain silent about him, as I am at a loss for words.

General Remarks

I wished to respect the language of the Latin sources used, but I have sometimes simplified the spelling and restored the capital letters where possible, as well as adjusting punctuation to facilitate the reading. The translation of this type of Latin document being very complex, it was mostly not done word for word but rather with the aim of reproducing the idea contained in the document.

Introduction: A Formal Dialogue

Abstract

The introduction presents the main historical context to the study at hand, with an in-depth focus on the corpus: the petitions sent to the popes and the letters written in answer by the Papal Chancery. It investigates the identity of the petitioners, alongside procedures and regulations relating to the written documents themselves. Most writers were members of the Italian and French high clergy, though individuals from all levels of the Church are represented in the petitions. The correspondence between such clerics and the Papal Chancery depended upon established writing and regulatory processes, both in terms of the rules put in place by the Chancery to guarantee its intervention and the mechanisms available to supplicants for reporting their impairments and making an effective case for dispensations.

Keywords: Petition; Papal Letters; Experiences; Methodology; Discourses

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> And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and
> cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee
> that one of thy members should perish, and not
> that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
> – Matt. 5:30 KJV

Using this sentence, Pope Leo found much-needed biblical justification for an act that appeared senseless to all those around him. Shortly after his election to the papacy, Leo had encountered a beautiful woman who, with due reverence, kissed his hand chastely. This unleashed within Leo, as legend has it, a fleshly temptation so powerful that he had only one option to staunch its fire: to cut off his hand, as prescribed in Matthew 5.30. Whilst this may have resolved the new Pope's internal spiritual struggles, it generated another set of problems entirely, even threatening his position as leader of the

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Church. Following canonical regulations on clerical impairment, his distal forearm amputation rendered him ineligible to perform Mass. The clergy openly voiced their dissatisfaction with a pontiff who could not fulfil one of the most basic, one of the most important, clerical tasks. Their disparaging sentiments were shared by the Roman laity, who threatened a revolt against Leo's religious authority. And so, Leo turned to another beautiful woman to resolve his situation: he entrusted his misfortunes to the Virgin Mary and prayed to her for a miraculous remedy. She dutifully appeared to him in a vision, restored his hand and explicitly authorized him to celebrate Mass. The story of Leo's amputation circulated widely in the Middle Ages, and experienced particular popularity in the mid-thirteenth century, featuring in numerous collections of miracles and *exempla*, in poems, and even songs.[1] Gruesomely entertaining and spiritually educative, it is little wonder that it gained such currency. Its utility as an *exemplum* is not limited to medieval audiences, however. It serves as an excellent primer on the main themes at play in a study of clerical disability in the Middle Ages.

Despite clear evidence of interest in clerical disability in the medieval period, the clergy has been all but forgotten in the discipline of disability history, an area of research that has recently undergone tectonic shifts in scholarly approach.[2] For many years, the topic had been studied almost exclusively from the perspective of social history. This approach privileged the construction of disability as physical anomaly, and analysed such difference in terms of marginality, poverty, and deviance.[3] In this, scholarship followed the contours of public policy that conceived of disabled people as indigents, patients, and/or objects of charity, a stance predicated on the medical model of disability.[4] In the 1980s, however, the issue of accessibility became crucial. Scholars and activists alike emphasized the distinction between impairment and disability, developing the social model of disability.[5] Whilst impairment is a biomedical fact, disability is a condition created and imposed upon non-normate bodies by an ableist society which does not offer equal access to all. The social model enacted a radical shift in conceptualizing disability,

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1   This narrative can be found in the miracles collection of Bartholomeo of Trent (see MS 1794, University of Bologna, and Dondaine, "Barthélemy de Trente O.P."); in the *exemplum* collections of the *Tractatus* 37, the *Tabula exemplorum* 5, the *Alphabetum narrationum* 20 and the *Scala Coeli* 31 (see Delaune, Le handicap dans les *exempla* médiévaux); but also in the poems and songs from the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (see the Oxford database).

2   For a more complete historiography, see Dubourg, "European Medieval Disability History".

3   Stiker, Ravaud, and Albrecht, "L'émergence des disability studies", p. 48.

4   Masala and Petretto, "From Disablement to Enablement", p. 1236.

5   Barnes (eds.), *Implementing the Social Model of Disability.*

yet it still had, and has, its limitations, especially in terms of definition(s) of disability itself.

Academics in the 2000s recognized more clearly than ever that the meanings, and thus the experiences, of disability changed over time, and within and between cultures; hence, the need for a cultural model of disability.[6] The documents used in developing this model, however, typically relate to the substance of laws, rather than their application. In other words, these sources fail to shed light on the real-life experiences of disabled people.[7] Notwithstanding such weaknesses in the literature, close attention to cultural and temporal context remains paramount in understanding disability history. From 2005 onwards, disability has been conceived of as a socio-cultural phenomenon, that which diverges from culturally constituted 'norms' at a given moment in time.[8] More recently, in the past decade or so, researchers have called for further refinement of this model, foregrounding the significance of intersectionality. In an intersectional framework, disability is understood as only one of the elements of identity that collectively governed an individual's lived experiences in medieval society, alongside gender, race, sexuality, and so on.[9] Researchers using an intersectional, cultural model of disability examine the ways in which a given society produces its own norms, including those from which the disabled body notionally deviates. Of prime importance are the ways in which an individual's experience of disability depends on their multiple subject positions, not just their physical ability or lack thereof. Such work is fundamentally interdisciplinary, thereby offering a comprehensive approach to disability and impairment as historically contingent cultural phenomena.[10] With this methodology, it becomes possible to analyse disability as a specific phenomenon, all the while considering the many social mechanisms which produce the non-normate, and the multiple contexts in which disability, as a category, is embedded.[11] Scholars have been all but unanimous in urging for this kind of methodological innovation in disability studies, yet its adoption has

6   Turner and Pearman (eds.), *The Treatment of Disabled Persons in Medieval Europe*; Metzler, *Fools and Idiots?*

7   Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*; Eyler (ed.), *Disability in the Middle Ages*; Turner and Butler (eds.), *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages.*

8   Nolte (ed.), *Homo debilis*; Collard and Samama (eds.), *Handicaps et sociétés dans l'histoire*; Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages.*

9   Goodley, *Disability Studies.*

10   Burghardt, "The Human Bottom of Non-human Things", p. 5; Shildrick, "Critical Disability Studies", p. 30.

11   Waldschmidt, "Warum und wozu brauchen die Disability Studies die Disability History?", p. 26.

been slow, particularly in historical research. Only a few historical studies have thus far taken into account this interdisciplinary, intersectional way of thinking.[12] Nevertheless, several publications have recently aimed to contextualize historical experiences of disability. They have contributed to a deeper understanding of disability in the premodern era and of the body in medieval Christian thought, by adopting a rigorously focused analytical gaze.[13] Eschewing generalized surveys, such enquiries concentrate on a delimited geographical region, and/or a specific primary-source corpus, including using material from papal registers. This is illustrated by the work of Friederike Stöhr on disabled German and Scandinavian clerics, which leveraged papal petitions dating to the fifteenth century, preserved in the Apostolic Penitentiary.[14] Stöhr built on the earlier work of Jussi Hanska and Kirsi Salonen, who consulted the same set of primary sources in their book-length analysis of clerical careers from 1458 to 1471.[15] Such scholarship demonstrates the productivity of studying papal documents and religious experience in terms of disability history.

Following a post-structuralist approach, this book proposes that disability is constituted by social and cultural processes, mechanisms which likewise integrally shape representations of the impaired body.[16] Disability is polysemic; as a concept, it is both diachronic (mobilizing concepts or structures that evolve over time) and synchronic (revealing structures, ideas, or cultures from a specific point in time). From a synchronic perspective, the language of disability is common to all contemporaneous narrators at a deep and unconscious level.[17] The cultural model, as sketched above, makes it possible to reconceptualize disability in this mode, by taking into account the specific cultural contexts which produce the disabled body and the lived experiences of disabled people.[18] Impairment, understood by its direct link to the body and physical difference, is culturally constructed in a similar fashion. It has its own symbolic dimension in which illness, old

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12   Krötzl, Mustakallio, and Kuuliala (eds.), *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*; Turner and Lee (eds.), *Trauma in Medieval Society*.

13   Kuuliala, *Childhood Disability and Social Integration in the Middle Ages*; Scarborough, *Viewing Disability in Medieval Spanish Texts*; Künzel and Connelly (eds.), *New Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Medicine in Medieval Europe*; Baker, Nijdam and Land (eds.), *Medicine and Space*.

14   Stöhr, *Körpermakel – Arbeits(un)fähigkeit – Kirchenrecht*.

15   Hanska and Salonen, *Entering a Clerical Career*.

16   Hughes and Paterson, "The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body", p. 326.

17   Metzler, *A Social History of Disability in the Middle Ages*, p. 4.

18   Shakespeare, "Cultural Representation of Disabled People".

age, accidents, and so on contribute to its social construction.[19] Within this framework, the body becomes a social and historical object: it must be re-centred as the primary object of analysis.[20] The cultural model demonstrates that society, as a capitalist and materialist system, is not the only 'disabling' agent. What becomes clear is that biological factors and the socio-cultural perception of the impaired body are inseparable, and intertwined, in the understanding and lived experience of disability. Impairment is not only a medical condition, but an experience, and a discursive construction. Consequently, it is as much social as it is biological.[21] Consideration of impairment and disability in concert allows us to discern the various aspects of physical and/or mental handicap in a given society. In that respect, they function in the same way as other analytical metrics, such as age, gender, or social status.[22] In short, impairment and disability exist first and foremost as shifting cultural constructs that change across time and between places. The signification ascribed to these constructs also varies according to more immediate, or narrow, social and/or environmental context(s), and may therefore change depending on the documents studied.[23]

In petitions written by disabled clerics and pontifical letters, studied as the primary corpus for this book, the 'impairment' turns into a 'disability' in relation to the pontifical institution because of its consequences. Indeed, within the supplication process, 'disability' appears because 'impairment' prevents clerics from fulfilling their social role, which requires a particular kind of 'fixing' from the pontifical institution. In this material, clerics with a range of impairments – including physical conditions (e.g., limb loss, bodily weakness, disease), sensory impairments (e.g., blindness, deafness), and mental infirmities (e.g., senile dementia, epilepsy) – encounter similar or comparable difficulties in fulfilling some of their ecclesiastical duties and benefiting from their associated rights. These individuals, then, experienced disability as a social, religious, and cultural phenomenon, in terms of the way in which their impairment(s) were framed as barriers to their full participation in the Church.

