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Chapter 5: Leaving the Clergy

Invoking the 6th century Pope Gregory the Great, Gratian sets out a roster of unsuitable candidates for the priestly office in his *Decretum*, written between 1140 and 1150. He cites the usual suspects – men who have been married twice, simoniacs, usurers, and so on – before seizing upon the least desirable of all: the mad, or as Gratian puts it, men ‘rendered frantic or possessed by the devil’ (*forssenez ou travaillez del deable*).¹ It seems clear, then, that an individual with *defectus mentis* is prohibited from entering the priesthood, and certainly from giving the sacraments.² Yet, in a letter sent to Eleuthera and later compiled by Gratian, Gregory the Great asserts that bouts of madness or the loss of one’s senses do not always provide grounds for the expulsion of a recently ordained cleric: ‘for that which prevents entry into orders does not always entail the deposition of a cleric already ordained’.³ Gratian relies directly on this letter to draw his own conclusions: a bishop overcome by passion (*passio*) leading to insanity (*mente alienate*) could not be forced to resign, as he had already been ordained. On one hand, the *Decretum* rules that a cleric, who, weighed down by old age or illness (*defectus corporis*), is prevented from performing his office, is authorised to substitute a person in his place.⁴ In those cases, assessors were nominated, implying that such well-off clerics continued to receive the income associated with their office until their death.⁵ On another hand, the *Decretals* of Gregory IX highlight the link between old age and lack of vigour, both of which can provoke a cleric’s resignation.⁶ In both cases, whether the bodily and/or mental incapacity was caused by illness or age conditions, no distinction was made between in the adjudication of clerics’ requests for assistance and/or resignation, because the conditions had similar effects.⁷ Impairment then involved either the rapid appointment of an assistant to ensure that the petitioner’s benefices were appropriately managed and remained intact, or, if in case of resignation, the endowment of special benefits to support him in his new life.

The Church’s central aim was to prevent resigners from falling into poverty – by giving them help to keep their benefits or by allocating them a pension. The institution sought to support impaired clerics who had toiled in its service by keeping them in the broad ecclesiastical fold, albeit situating them on its outskirts. The loss of benefits, and the social status attached to such sources of income, served to cast impaired resigners on the margins of society. The petitions and papal letters highlight, however, that such marginalization was neither automatic nor entirely negative. Analysis of the sources shows that the Church’s procedures functioned, above all, to protect impaired individuals. Retirees could, for example,

1 *Decretum Gratiani*, first part, distinctio 33, chapter 2. Anonymous French translation edited in Löfstedt (ed.), *Gratiani decretum*, p. 73.

2 On this in detail see Chapters 1 and 3.

3 *Decretum Gratiani*, first part, distinctio 50, chapter 4.

4 *Decretum Gratiani*, second part 2^e partie, causa 7, chapter 11.

5 Lewin, *Pensions and Insurance*, p. 23.

6 *Decretales of Gregory IX*, book I, title 9, chapter 1.

7 *Ibid.*, book I, title 9, chapter 10.

benefit from financial compensation to stave off destitution and build a relatively good life for themselves after the end of their clerical career. Even clerics who lost their rank, or those without a sufficient pension, were taken care of by the Church. Many such clerics were cared for in hospices, monasteries, and even private houses, for the remainder of their lives.⁸

Leaving the workforce

There were no regulations – in canon law, customary legislation, or monastic rules – that governed the replacement of bishops or abbots who resigned their office.⁹ The procedure was thus highly flexible. In some cases, for example, the petitioner’s assistant might allow him to remain in charge until his last breath, with no clear plan to install a replacement before it was absolutely necessary.¹⁰ It is possible that such practical arrangements went unspoken in letters, put in place by the petitioners without seeking pontifical permission. After the petitioner’s death, it was natural for his appointed assistant to receive a promotion and formally take over the role for which he had previously deputized. Despite the availability of such informal provisions, however, some clerics wished to formally resign their office. This required petitioning the pope for permission to leave the Church’s workforce. In these circumstances, the pope was called upon to resolve issues that impacted both the ecclesiastical institution and the resigner himself.