Normality is defined at a cultural rather than an individual level. As such, any study of the representation of a specific group of disabled people, such as clerics, must be grounded in a more generalized understanding

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19   Siebers, "Disability in Theory", p. 739.
20   Gleeson, *Geographies of Disability*, p. 67.
21   Thomas, "Disability Theory: Key Ideas, Issues and Thinkers", p. 52.
22   Krötzl, Mustakallio, and Kuuliala, "Introduction", p. 5.
23   For examples, see Hsy, Pearman, and Eyler (eds.), *A Cultural History of Disability in the Middle Ages.*

of the bigger picture of disability, including its complexity, in medieval society as a whole.[24] To this end, it is necessary to determine the way in which physical and mental conditions were perceived on the basis of the knowledge and practices of the period.[25] When referring to 'the body' in medieval society, we refer more accurately to the *Christian* body, for religion was the primordial signifying framework in which the body was embedded and was its principle regulatory agent.[26] The prescriptions set out in dogma were not just spiritual, but physical. For example, Christians were instructed on an array of appropriate practices, including those regarding food (e.g., Lenten fasting, ingestion of certain foods on certain days), sexual intercourse (e.g., approved positions, prohibition during menstruation), sleep (e.g., structured according to canonical hours), and work (e.g., the timing of rest).[27] Moreover, ecclesiastical authorities explicitly legislated the idealized form of embodiment, the 'perfect body' required of all clergy. The impaired bodies of clerics exhibiting 'defects' of body or mind (*defectus corporis* and *mentis*) fell short of this normative standard, and thus were judged to be 'irregular'. Clerical impairment as a category of experience is, thus, integrally contingent: inseparable from the power that legislates its form(s), and the culture in which it is produced. For this reason, this book establishes a critical dialogue between norms and practices. As the sources demonstrate, norms can and do shift, thereby changing an individual's (experience of) impairment, even as their physical condition(s) may remain the same. The norms decreed by pontifical authority, such as statutes in canon law, could be endorsed, modified, even overruled, on a case-by-case basis, as the Papal Chancery responded to individual cleric's petitions, in letters written and sent in the name of the current Pope.

This book approaches medieval disability on the basis of correspondence received and issued by one of the most powerful medieval authorities in the Western world: the papacy. Concentrating on sources from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, this study tracks the papal monarchy's formation, its glorious heyday, and its eventual decline.[28] This tumultuous period saw the emergence of a papal theocracy (a political system whose nature is based on power from God), founded on legal concepts but also on administrative

24   See Linton, "What Is Disability Studies?", p. 518; Meade and Serlin, "Editors' Introduction", p. 4.
25   Van Trigt, Gross, and Söderfeldt, "Historicizing the Social Model", p. 95.
26   Hutchinson, "Disabling Beliefs?", p. 11.
27   See Bynum, *Christian Materiality*.
28   Whalen, *Dominion of God*, p. 3.

organization. The book starts on the theoretical foundations laid by the Gregorian reforms that advocated the assertion of papal power and stated a stronger separation between the laity and the clergy. One of its manifestations was the Investiture Controversy, which tried to define whether the king (temporal power) or the Pope (spiritual power) had the legitimacy to appoint the prelates of the Church. Elected in this context, Paschal II (1099–1118) is the first Pope we encounter in the corpus. He was the first pontiff to attempt to resolve the thorny issue of antipopes, 'competing' Church leaders that had long been an issue, with the present interlopers installed by Henry IV.[29] During the late Middle Ages, the papacy was in conflict with various secular forces around these issues of delimiting its temporal power, to the point of having to flee Rome and take refuge in Avignon from 1309 to 1378. The study ends with the pontificate of Gregory XI (1371–1378), which marked the return of the papacy to the Eternal City. Yet Gregory's reign also saw the beginning of the Great Western Schism that divided Christians into two factions for some forty years. This *terminus ad quem* corresponds to the end of the period in which the papacy, in Rome as in Avignon, had strenuously attempted to solidify and centralize its authority.

The popes developed the administrative centrality of the Church around their person in the Curia (the popes' court and central administrative government) in order to strengthen their power. They created a colossal volume of diplomatics in pursuit of this goal, forming the rich corpus of material that furnishes the present study.[30] From the twelfth to the fourteenth century, the ecclesiastical institution exercised temporal, as well as spiritual, supremacy over the whole of Christendom. Its role in defining impairment and disability cannot be overstated. The real-world power of papal letters to settle clerical or religious problems across Europe lay in the pontiff's own ability to grant graces – the prerogative of the greatest monarchs of the medieval period – and the letters' function as a vehicle by which to transmit that grace. Grace, in this context, typically refers to grants of permission to ratify, edit, and/or exceed rules and established norms, issued in response to an individual's petition. Taken as a corpus, then, the papal letters bear witness to a 'dialogue' between the lived experiences of disability (specific clerics; petitions), and the structures which constructed disability as a category (the

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29   Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government*.

30   This moment in ecclesiastical history, difficult to study given the great diplomatic output of the multiple Chanceries (Avignon, Rome, Pisa), reveals the problems of power around which the question of pontifical grace crystallizes.

papacy, as Church authority; papal letters), allowing historians to grasp the complexity of such interchanges.[31]

Disability and impairment are socio-culturally structured as deviance, that is, the inability to conform to the bodily and/or mental norms produced by one or more authorities.[32] Indeed, the very materiality of the body is challenged by knowledge power.[33] Dominant discourses, for example medicine and law, orient the body and render it 'intelligible', at least partially. In Foucauldian terms, these authorities determine a baseline of 'normality', thereby producing impairment and disability.[34] Accordingly, categorizations of normality and abnormality ultimately serve to establish who has the right to be part of society and who does not.[35] The necessity of first defining normality in a given context, in order to discern and define otherness, has become ever more clear, as more and more researchers have begun to examine disability across cultures and time periods.[36] We must seek out the 'perfect', 'normal' body in a given culture to bring into focus the 'imperfect', 'abnormal' body, following the discursive logic of ableism.[37] From this point of view, studies of disability highlight the fact that disability and normality are, to some degree at least, fluid concepts and states.[38] The medieval Church had the prerogative of transmitting, revising, and applying canon law. With pontifical letters, the institution issued pronouncements on all, and any, issues relating to the ministry, religious obligations, and Christian life. The Church's epistolary policy had a notable impact on the lives of the clergy and laity alike as its authority grew stronger during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, particularly in the papacy's official acts.

This study operates according to two fundamental principles. Firstly, the impaired body is understood as both the product and target of social anxieties. In medieval society, as arguably in our own, physical and mental impairments are linked to abnormality. This gives rise to legislation and regulations which exclude disabled people from social roles, services, and more. This is equally true of the situation within the ecclesiastical institution,

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31   Millet, *Suppliques et requêtes*. It was rather about presenting a petition in a right form so that the popes could accept it than a real and developed 'dialogue' but it could also lead to a series of epistolary exchanges.

32   Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 6.

33   Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*.

34   Shildrick and Price, "Uncertain Thoughts on the Dis/abled Body", p. 234.

35   Meekosha and Shuttleworth, "What's so "Critical" about Critical Disability Studies?", p. 65.

36   Kudlick, "Disability History", p. 560.

37   Titchkosky, "Disability Studies", p. 219. On ableism, see Campbell, *Contours of Ableism*.

38   Frohne and Horn, "On the Fluidity of "Disability"", p. 28.

since impaired supplicants were obliged to seek dispensations from the Pope himself on account of their 'abnormality'. Petitions and papal letters therefore illustrate the typical anxieties of medieval society about impairment. Secondly, this corpus elucidates ecclesiastical attitudes towards 'abnormality', attitudes which are fundamental to a medieval understanding of disability more generally. This point is essential to grasp. The Church, as an institution, imposes (or attempts to impose) its authority on the whole of Christian thought. What's more, it proposes a normative definition of impairment – that which diverges from the 'perfect body' – upon which our analysis depends. These primary sources do not merely offer us information, fleshing out what we already knew, but rather inspiration: this study is guided by what these rich documents have to say on the matter of disability, using such findings to expand our conceptualization of the categories at hand. The Papal Chancery is charged with measuring impairment and deciding whether or not a person is capable of fulfilling the duties associated with his ecclesiastical office based on the severity of his 'infirmity'. As such, impairment becomes a disability.

This book hypothesizes that clerical disability emerges in the moment that an individual's impairment was recognized as such by the Church, that is, in terms of the relationship of a given body with an institutional authority. In this context, physical or mental impairments considered to be disabilities justify the receipt of pontifical grace. Indeed, the use of the Latin word *defectus* to describe the irregularity of the impaired clerical body allows us to characterize bodily difference as a crucial identity marker within the supplication process. Impairment could be a potent conduit, even remedy, for social anxieties, insofar as individuals could leverage their impairment as a pretext to justify modifying their identity, achieved through the supplication process. If recognized as disabled, individuals acceded to an established role in the community, one that could have certain advantages.[39] This papally approved transition was achieved chiefly through adapting petitioners' ecclesiastical duties, and thereby updating their social identities, according to their current level of in/ability.

Responding positively to petitions, the Papal Chancery recognized the condition of disability and – without erasing the impairment itself – erased its *institutional* effects, by enacting, modifying, or softening the application of relevant laws. In fact, granting of papal grace allowed supplicants to be

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39   Calvez, "Le handicap comme situation de seuil", p. 84; or Willett and Deegan, "Liminality and Disability". See the foundational works of anthropologists on rites of passages and ritual processes, who include Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner.

included in an environment from which they would usually have been excluded. The Church, as the authority which defined bodily 'abnormality', could and did act as an agent both of exclusion *and* inclusion, flexing its power to produce both disability and ability on a case-by-case basis. It appears that defining disability constituted a fundamental act of governance – tinged with political value – for the papacy.

Petitions and Papal Letters

Petitions and papal letters are a uniquely rich source, offering almost unparalleled documentation of clerical impairment in the Middle Ages, from both individual and institutional perspectives. This material was the output of the Papal Chancery, an institution that underwent a dazzling evolution from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, with the epistolary apparatus playing a central role in attempts to legitimize papal authority, when granting of pontifical grace through letters became resolutely political. The archives demonstrate a noticeable uptick in the number of letters received, sent, and kept by the Curia from the reign of Paschal II (1099–1118) onwards, alongside more stringent regulation of the diplomatic format itself. The so-called Gregorian Reforms, the reign of Innocent III (1198–1216), and the promotion of *plenitudo potestatis* all explain, and justify, this new zeal to preserve correspondence.[40] Faced with the administrative chaos of an ever-growing mass of documents, the popes and the Holy See were obliged to revolutionize the organization of the Chancery, and the tools at its disposal, from the beginning of the thirteenth century.[41] From the eleventh century onwards, the influence of pontifical power expanded significantly, coinciding with the institutionalization of papal grace. The Chancery's remit broadened, and the authority with which its letters were invested was strengthened. Exchanges between petitioners and Chancery continue to be recorded to this day, and can be found alongside the medieval examples in the Vatican Apostolic Archives' registers.[42]

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40   Kiedi Kionga, *Dispenses en droit canonique*.

41   Montaubin, "L'administration pontificale de la grâce", p. 321.

42   To find out more about the places where the Vatican Archives are kept, from the Lateran in 649 to the Palatine Hill in the eleventh century, to the archives we know today, set up by Pius IV (1605–1621) during the Napoleonic parenthesis of 1810 and opened to researchers in 1881 by Leo XIII (1878–1903), see Coombs, Yakel, Carlen and Gill, *Vatican Archives*, or Gachard, "Les archives du Vatican".

A Hybrid Corpus: Regulation, in Theory and in Practice

Some petitions were lodged by the laity in order to absolve a sin, commute a vow, or allow prohibited acts, such as marrying a cousin. The majority of the corpus, however, deals with issues specific to the clergy which fell under the exclusive remit of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in professional as well as spiritual terms. This includes, for example, requests to become a priest despite the canonical impediment of *defectus*. Such a 'defect' could relate to age (*defectus aetatis*, if an individual were underage), to legitimacy (*defectus natalium*, in cases of illegitimate birth), and, crucially for the present analysis, to physical or mental conditions (*defectus corporis* or *mentis*). The presence of any defect could disqualify a man from joining the Church's ranks entirely.[43] But defects of body or mind also concern those already in the ecclesiastical community, clerics whose condition(s) now prevented them from fulfilling their responsibilities in performing religious rites (such as Mass, Eucharist) and duties (Lent, pilgrimages, and so on).[44]

Petitions and papal letters form a productively hybridized corpus, situated at the intersection of authorized institutional policy and (auto-)biographical testimony, chronicling the lived experiences of disabled people in the Middle Ages. As such, they constitute an excellent analytical laboratory in which to study medieval impairment in its relation to the papacy as an institution, alongside the impact of official ecclesiastical judgments on disabled lives. The corpus of petitions and papal letters on physical and mental impairments under discussion in this study consists of 142 petitions, preserved for the reign of Clement VI (1342–1352), Innocent VI (1352–1362) and the first four years of the pontificate of Urban V (1362–1370), as well as 743 letters (for at least 753 petitioners) from the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries.

The petitions followed a complex and costly path before reaching the Pope, to whom all of the Church's *causae majores* (matters of major importance) were sent. They were addressed to the Pontifical Curia by clerics or lay people from all over Europe, reflecting the growing push to centralize ecclesiastical power. This was emphasized, for example, in Gregory VII's influential (though unofficial) treatise *Dictatus Papae*, which affirmed that the Pope alone held jurisdiction over all Christendom.[45] With few exceptions, the

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43 Metzler, "Then and Now", p. 465.
44 See Parlopiano, "*Propter Deformitatem*".
45 Schuster, *Der Dictatus Papae*.

original petitions have been lost.[46] Their contents, however, were copied by
the Chancery for archival purposes.[47] Petitions in this study's corpus have
been preserved in the first 46 registers of the Vatican Apostolic Archives
(VAA), known collectively as *Registra Supplicationum* (RS). Whilst papal
bulls have been the object of fairly comprehensive research, the petitions
have long been neglected, a fact that is reflected in, and explains, the dearth
of published editions.[48] Things appear to be changing, however. Since the
beginning of the twentieth century, the petition registers, as a collection,
have been amongst the most frequently consulted medieval sources in the
entire VAA.

Papal letters were written by the Chancery on behalf of the Pope in
response to supplications.[49] These acts are known variously as rescripts of
privilege, indulgence, dispensation, exemption, grace, or benefice, according
to their content and function.[50] Dispensations relating to impairment were
case-specific, authorizing a modification in the application of canonical
law for a specific petitioner, without changing the legislation itself.[51] Such
grants of grace remained strictly exceptional and constituted 'a temporary
softening of the rigour of the law because of the necessity of time or the
usefulness to the Church', to quote Bernold of Constance, a Benedictine
chronicler and supporter of the Gregorian reform paraphrasing Gratian's
Decree (*Decretum*).[52] The pontifical letters are therefore neither constitutions
(which are matters of law and discipline), nor encyclicals (letters addressed
to the episcopate), nor decrees (regulations valid for the whole Church), nor
decretals (documents which deal with particular cases before becoming
jurisprudence). Papal missives in this study's corpus are preserved in the
290 Vatican Registers (VR) spanning the years 1198–1378.[53] Some were kept
in 172 Avignon Registers (AR) recording activities in the period 1309–1378.[54]

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46   See Van Moé, "Suppliques originales", and Gasnault, "Une supplique originale".

47   Completed in 1899, the fund amounts to 7,365 volumes since 1342.

48   Zutshi, "The Origins of the Registration of Petitions".

49   Zutshi, "The Personal Role of the Pope", Herold (eds.), *Vom Nutzen des Schreibens*.

50   Durand de Maillane, *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, IV, p. 360.

51   Vallerani, *Medieval Public Justice*, p. 312.

52   My translation of Bernold of Constance, *Epistola* 57, *in* Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 161,
p. 326, quoted in Hoareau-Dodinau, *Le pardon*, p. 346.

53   This number rises to 2,042 for the whole series of RV (up to 1605). See Boyle, *A Survey of the
Vatican*, p. 106.

54   RA run to 349 volumes and were used to record the missives of the Popes of Avignon from
1316 to 1378, then the antipopes from 1378 to 1416. See op. cit., p. 107. Under the pontificate of
Clement VI, a double recording system was introduced: the first rapid and discursive, much
abbreviated, on paper (AR), and the second with the hand laid down on parchment registers

Selections of this material have been published relatively frequently, edited by various European teams through history.[55]

Above all, papal letters highlight the Pope's *plenitudo potestatis*: they manifest, and act as a conduit for, the pontiff's access to grace. This was central to the papacy's legitimacy as an institutional authority, and its effective administration of the Church's affairs. Grace served as a mechanism by which the Pope could adjust, even contravene, established ecclesiastical standards, norms, and functions, by softening the application of law.[56] These documents allow petitioners to disobey notionally universal rules that, in theory, should apply, due to their physical and/or mental impairment(s), without fear of punishment. In this way, they demonstrate Weberian 'material rationality': the law is neither fixed nor entirely objective, in terms of an equal, fixed application. Broader social contexts and extra-legal concerns directly influence legal outcomes.[57] The law was ill-equipped to deal with the material effects of clerics' physical and/or mental impairments, a weakness which did not similarly affect the efficacy of pontifical grace. The latter provided the means to surpass legal authority, ensuring necessary social adjustments were put in place for disabled clergy. In concrete terms, the petitions and letters illustrate how divergences from the norm compelled institutional responses and affected, perhaps even transformed, institutional practices. This compelled, in turn, a shift in the standards by which the norm was constructed, responding to the social needs of medieval people. This is entirely in line with medieval thought, which held that neither a general rule of law nor absolute predictability of legal solutions were possible: the law lies in the particular.[58] Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the Papal Chancery became something like a factory churning out case-by-case exemptions to norms, issuing countless grants of grace to disabled petitioners. Yet these 'exceptional' accommodations would, ultimately, reshape the norms to which they originally responded, gradually modifying what would be taken as normal, and permissible, for future clergy.[59]

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when the document was ready to be sent (VR). However, ten years later, during the reign of Innocent VI, the Chancery made it a practice to copy only part of the letters in the VR: the two series therefore remain complementary even today.

55   This book contains unpublished papal letters. For a list of published documentation, see Bibliography.

56   Claustre, "La grâce et la norme", p. 175.

57   See Miramon, "L'invention de la Réforme grégorienne", p. 288, quoting Weber, *Rechtssoziologie*.

58   Leveleux-Teixeira, "Fabrique et réception de la norme".

59   Indeed, over time, the missives became integrated within the canon law. On this process, see Cerutti, "Normes et pratiques".

A Grounded Approach to Medieval Clerical Disability

This study employs a blended methodology, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches to interrogate the corpus. Relevant information has been extracted from the textual sources, producing a database which facilitates statistical processing.[60] Quantitative analysis offers an expansive overview of the totality of cases found in the corpus, and reveals patterns in the dataset, thereby providing macro-level findings about clerical disability. Examination of a corpus of homogeneous documents can testify, for example, to continuities or differences in terms of the representation of the same phenomenon in different individual contexts. This approach illustrates the constructed-ness of impairment, as it makes visible the norms most frequently mobilized by the ecclesiastical institution in determining clerical disability, or lack thereof. Likewise, through the comparative study of the contents of the letters, we gain ever more detail regarding the lived experiences of medieval disability, especially in terms of the diversity of conditions represented. In a complementary fashion, this study offers qualitative case studies that focus more narrowly on individual petitions, and the traces of the lives of the disabled clerics they transmit. Case studies, if an appropriate case has been selected and analysed with sufficient rigour, allow historians to explore in depth aspects relevant to the research project more generally, bringing to light an individual example of a discourse or an experience that can then be generalized.[61] This approach is akin to micro-history, and is one of the most effective methods for excavating the authentic reality of situations in which rhetorical stereotyping has been used against groups of people. The generic features of a singular object are thus revealed, permitting an empirical approach.[62] In this way, serial analysis and the usage of case studies are mutually reinforcing methodological tools.

The interweaving of these two approaches is a hallmark of grounded theory, a framework first developed by anthropologists and sociologists.[63] This theory is based on the systematic analysis of all available data on a given subject. Following an inductive and grounded methodology, this book draws on several types of supplementary sources which, in various ways, all speak to the specific nature of 'normality' in the period, in order to understand the law justifying the writing of papal letters and to highlight the cultural

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60   Brown, "Methodological Paradigms", p. 146.
61   Morley, *Theories, Models, and Concepts*, p. 8.
62   Passeron and Revel (eds.), *Penser par cas.*
63   Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory.*

norms in which disabled supplicants were oriented more generally. This documentary base comprises dogmatic texts which upon which key Christian concepts depend and in which they are contemporaneously anchored. It includes biblical writings (Old and New Testaments) and foundational theological works (e.g., patristic writings and the works of theologians).[64] It also embraces legislative writings (including ecumenical and provincial or diocesan conciliar decisions) and monastic texts (e.g., constitutions, rules of orders, or customs specific to certain monasteries).[65]

This book also engages with the legal compilations that were produced as part of the drive to officially codify canonical legislation from the eleventh century onwards. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the way in which law was enacted evolved. Thanks in particular to the compilation of letters sent by the Pope, the general law became gradually incorporated into particular legislative collections. The spread of collections of decrees such as the *Decretum* (*Collectarium canonum*) by Burchard of Worms (965–1025), the *Decretum* and *Panormia* by Yvo of Chartres (1040–1116), and the *Four Books of Sentences* by Pierre Lombard (1100–1160) during this period bears witness to this change in the construction of canon law.[66] These volumes anticipate, and contribute to the formation of, the Corpus of Canon Law (*Corpus Iuris canonici*).[67] This collection of texts, compiled around 1500, contains various canonical writings and pontifical decrees. Of particular interest to the present study are: Gratian's *Decree* (*Decretum* or *Concordia discordantium canonum*), compiled between 1140 and 1150; and Gregory IX's (1329–1378) *Decretals* (or *Liber Extra*), compiled by the Dominican Raymond of Penyafort (c. 1175–1275) in 1234. Similarly, the works of various decretists, decretalists, and glossators offer invaluable context to the investigation at hand, most notably Raymond of Penyafort's own writings.[68] The oeuvre of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), will also be used, particularly but not exclusively the *Summa*.[69] These texts, to a greater or lesser extent, draw from real cases

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64   The Church Fathers are Hilary of Poitiers (c.310–367), Ambrose (c. 340–397), Jerome (c. 345–420), and Augustine of Hippo (354–430). According to Le Goff, *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Âge?*, p. 13, the theologians are Boethius (c. 477–524), Cassiodorus (c. 485–585), Pope Gregory I (c. 540–604), Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) and Bede (c. 673–735).

65   The rules of St. Benedict and St. Augustine are mainly invoked, as well as the additions of the Cistercians, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans.

66   *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms, edited in Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 140, col. 537–1058; *Decree* of Yvo of Chartres, edited in Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 161, and *Panormia* of Yvo of Chartres, edited in Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 141; Silano (ed.), *The Sentences*.

67   Friedberg (ed.), *Corpus iuris canonici*.

68   Rius Serra (ed.), *Summa iuris*.

69   Thomas D'Aquin, *Summa theologiae*, and *Somme contra gentiles*.

dealt with by the popes,[70] and served as the basis for numerous publications during the late thirteenth and fourteenth century.

With the aim of accounting for the diverse, overlapping ways in which social norms were established in the medieval era, the epistolary primary corpus is also brought into dialogue with a range of secular texts. This includes, for example, scientific writings (medical and surgical treatises, medical recipes, and health regimens) and linguistic writings (etymological lexicons, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias). Such texts are particularly productive for reference, in order to identify typical terminology used in descriptions of a given impairment or known symptomology, within the relevant discourse. This makes it possible to highlight linguistic norms and descriptive conventions that are operative, or not, within the papal corpus, and thereby to identify the harmonization of discourse. Finally, literary portrayals of physical and mental impairment – such as those found in hagiography and fictional narratives (e.g., courtly novels, allegories, and tales), demonstrate the range of attitudes towards disability in the Middle Ages from another perspective, rendering in finer detail the complex web of signification in which the papal letters and petitions are embedded and to which they implicitly respond.[71]

Writing Processes in Action

A grounded methodology supports the excavation and appropriate contextualization of heretofore overlooked information about physical and mental impairment in the primary corpus. By considering both petitions and their corresponding institutional responses, we find ourselves eavesdropping on authentic, albeit highly structured, 'dialogues' that took place between petitioners and the Papal Chancery. On the one hand, petitioners fashioned a narrative of their disability, choosing their words carefully in order to meet institutional expectations and thereby increase the chances of their request being approved. They called upon powerful intercessors and strategized

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70   Hartmann and Pennington, *The History of Medieval Canon Law*, p. 9.

71   The hagiographical documents produce models to be followed and disseminate the norms, especially those produced by the pontifical institution. See Isaïa and Granier (eds.), *Normes et hagiographie*; and, for some examples, Kuuliala, *Childhood Disability and Social Integration* and Kuuliala, Peake, and Räisänen-Schröder (eds.), *Lived Religion and Everyday Life*. On the courtly novels, see for example Godden, "Prosthetic Ecologies". On allegories, consult Gianfalla, "Discours of Disability". On tales, see for instance Delony, "Alisoun's Aging" or Hsy, *The Open Access Companion*.

the best time to submit their supplication. In turn, the Papal Chancery verified supplicants' testimony with tests carried out by trusted proxies, and appointed notaries and scribes to rework and standardize their speeches. Though strongly codified in terms of its rigid epistolary style, the interaction between petitions and the Chancery nevertheless allowed the Curia to be flexible, by modifying established norms to better suit individuals' specific circumstances. This was not, however, an entirely magnanimous undertaking. The process of supplication proved to be a formidable instrument, wielded by the popes to increase their control over Christian society in the late medieval period. As I explain below, each step in the construction of the petitioner–papal dialogue served the pontifical authority. No matter what they personally gained from the interaction, everybody involved, from the petitioners to the scribes, ultimately contributed to strengthening the Pope's power.

From Real-life Experiences to Formalized Discourse

Can we ever access the real-life experiences of disabled people in documents produced by an institution, especially one that is largely responsible for constructing disability as a category in the first place? This is the question that animates the present study. Authorship is a central issue, due to the complex workflow involved in the drafting of petitions and papal letters. Bonaventure, commenting on the prologue to Pierre Lombard's *Book of Sentences*, distinguished four collaborators in the *modus faciendi librum* (composition of a document).[72] The *auctor* (author) was the most important participant, since they provided the raw subject matter, their personal observations. The *scriptor* (writer) transcribed the *auctor*'s musings. The compiler (*compilator*) then stepped in, to enrich the text with relevant references, citations, and so forth. Alternatively, or additionally, the *commentator* added their own responses and critique. In this way, the raw material supplied by the *auctor* was refined, translated into the appropriate discourse for a given context. Within the framework of the Papal Chancery, the clerics wrote the petition and sent it to the popes. The Curia's staff read the petition and wrote back a papal letter that recapped the text from the petition. We sometimes have access both to the petition and the papal letter. Because the latter notionally contains extracts from the petition, we can compare the petitioners' initial input and the official output. By comparing

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72   Lett, "Des compilateurs au travail", quoting Ad claras aquas (ed.), *Opera omnia*, t. 1, 1882, pp. 14–15.

the two documents side-by-side, we may find fragments of individuals' own words and experiences.[73]

Careful framing, and rewriting, of a cleric's request began in the earliest stages of formulating the *petitio* (Fig. 0.1: § 1).

Figure 0.1   Life cycle of a petition, from supplicants' initial testimony to administrative registration
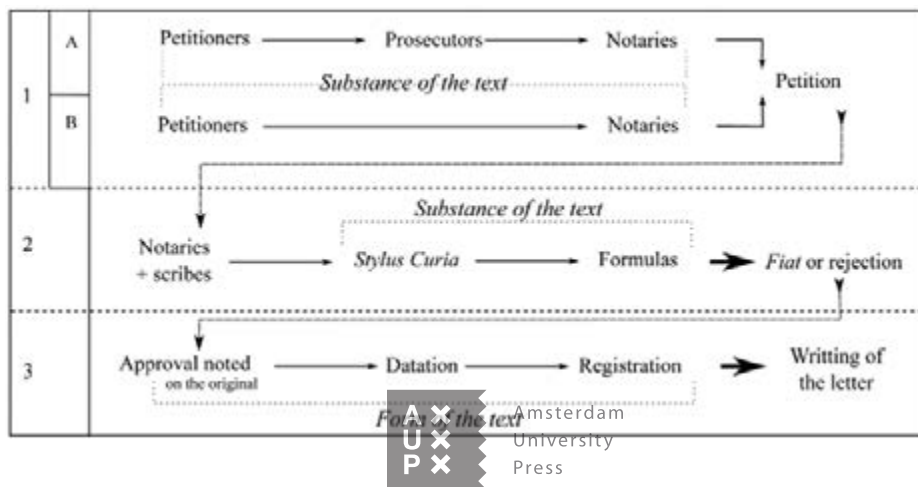
In the first instance, the *Vorurkunde* (preparatory document) was drafted by the applicant himself (Fig. 0.1: § 1A) or by a public prosecutor (Fig. 0.1: § 1B). Prosecutors were usually clerics or monks, mandated with an office or an individual in order to manage their affairs at the Curia.[74] The prosecutorial ranks steadily increased, with 40 in post during Clement VI's tenure, 68 in Innocent VI's reign, and 72 in Urban V's pontificate. Although they were not employed by the Curia directly, they were dependent on pontifical power and deeply embedded in the institution.[75] They pursued legal training similar to that of the officers of the Curia and were in daily contact with the pontifical entourage.[76] Prosecutors thus acquired the necessary expertise to ensure that no essential information was omitted from petitions, with their curial know-how offering clear benefits to the petitioners that sought out their services. The stringent submission process, to which all supplicants had to adhere, was controlled by the Chancery. This obliged the intervention of another

73   Tock, "Auteur ou impétrant", p. 216.
74   Zutshi, "Proctors Acting", p. 16.
75   Brundage, *The Medieval Origins*, p. 210. See also Makowski, *English Nuns*, p. 36.
76   Berthe, *Les procureurs*, p. 482.

layer of administrators when the petition entered the Curia: scribes and notaries. Unlike public prosecutors, notaries and scribes were not recruited by the supplicants.[77] They were agents of the Curia in charge of standardizing petitioners' testimony for administrative purposes.[78] During Boniface VIII's reign, 113 copyists served six or seven notaries.[79] Whilst scribes knew how to copy legal acts, the notaries' role, as defined by the apostolic authority, was to redraft petitions sent to the Pope into the appropriate style and format. Only once this work had taken place would petitions be presented to the popes and registered.[80] Notaries and scribes can thus be termed *petitionarii* (petitioners) in a technical sense: they rewrote submitted petitions, implementing the requisite *stylus curia* for all requests addressed to the Pope.[81]

Petitioners' own words were thus mediated by external parties, be that a prosecutor and/or notaries and scribes. Since the thirteenth century, the format of petitions had been formalized. They opened by identifying the petitioner, and someone who could possibly intercede on their behalf. There followed a statement outlining the request, supported by any details that the supplicant wished to provide. Though recounting personal, even intimate, details in order to justify their request, the petitioners' disclosures were phrased with due formality. All such material was presented in the style of the Curia, according to fixed rules and formulas (Fig. 0.1: § 2). These rules, in essence, signified the document's origins in the Chancery, and established the nature of a given act. The regulations and formulas were set out in so-called 'Chancery books', such as the *Liber Cancellariae apostolicae*, written in the 1380s by Thierry of Nieheim (1340–1418), and gained in importance between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries.[82] Collections of form letters composed by those close to the Curia on various subjects – including petitions – circulated, operating as stylistic aide-memoires.[83] Made available to supplicants, intercessors, public prosecutors, and notaries, these anthologies quickly became essential to the functioning of the administration, as they made it possible to standardize requests, and thereby optimize the task of processing them.[84] It was thus essential that the 'original' text of a petition

77   Heckel, "Das Aufkommen". For practical examples, see Cheney, *Notaries Public*, p. 89.
78   Garcìa y Garcìa (ed.), *Constitutiones Concilii*, constitution 38.
79   Digard, Fawtier, Faucon, and Thomas (eds.), *Les registres de Boniface VIII*, p. xvi.
80   Zutshi, "The Office of Notary", p. 667.
81   Barraclough, "Formulare für Suppliken".
82   Tangl, *Die päpstlichen Kanzleiordnungen*, pp. 53–316.
83   Erler, *Der Liber cancellariae*.
84   Schwarz, "The Roman Curia", p. 209.

respected formal constraints, to the extent that scribes used those docu-
ments as models for the pontifical letters.

Petitions concluded with a pontifical sentence (Fig. 0.1: § 3). If the popes
approved the request and signed it, they were subsequently annotated
with the word *fiat* ('done'), and, on occasion, further relevant details. This
information was subsequently recorded in the registers in a prominent place,
although only *accepted* petitions were recorded. Finally, petitions were not
dated according to the date the request had been written or submitted, but
instead when it received papal approval by the Pontifical Administration.
Such dates are, in this sense, fictitious, since they reflect only when the
petition was bureaucratically processed.

Once a petition had been authorized by the Pope, staff in the Papal
Chancery proceeded to write a formal response (Fig. 0.2: § 1).

**Figure 0.2   Life cycle of a papal letter granting grace, from composition in the
Papal Chancery to receipt by petitioners**
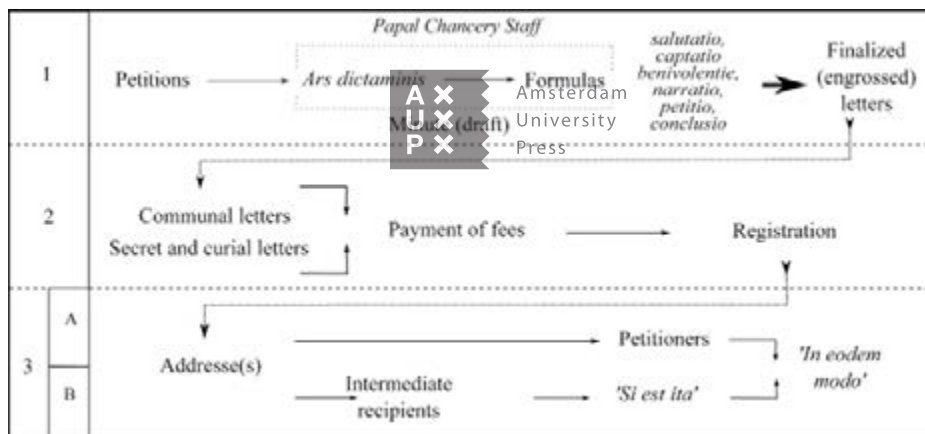
The most common process for drafting such letters, the *expeditio per cancel-
lariam* (expedition by the Chancery), comprised four distinct stages carried out
by different offices, under the direction of the Chancellor.[85] In the first office,
the 'minute' (draft) was drawn up by scribes according to the basic information
contained in the petition: addressee's location, status, ecclesiastical benefice
held, subject of the request, and so on, as well as the date the request had been
approved by the Pope.[86] At this stage, scribes often retained the petition's style

85   Zutshi, "The Office of Notary", p. 667.
86   Bock, *Einführung in das Registerwesen*, vol. 31.

(i.e., *stylus curiae*), before sending the document to its second point of call.[87] In the second office, the minute would be engrossed and taxed by scribes, who could wrote their names on the letter.[88] The process of engrossing involved ensuring the letter conformed to yet another set of regulations called the *ars dictaminis* (the art of producing letters, literally 'the art of dictation').[89] Missives followed a rigid structure, comprising five obligatory stages: *salutatio, captatio benivolentie, narratio, petitio, conclusio*.[90] Letters began with the *salutatio* (salutation), which functioned as an introduction of sorts, presenting the sender (i.e., the Pope), noting the recipient's address, and finally issuing the customary apostolic blessing. In the second part of the letter, the request itself was laid out. In the *captatio* (preamble), the Pope developed the subject of the missive in an abstract manner that was nevertheless tailored to the circumstances at hand, integrating relevant biblical quotations and religious generalities. Thereafter, in the *narratio* (exposition) and the *petitio* (request), the letter recapitulated elements supplied in the original petition.[91] The letter then came to a close, revealing the Pope's decision on the matter in a sentence, and offering the fixed phrases of the *conclusio*. Then, even the Pope's 'personal' response was standardized. Once rewritten, the now-finalized letter was transferred to a third office. Here, it could be copied into the register according to its category, and a date was appended after the *conclusio* (Fig. 0.2: § 2).

Apostolic letters were generally divided into two categories for registration, according to their legal function: mandates (i.e., letters of justice, which may contain a measure of grace), and titles (i.e., letters granting grace, including privileges, concessions, dispensations, absolutions, indulgences, donations, benefices, and so on). However, from the twelfth century onwards, a further distinction was made, based on letters' importance. Secret and curial letters were those with diplomatic significance, around 15% of extant documents during the Avignon period (1305–1378), for example.[92] The remainder, comprising 85% of the archive, were communal letters, written in response to a petition regarding the routine management of clerical affairs. Registration entailed recopying the letter, and it is these copies to which we have access today. Scribes had to be meticulous to avoid distorting the text of a letter

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87 Rabikauskas, "La cancelleria", p. 228.

88 Barbiche, "Le personnel de la chancellerie", p. 123.

89 Vulliez, "L'*ars dictaminis*", p. 89.

90 Giry, *Manuel de diplomatique*, p. 490; Grévin (ed.), *Le "dictamen" dans tous ses états*.

91 The Pope recalls, writing in the first-person plural, the details that weighed in the decision to grant or not to grant pontifical grace. Thus, not all the ideas developed in the petitions necessarily appear here.

92 Kuras and Sulkowska-Kuras, "Suppliques, brouillons, lettres et registres", p. 724.

approved by the Pope himself. There is little available information regarding the practical logistics of recording petitions and papal letters. However, we do know that registration of these documents was subject to the supplicants' payment of an extra fee. Paid to the Curia as the tax, this fee was added to the initial price of the missive. Registration was neither free nor automatic, but rather 'à la carte': petitioners could choose to have their petition and/or letter copied so that it was kept in perpetuity by the Papal Chancery, guaranteeing its authenticity.[93] It is estimated that between 25% and 50% of acts were registered by the Curia, calculated from the number of original letters kept 'on file' but not recorded in registers.[94] Subsequent to registration (if applicable), Chancery staff affixed the papal bull to the document, as a means of authenticating it, and it was finally ready to be sent.[95]

Chancery staff had to follow strict procedures, set out in official style and form guides, in the process of drawing up a papal letter, one which compelled the standardization of petitioners' original text and testimony.[96] The Apostolic See strengthened its political and administrative power not just by centralizing religious affairs, but by acting, in effect, as an administrative archive for the whole of Christendom. Moreover, the requirement for correspondents to use standard forms, supported by the provision of style guides and formularies, established a homogeneous political language, a common discourse that clergy and laity across Europe were encouraged, if not outright compelled, to adopt.[97] Such standardization was also a necessity for the Papal Chancery in practical terms. On the one hand, clear guidelines meant that individuals could create the requisite original documentation essential to centralization efforts. At the same time, standardized forms helped the Chancery deal more efficiently with the high number of requests it received.[98] In this way, the Apostolic See educated supplicants on its practices in order to streamline the entire process, and thereby to meet petitioners' expectations with more success.

Quid Pro Quo

This book analyses the petition process in its totality, from its logistical practicalities to its ideological function and the power dynamics at play

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93   Montaubin, "L'administration pontificale de la grâce", p. 328.

94   Barbiche, *Les actes pontificaux originaux*, pp. ciii–civ.

95   Jamme, "Écrire pour le pape", p. 14.

96   See Barraclough, *Public Notaries*, p. 9.

97   Grévin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir*, p. 21.

98   Grévin, "Les mystères rhétoriques", p. 273.

at every stage. In its most basic iteration, a petition is defined as a humble prayer in order to obtain a privilege or special grace from a sovereign. More than a simple request, a petition must contain acknowledgment of the petitioner's own incapacity, impotence, and/or poverty.[99] In this way, the petition process is a hegemonic cultural practice articulating the power differential between a petitioner and the petitioned individual or institution. The petition establishes a relationship between the parties, one based on an exchange of favours: each benefit from the petition in their own way.[100] The petitioner directly appeals to the recipient's authority, and so doing, further legitimizes it. Indeed, the petitioner becomes even more subservient to this authority, especially if their request is granted: the vocabulary of lament, almost a requirement for such documents, reinforces the notion of the supplicant's inferiority, and their obligatory submission. For powerful donors, then, supplication facilitated a privileged bond with their subjects which concretized their prestige and further entrenched their elevated status, even if petitions were concerned with banalities.[101] This book demonstrates that, for disabled clerics, entering the supplication process entailed submission to the Pope's authority. Nevertheless, petitioners were not rendered completely passive in, and through, the process.

The petition process served to increase supplicants' agency in certain ways. For a start, these documents effectively made individual petitioners visible to the Chancery, and so doing subjectivized them in terms of the institutional apparatus. Following established guidelines, petitioners were able to construct narratives of their own lives and circumstances, and make precise requests of those in power. Petitions preserve the discourse of impaired individuals, albeit couched as appeals to authority. This discourse reflects petitioners' shared desire to remain socially useful, full members of their community. For this desire to be satisfied, petitioners negotiated for papal grace by consciously playing the institutional game of petitions, in turn both passive victims and dynamic actors. In this way, petitions allowed disabled clerics to accede to an active role in negotiating the Church's internal power structures, at least to some degree. Whilst it was impossible for supplicants to liberate themselves from normative regulatory frameworks entirely, petitions gave them room to manoeuvre. Disabled petitioners were agents, in a fundamental sense: subjects with the capacity, means, and

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99   Cerutti and Vallerani, "Suppliques"; Nubola and Würgler, *Suppliche e "gravamina"*, p. 10.

100   Whiting, *Women and Petitioning*, p. 2.

101   Thompson, *Customs in Common*.

desire to act in a given situation, according to their own circumstances.[102] By taking advantage of the privilege of applying for a papal exemption, petitioners could decisively influence their own situation. Similarly, such applications could influence the development of normative standards more generally – as some pontifical letters were added in formularies – thereby helping future supplicants.[103]

Petitioners used grants of pontifical grace to serve their own interests, carving out space for themselves in the Church and their community. At the same time, however, letters of grace reinforced the authority of ecclesiastical law and the Church as an institution over society as a whole. The Church followed a juridical logic above all, and it developed specialized skills in order to ensure its own functioning and solidify its authority.[104] Here we find the purpose, and the power, of grace, an asset of divine origin dispensed by the Pope and to which only he had access. This papal prerogative was then integrated into, and mobilized by, a discursive apparatus (or Foucauldian 'dispositif'), which enabled the Church to keep abreast of happenings across Europe, as reported in petitions, and to disseminate its decisions.[105] Thus, the Papal Chancery established a 'dialogue' with Christians similar to an exchange between a prince and his subject, facilitating a quasi-personal relationship.[106] The petition process created a certain intimacy between the parties, as popes personally authorized individuals to pursue practices that were otherwise prohibited, through the case-by-case granting of graces. This provided a mechanism to engender flexibility in the otherwise rigid normative system.[107] Equally, this interventionist policy was motivated by another logic, archival this time: the Church was, to a large extent, defined by its role as a producer and curator of government records.

Timing was a key factor in the petition process, with supplicants and the Chancery alike seeking the 'right moment'.[108] Petitioners had to make careful calculations as to the best time to submit their documentation. They often

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102 "Agency" with this meaning can first be found in Thompson, "Socialist Humanism", p. 113.

103 The petitioners show agency in asking for help and become agents of recognition of their status, just as those seeking the intermission of a saint are agents of their miraculous healings. See Lee, "Disability".

104 Revel, "L'institution et le social", p. 88.

105 Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*. "Apparatus" describes any institutional, physical, or administrative mechanism where discourse is a tool of power over the social body.

106 Millet, "Introduction", p. 8.

107 Van Voss (ed.), *Petitions in Social History*, p. 1.

108 Baumgartner and Harf-Lancner (eds.), *Dire et penser le temps*.

chose administratively or practically profitable moments to submit their
appeals, such as the beginning of the pontificate, an advantageous papal
journey that would come near them, or acquaintances' trips to the Curia.
Alternatively, their decision was motivated by their worsening situation,
when an impairment had become unbearable and thus necessitated some
kind of accommodation. At times, though, the decision was taken out of
petitioners' hands, as in the case of petitions compelled by denunciations,
compulsory examinations, and the political and epidemiological contexts
in which the clerics found themselves. For the pontifical institution, the
'right moment' for petitioners to seek grace was their entrance into orders,
accession to the priesthood, or promotion to the highest ecclesiastical
offices. More generally, the temporal rhythm of the Church's administrative
schedule – pastoral visits, ordination ceremonies, pontifical elections, and
so on – shaped the temporality of sending the petitions. Such focus on
finding a 'favourable' moment in which to lodge, and deal with, a petition
demonstrates that the canonical rules could be bent, but only at the 'right'
time and in the 'right' circumstances.[109] The petition process amounts to a
conscious strategy to find, or create, this opportune moment, an endeavour
instigated by petitioners and then pursued by the pontifical institution.
Petitioners' disclosures of their impairment(s), alongside their existing
relationship with the Church, were central to judging whether these were,
indeed, the 'right' circumstances.

The Status of Disabled Petitioners

Grants of grace could authorize petitioners to contravene existing regula-
tions. Yet it was not clear, even at the end of the medieval period, who
precisely was responsible for distributing such divine privileges.[110] The
eleventh-century Gregorian Reforms determined that derogation was a
right exclusive to the Pope, in theory at least. Adherence to this ruling
was shaky at best in the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. In reality,
bishops continued to grant graces to the clergy in their dioceses. Impaired
clerics thus appealed to the Apostolic See in two cases: either when their
bishop had explicitly deferred to the Pope on the matter, or when the clerics
themselves wished to go 'over the head' of their bishop and leverage the
Pope's supreme authority. Circumventing the local ecclesiastical hierarchy

109 Le Goff, "Le temps du travail", p. 74.
110 Stöhr, *Körpermakel – Arbeits(un)fähigkeit – Kirchenrecht*.

voluntarily was a strategy with which clerics could protect themselves from disadvantageous episcopal distribution. Issued by the Pope himself, any gracious exemptions they received were essentially immune to objection or modification. In such cases, supplicants took part in a dialogue with the Papal Chancery because they shared its codes. They were mostly rich, powerful, and often impressively connected (Fig. 0.3). Some were masters in the art of intercession, a process which enabled them to activate their networks: bypassing local hierarchies and petitioning the pontiff directly meant that they could position themselves favourably on the chessboard of papal power.

**Figure 0.3   Status of supplicants identified in petitions and papal letters in the corpus**

Papal letters				Petitions			
Secular orders		**Regular orders**		**Secular orders**		**Regular orders**	
Cardinal	5	Abbot	99	Cardinal	3	Abbot	10
Archbishop	32	Abbess	11	Archbishop	3	Abbess	4
Bishop	194	Monk	67	Bishop	16	Monk	26
Archpriest	5	Nun	23	Archpriest	0	Nun	4
Priest	39	Prior/esses	38	Priest	14	Prior/esses	3
Archdeacon	18	Professor	16	Archdeacon	3	Professor	4
Deacon	16	Canon	9	Deacon	6	Canon	2
Subdeacon	3	Prevost	5	Subdeacon	4	Prevost	1
Canon	57	Other	14	Canon	10	Other	6
Rector	24	Total	282	Rector	3	Total	59
Simple cleric	44			Simple cleric	9		
Elector	7			Elector	0		
Master	0			Master	3		
Scholar	7			Scholar	4		
Treasurer	4			Treasurer	0		
Other	16			Other	9		
Total	471			Total	87		

Pontifical Interference in Clerical Affairs: Secular vs. Regular Orders

Members of the clergy represented around only 2–3% of the European population in the Middle Ages. In a general sense, then, the lack of practical sources about the lived experiences of clerics, not to mention disabled clerics, explains why they are not the subject of specific studies in the

literature on medieval disability.[111] A minority in the population as a whole, the clergy nevertheless occupied a privileged place in the Christian hierarchy, and were directly subject to the pontifical institution that employed them. Hence, sources documenting the interactions between clerics and the Church apparatus offer particularly fruitful insights, heretofore neglected in scholarship. It bears repeating that the petition process began with the decision of an impaired cleric to apply for papal grace, whether his hand was forced or he took the matter in his own hands. As such, petitions bear traces of clerics 'authentic' experiences and desires, however modulated they may have become through the process. Altogether, pontifical letters witnessed of the Curia's interference in clerical affairs, first clearly within secular orders, then increasingly within secular orders (Fig. 0.4).

Figure 0.4 Petitioners identified in pontifical letters: secular vs. regular clerics (one point every fifty letters)
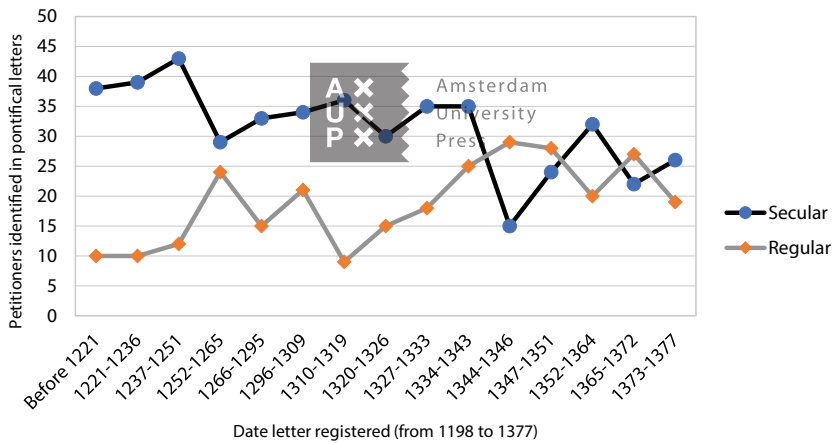
Most supplicants in the corpus of disabled clerics, spanning the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, are from secular orders. Secular clerics account for 60% (=87) of individuals identified in supplications (from 1342 to 1370), and 63% in letters (=471; 182 in letters dating to the twelfth and thirteenth century, with a further 289 in fourteenth-century missives). In the twelfth century, clerics from the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy – archbishops and bishops – submitted the majority of petitions, though their junior

111 For example, on the clerics see Metzler, *A Social History of Disability*, p. 55, and p. 144 on their great age.

colleagues began to take greater advantage of the petition process in the fourteenth century (Fig. 0.5).

Figure 0.5   Status of secular clerics identified in pontifical letters (one point every fifty letters)
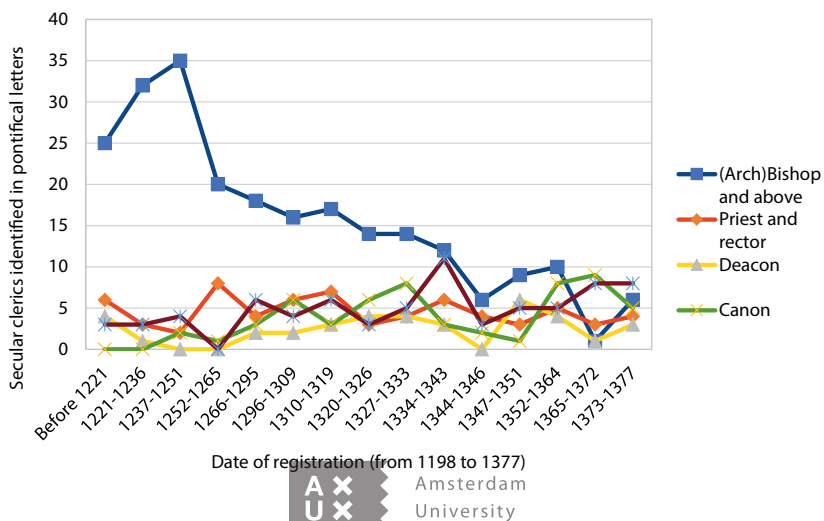
This disparity can be explained, at least in part, by the differences in expectations of individuals for different ranks in the ecclesiastic hierarchy. High-ranking clerics were in direct contact with the faithful and tasked with the most important sacramental duties. For this reason, they were subject to more stringent standards than junior clerics, and specifically the obligation of physical and mental perfection, as will be discussed in depth in Chapter 1. Furthermore, contemporary studies of disability evidence that people of high social status are more likely to suffer profound psychological distress and difficulty in coping after the onset of impairment than those of lower status, particularly when the impairment is visible.[112] Archbishops and bishops belonged to the medieval elite: they were typically part of the royal entourage, well-known and respected locally, and had high levels of administrative responsibility. Whether rural or urban, these elite clerics enjoyed an elevated social position, and profited from the regional and/or supra-local power structures to which they belonged.[113] Due to their prominence, we can trace their career progression, and the sources demonstrate that they benefited from access to wealth and kinship alliances, were fluent

112   Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 6.
113   Le Jan, *L'historiographie des élites*, pp. 1–2.

ecclesiastical cultural norms, and secured a certain level of renown. These individuals wrote to the Pope directly because they were representatives of his authority, and as such his direct subordinates. They sought grace to remain in office, as their physical and/or mental impairments compromised their existing roles and privileges in the *ecclesia* (Church). The petition process, and thus the pontifical institution, provided secular clerics at the highest ranks with a framework to strengthen their position within the Church.

In the fourteenth century, there was a shift in the supplicant pool as the petition process opened up to less powerful members of the clergy (see again Fig. 0.5). This correlates with the weakening of regional hierarchies in the face of papal power. The popes seized control of several prerogatives hitherto reserved for local ecclesiastical prelates, archbishops, and bishops. At the same time, the number of priests, deacons, and rectors increased, whilst the proportion of archbishops and bishops decreased. New recruits typically hailed from the rural or urban aristocracy, or were even of noble blood. Even after entrance into the orders, they maintained their aristocratic lifestyle and relationships thanks to the receipt of substantial income.[114] Petitions lodged by these clerics could potentially count on support not just from their local ecclesiastical hierarchy, but from their powerful families, and even the faithful in their community more generally. Their clerical role and attendant duties, especially the *cura animarum* (care of souls), elevated these men above the rest of the faithful, concretizing their status as local elites.[115] Alongside such privileged figures, secular clerics of decidedly lesser status – such as students, singers, or treasurers – were also increasingly represented in supplications. More and more, clerics with limited authority in their local context(s) eschewed their direct superiors in favour of sending their petitions directly to the Pope, thereby becoming more visible to the Church apparatus. This preference is certainly a result of the introduction of letters *in forma pauperum* in the fourteenth century. This allowed cash-strapped secular and regular clergy without prebend to obtain the free dispatch of their petitions.[116] The petition process facilitated the papacy's intrusion into the management of clerical affairs typically handled by bishops, local authorities in a given diocese, whilst simultaneously permitting individuals to stray from the strictures of canon law: it reinforced the authority of the Church's head over its subordinate members. In this way, the popes did not just claim the full extent of their

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114 Morsel, *L'aristocratie médiévale*, pp. 130–134.
115 Bougard, Feller and Le Jan (eds.), *Les élites*, p. 361.
116 Meyer, "Les '*littere in forma pauperum*'".

power but expanded it, to the detriment of both the secular elites and regional ecclesiastical hierarchies.

From the middle of the thirteenth century, the petition process evidently further opened to another clergy members, the regular orders. Regular clerics account for 40% (=59) of individuals identified in petitions, and 37% (=282) of supplicants mentioned in papal letters (Figs. 1.3 and 1.4). Their representation in papal letters tripled from the twelfth to the fourteenth century (71 clerics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; 211 in the fourteenth century) (Fig. 0.4). This tracks with the popes' increasing interference in monastic affairs. During the eleventh century, the papacy relieved certain religious orders of their dependence on bishops through the 'privilege of exemption'. Thus, the popes removed them from the hierarchical relationship they previously had with local ecclesiastical representatives. Beyond such strategic reorganization, the papacy created other orders directly and explicitly under its power.[117] The Apostolic See became the spiritual and institutional authority for the approval, correction, and interpretation of regular religious life.[118]

The majority of disabled regular clerics who contacted the Papal Chancery during the thirteenth century occupied elevated positions in the hierarchy of their order or monastery: about 39% (=110) of those identified in the corpus were abbots and abbesses, and a further 13.5% (=38) were priors and prioresses (Fig. 0.6).

Initially, regulars with less power, who were subject to local authorities, feature in smaller numbers: some 32% (=90) were monks or nuns, and 15.5% (=44) of petitions were sent by professors and others. The proportion of petitions submitted by regulars of lower rank sharply increased over the decades. After 1330, they accounted for more than 50% of regular petitioners (Fig. 0.6). Regular clerics were obliged to direct requests for any exemptions relating to the rule or customs of their institution to their abbot, or the superior of their order, or in certain cases, the bishop.[119] However, for very specific questions, such as those concerning 'defects' of body, mind, and spirit, regulars had to appeal to the Pope, which could actually be to their advantage. This route was undoubtedly desirable for regular clerics in the fourteenth century, as they had become part of the medieval elite. From

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117   For example, Innocent III and his successor Honorius III allowed the foundation of mendicant orders in exchange for their help in preaching the Crusades and in preaching against heretics. See Garcia-Serrano, "Friars and Royal Authority".

118   Bagliani, *Il trono di Pietro*, p. 119.

119   See Falkenstein, "Monachisme et pouvoir hiérarchique", p. 389; Besson, "Dispensation".

the twelfth century onwards, the monastic milieu became increasingly aristocratized. Regulars with the financial and logistical resources to petition the Curia were likely part of the rural and urban elite, or nobility.

Figure 0.6 **Status of regular clerics identified in pontifical letters (one point every fifty letters)**
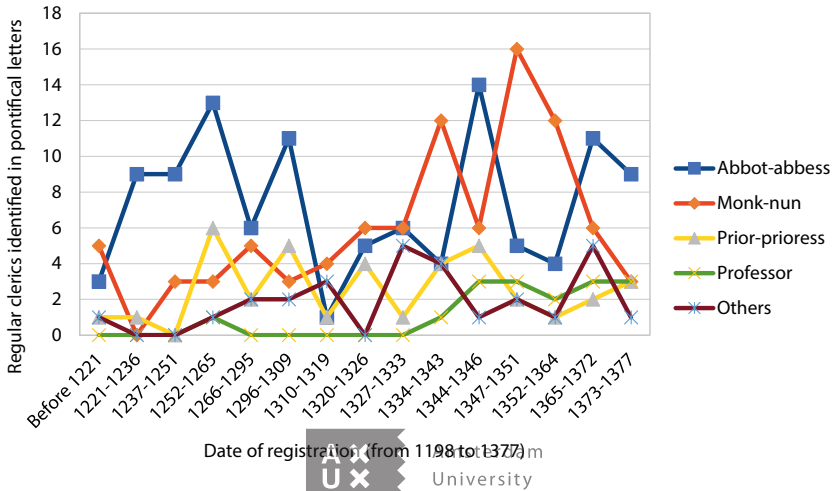
There was no 'one-size-fits-all' kind of relationship between the regular orders and the papacy; the nature of the relationship varied.[120] This is evident in the papal responses to petitions from religious who follow different types of community life. Three monastic types predominate in the petitions, with supplications mainly from: those following the rule of St. Benedict (Cassinians and Clunisians) who were thoroughly subjugated to pontifical power; those following the rule of St. Francis of Assisi (Franciscans and Poor Clares) who had a close, but less subservient, relationship with the Apostolic See, which included the papal appointment of their minister;[121] and those following the Rule of St. Augustine (Hospitallers and Dominicans), who had more independence from papal oversight. Though the Hospitallers were directly subject to the Apostolic See, they were near autonomous, which likely explains their minimal presence in the archive.[122] Similarly, the Dominicans had always maintained a certain distance from the Curia and guarded their sovereignty.[123] The uptick in petitions from monastics clearly indicates the

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120 Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism*, p. 298.
121 Robson, *The Franciscans in the Middle Ages*, pp. 69–71.
122 Claverie, "Les relations du Siège apostolique".
123 Wirtz, Paulus and Charlier, "La gouvernance des Dominicains".

increased authority exercised by the Pope over monastic communities – especially over traditional, as opposed to mendicant, orders – even though some orders managed to retain their independence. The monastic lifestyle was diverse, with monks and friars living according to the varied precepts of their particular order. As such, the Papal Chancery had to master various coenobitic legislations and monastic customs to craft a response suitable for the petitioner's specific circumstances when replying to a supplication. Skilful administration, incorporating the gathering of all relevant information, was thus key to the Chancery's success in the mission to centralize papal authority. This formed a bureaucratic complement to another essential manoeuvre: progressively transferring power to grant graces from bishops and abbots to the Pope, leveraging the pontiff's exclusive right to deliver grace. As disabled regular clerics bypassed their local power structures to address Rome or Avignon directly, they reinforced pontifical authority.

The policy of channelling all grievances to a single figure, the Pope, strengthened the logic of centralization already at play, with Rome and then, for a time, Avignon as the seat of all Christian authority. This led to a spatial convergence of correspondence, with letters pouring into Rome and Avignon from suppliants across the whole of Christendom, an area that was rapidly developing and reached its apogee, in both size and population, in this period.[124] The efficacy of the centralizing logic that accompanies the Church's mission to subjugate the Christian world to the papal monarchy (at least in theory) is evidenced in the multitude of places from which petitioners hail, an expansive geography that ultimately converges in Rome and Avignon.[125]

The establishment of the papal monarchy in the eleventh century led to the concentration of the popes' authority in and around Rome. The corpus demonstrates, however, that pontifical power spread far beyond a single city. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for example, we see an over-representation of suppliants who originate from the richest, largest, and therefore most powerful ecclesiastical provinces or dioceses across Europe – those located near urban centres, where power was concentrated. From 1099 to 1309, most suppliants came from France (c. 40%), Italy (c. 20%), or the Holy Roman Empire (c. 15%), with other geographical areas accounting for the remainder (25%). This geographical distribution can be explained by the strategic rationale for lodging a petition, since petitioners often sought to improve their endowment or acquire a more desirable benefice under

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124 *Christianitas* consists of the obedience in Rome and the Latin rite. See Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 243.

125 Morris, *The Papal Monarchy*, p. 178.

the pretext of obtaining an indulgence.[126] Every Christian subject following Roman obedience had the right to petition the Pope. This confirmed the authority of the Church across all Christian territories, even if it remained largely theoretical.

The magnetic pull of the pontiff was reinforced during the fourteenth century as the Curia moved into French territory. With the relocation of the ecclesiastical institution from Rome to Avignon from 1309 to 1378, Christianity's centre of gravity shifted, geographically and figuratively. The move to Avignon engendered a shift in the locations from which petitioners wrote, revealing the influence of the popes' location on the petition process, but also the French monarchy's immense influence over the papacy.[127] About half of all supplicants during this period came from France (c. 55%), with most concentrated along the Paris–Avignon axis, showing that local petitioners took the opportunity to make their appeals because the Pope was close by. Christians from Italy (c. 15%), the Holy Roman Empire (c. 11%) and the British Isles (c. 7%) sent fewer letters than in the preceding era, with the countries of the Iberian Peninsula (around 6%) and Central and Northern Europe significantly under-represented (less than 6%). In addition to the obvious issue of the geographical remoteness of these regions, fierce papal interventionism in 'national' churches was highly unpopular, explaining the resistance of some clerics to further submit to papal authority by engaging with the petition process.[128] Nevertheless, a concerted policy of interference in the affairs of secular and regular clerics meant that the Church wielded greater influence than ever before in the lives of the richest and most powerful medieval elites. As intercessors, they became crucial to the petition process, since they could be entrusted with relaying petitions to the Papal Chancery.

The Role of Intercessors and Intermediaries

In theory, supplicants engaged in dialogue with the popes directly. It entailed meeting them face-to-face for a formal audience when the petition was

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126 The thesis of the invocation of impairment as a pretext in no way undermines, in my opinion, the truthfulness of the supplicant's discourse. It is developed in particular by Baix, "De la valeur historique", p. 61.

127 According to Jacques Le Goff, Gregory X and the popes who followed realised that it was in their interest to have a capital that was less outlying than Rome following the Council of Lyon II of 1274. See Le Goff, "1274, année charnière".

128 Hayez, "Les demandes de bénéfices présentées à Urbain V"; Hayez, "Un aperçu de la politique bénéficiale de Grégoire XI".

adjudicated. Indeed, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, most papal letters mentioned the possible transfer of the petitioners to the Curia. The increasing centralization of ecclesiastical power, and concomitant increase in the number of letters received by the Papal Chancery, enacted a shift in how favours were requested and formulated stylistically. Over the course of the fourteenth century, details of petitioners' potential visits to the Curia appear less and less frequently: papal letters placed more emphasis on the active role of the supplicant in drafting the initial petition, and less on the request being delivered orally by the petitioner in person.

In about 60% of cases, supplicants sent a request directly to the Papal Chancery, illustrating their ability to obtain grace without the help of contacts in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and/or in powerful secular circles acting as intercessors. Such cases, in which petitioners did not rely on third parties, suggests that some supplicants were excluded from solidarity networks, or were acting in opposition to their superiors' will. Nevertheless, clerics were not legally obliged to use intercessors when filing a petition. And yet, intercessors supported petitioners in about 40% of cases. Intercession does not constitute a single social practice, but rather equates to a multitude of practices, which vary according to each intercessor, in terms of their capacities and also their interests.[129] Instances of intercession in the petition process testifies to the hierarchy's control and/or support of subordinates, as well as revealing a particular petitioner's inclusion or exclusion from solidarity networks. In this way, it reveals a chain of interdependent relationships: those between supplicants and the influential personalities to whom they appealed for help; and those between powerful intercessors and the Pope, with whom they must maintain privileged links in order for the intercession to be effective.

The use of an intercessor had one clear benefit: it allowed less fortunate clerics to obtain grace without any financial outlay, since the petition was paid for by the intercessor. Influential intercessors could submit a single petition or combine a batch into a *rotulus* (roll), which would be sent to the Chancery all in one go.[130] About 10–15% of all requests were submitted in *rotuli*, which typically gathered requests that dealt with related issues, those that were geographically proximate, or gathered by one person or one institution.[131] Furthermore, major clerics in the secular clergy were typically well-connected, and benefited from elevated social status. For this reason,

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129 Moeglin, *L'intercession du Moyen Âge à l'époque modern*, notably p. 67.
130 Hayez, "Les *rotuli* présentés au pape Urbain V", p. 328.
131 Hayez, Mathieu, and Yvan, "De la supplique à la lettre", p. 176.

their networks tended to be both broad and deep, and they thus had access to powerful intercessors and could themselves act as effective intercessors. The options for monastic petitioners, by contrast, were much more limited, as they operated in a fairly closed circuit. Indeed, intercessors acting on behalf of regular clerics were mainly authority figures in monastic life, and they in turn requested letters almost exclusively from other regular clerics. Both in the secular and regular orders, hierarchical superiors interceded on behalf of their subordinates because they belonged to the same clerical order, whether local or provincial. Then, the intercession in the supplication illustrates the networking and often local strategies put in place in order to receive the requested grace.

The petitioners had to know their intercessor(s) personally, whilst the latter needed to possess sufficient notability to be able to positively sway or accelerate the pontifical decision.[132] When the supplicants were not themselves in a position of power, it was often their direct superior who took care to intercede for them before the Apostolic See. An abbot might intercede for a monk, for instance, or a bishop for a priest. If, on the other hand, petitioners were high up in the hierarchy, their subordinates could act as intercessors. A suffragan bishop might intercede for an archbishop, or a canon for his bishop, for example. In such cases, appealing to an intercessory could give a subordinate the chance to denounce their superior. Individuals occupying a position of secular authority were also likely to appear as intercessors for secular, and regular. Asking someone to act in an intercessory capacity was arguably an act of flattery, as it entailed a recognition of the would-be intercessor's influence and power. By paying close attention to the minutiae of intercession, it is possible to discern networks and/or relationships of power and influence coalesce around individual petitioners on a case-by-case basis.

Scrutinizing the address to which papal letters were dispatched enables us to shed light on the role of intermediaries, a process parallel to intercession. In approximately 70% of thirteenth-century cases, the Chancery sent their response to a different address than the one initially provided by the supplicant, a figure that declines to around 40% of cases in the fourteenth century (Fig. 0.2: § 3B).[133] This demonstrates the extent to which the pontifical institution relied on trusted middle-men as intermediaries in the petition process. Called the *Reskripttechnik* by German scholars,

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132 Gorochov, "Le recours aux intercesseurs", p. 158.
133 On the *si est ita* clause, which assumes that the act is worthless if the supplicant has lied, see Chapter 3.

this system of government mandated that petitioners passed tests to validate the claims made in their letters before grace was actually granted.[134] Intermediate recipients, typically powerful figures of significant local influence, thus played a central role in granting graces. They were endowed with the authority and responsibility to subject petitioners to additional examinations, to ensure they had been fully honest in their appeal – as shown in the case studies presented in Chapter 3. During the thirteenth century, intermediary recipients often served as relays of papal authority, helping the centralized Church apparatus to manage local affairs.[135] In this way, intermediaries strengthened the ecclesiastical hierarchy, which was organized in parallel with the vassalage of the lay lords. The intervention of the ecclesiastical hierarchy was not always necessary, however, for granting graces, nor was there any requirement for them even to be notified of such grants. Whilst papal letters of grace were sent directly to petitioners in only 30% of cases in the thirteenth century, things changed dramatically in the fourteenth century, with 60% of petitioners now receiving letters direct. This increase highlights the success of the fourteenth-century mission to centralize pontifical authority, since such letters offered the Pope the ability to manage local clergy directly, bypassing the usual ecclesiastical supervisory hierarchy.

Conclusion

The petition process established a 'dialogue' between the Pope and individual clerics, one in which all parties acted in line with a shared code. With grants of papal grace, disabled supplicants gained room to manoeuvre within the strictures of canonical regulation, as long as they submitted themselves to the protocols established by the Papal Chancery.[136] Formalization of requests led to the creation of categories according to which supplicants were classified, based on the rationale underlying their petition. The recognition of disability as an organizational category allowed the Chancery to standardize and streamline the way in which they handled the increasing volume of requests that were being submitted by clerics from all over Christendom. Whilst increasing efficiency, the formal standardization of petitions served to flatten the messiness of human experiences into

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134 Zutshi, "Petitioners, Popes, Proctors", p. 266, quoting Pitz, *Papstreskript und Kaiserreskript*.
135 Jamme, "Écrire pour le pape", p. 4.
136 Fassin, "La supplique", p. 961.

bureaucratic and administrative order. The popes' growing interference in clerical affairs explains, above all, the growing heterogeneity of supplicants, alongside the overall increase in correspondence, from the twelfth to the fourteenth century. The pontificate wrested power from all levels of the Church, with intermediary ecclesiastical authorities forced to cede control in the face of the centralizing zeal of Rome and Avignon. This book focuses on disabled clerics' life experiences, interrogating medieval ecclesiastical norms to reveal how disabled clerics could be, and indeed were, included within the Church. It is organised in five chapters, highlighting the legal and cultural aspects of impairment in petitions and papal letters, by following the consequences of disability during a clerical career.

Chapter 1 investigates the legal origins of the prohibition against impaired clerics. Petitions and letters helped to define 'invalidity' as a legal category, since they contributed directly to medieval canon law's statues regarding so-called 'defects' of body and mind. This institutional construction of disability allowed the Apostolic See to set a standard for bodies and minds, in order to distinguish the normatively able-bodied from those deemed 'abnormal', impaired. The Papal Chancery thus defined a physical standard in which a body diverging from the norm was considered 'defective', and thereby unfit for clerical office, according to two criteria: its capacity and its image. They were only two mitigating factors for disabled clerics: their innocence and their 'ignorance', that is, their lack of 'culpability' in relation to the existence of their impairment. During the petition process, supplicants defined their impairments through dialogue with the Papal Chancery, as shown in Chapter 2. They drew on medical and religious culture, evident in the specific words deployed in letters, to present the causes of their impairments and to relate their ongoing experiences. Letters from the Chancery, in response, make use of similar terminology and frameworks, highlighting that petitioners' conceptualizations of disability was shared by the Curia's staff and vice-versa. The legal, cultural, and linguistic frameworks provided by Chapters 1 and 2 allow us to develop argumentative strands in the later chapters.

Chapter 3 interrogates the tests used by the Church to determine disability. These were required at several stages of the clerical profession: canon law stipulates that all candidates applying for admission to the secular and regular orders, and all clerics wishing to receive a promotion, must be examined before their appointment. Supposedly a 'quality-control' measure to guarantee the uniformity of the clerical condition at all levels, this evaluation was required from a cleric's first tonsure to his entrance into the priesthood, up until his election as bishop or abbot, when the Pope

himself, in theory at least, conducted the examination. Chapter 4 moves on to examine the consequences of the 'failure' of such disability tests and of clerics' disclosures of impairment in petitions. In such cases, gracious papal letters sometimes allowed for the relaxation of ecclesiastical regulations to accommodate the disabled cleric's conditions, if he himself desired to remain in the clergy and was deemed capable enough. The process of supplication was used to improve clerics' lives by adapting existing statutes to their personal situations. Chapter 5 probes the fate of the disabled men who were less fortunate, those who had to leave the clergy entirely, either of their own volition or due to the severity of their disability. At times, poor health or impairment forced clerics to resign from their positions as they became unable to perform their rights and duties. Often, they were forced to find care and support outside of their clerical community. Case studies demonstrate, however, that petitions and pontifical letters sometimes allowed for the adaptation, even contravention, of existing rules so that the disabled former clerics could see out the remainder of their lives with dignity.

Documents in the corpus bear witness to the blurry bounds between clerical impairment as bio-medical fact and disability as a category constructed by Church authorities. Obliged to follow the directives of the Chancery when formulating their petitions, supplicants adhered to the representation of physical and/or mental impairment mandated by the papacy. This served to suppress any traces of disagreement between the papally authorized conceptualization of disability and petitioners' own. At the same time, the process of supplication could erase the negative institutional effects of disability by actively including the disabled cleric within the ecclesial and Christian body. With this process, the Apostolic See thus created a metaphorical space conducive to negotiation, where disabled clerics could disclose their physical and/or mental difference in order to advocate for themselves, requesting – and often benefiting from – accommodations from the institutional Church.

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