The petition process offered a means for impaired clerics to resign, and in so doing, often provided them with a valuable opportunity to secure a pension in order to live comfortably thereafter. Resignation entailed the loss of all income associated with the cleric’s (former) benefices, hence the need for additional financial support. The petitions and papal letters allow us to distinguish between ‘resignation’ and ‘retirement’, even though, in practicality, the two states often overlapped. Resignation refers simply to leaving one’s office. Retirement, by contrast, denotes that one has left one’s office and is in receipt of a pension. Analysis of documents in the corpus reveals that the clerics who wrote to the Apostolic See to abdicate their office were among the aristocratic elite. Clerics of lower social status, on the other hand, typically offered their resignation to their superiors, unless there were local institutional conflicts with which to contend. Aristocratic petitioners could obtain a pension from the pontifical institution, though this was not automatic. If successful, these supplicants became ‘pensioners’, whose existence is attested to as early as the thirteenth century.¹¹ In these cases, retirees used the allowance to cover their expenses until death.

8 Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 111.

9 Trembinski, “An Infirm Man”.

10 Orme, “Sufferings of the Clergy”.

11 Gonzales, “L’heure de la retraite a sonné”; Mattéoni, *Servir le prince*, p. 385; Sommé, *Isabelle de Portugal*, p. 622-625; Lachaud and Penman, *Établir et abolir les normes*, p. 235; Cummins, “Attitudes to Old Age”, p. 220-221.

Resignation: letters of revocation

Petitions and papal letters which detail a cleric's resignation are called 'letters of revocation'. With these missives, the pope officially retracted the authority that he had previously entrusted to the petitioner.¹² However, letters of revocation were neither letters of dismissal nor of deposition, as these formats were based on the presumption that the supplicant was at fault and would need to perform penance. Rather, these functioned as letters of absolution, allowing the petitioners to relinquish their office without any stain on their spiritual record. Examples of letters written to popes requesting resignation dating to the early Middle Ages remain extant, revealing that impairment, illness and/or old age were cited as conditions motivating clerics' resignation. Raban Maur (780-856) and Alcuin (735-804), for example, abdicated their offices as they became physically unable to perform their duties.¹³ However, following the reign of Innocent III (d. 1216), the pope's right of review was asserted. It became obligatory to receive a missive of grace in which the cleric or his superior detailed a reason for the supplicant's resignation that the Church authority deemed to be legitimate. The supplications and papal letters bear witness to the fact that both physical and mental incapacity were accepted as grounds for resignation by the pontificate. Indeed, the majority of letters of revocation dating to the thirteenth century stipulate such impairment as the motivator for the supplicant's departure (58%). Strikingly, this figure declines sharply in the following century: only 14% of fourteenth-century letters and 12% of petitions provide this explanation. This drop tallies with the fact that the concerns of ecclesiastical authorities were broadening during the fourteenth century, a period in which the Chancery dealt with fewer clerical matters overall, and therefore processed fewer renunciations.

The papacy could not force clerics to resign if they did not wish to. However, if clerics decided to leave their office, they were obliged to abide by the formal resignation procedure, and follow through on their intent. Canon 28 of the Fourth Lateran Council mandates that '[h]e who has requested and obtained permission to leave his benefice shall be bound and even compelled to leave it, since he has taken this resolution only for the utility of his church or for his own interests'.¹⁴ Table 1 demonstrates that the vast majority of petitioners who appealed to the pope to resign their offices were at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy: abbots, priors, rectors, bishops, and archbishops.

Table 1: Recipients of resignation letters

12 Durand de Maillane, *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, tome V, article "révocation", p. 220.

13 Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 141.

14 Riguaud (ed.), *Acta conciliorum*, vol. 1, col. 42 (my translation).

Resignees	Letters from the 13th c.	Letters from the 14th c.	Petitions (1342-1366)
<u>Regular clerics</u>	44 (31%)	43 (61%)	10 (56%)
<i>Men</i>	41	36	8
<i>Women</i>	3	7	2
<u>Secular clerics</u>	97 (69%)	27 (39%)	8 (44%)
<i>Higher ranks</i>	95	25	8
<i>Lower ranks</i>	2	2	0
Total	141	70	18

This is relatively unsurprising, as the benefits under discussion must have had to possess a certain notability for the petition to be sent to the head of the Church. What's more, lesser-ranked clerics were not obliged to apply to the pope to withdraw from their office, only to their local hierarchy though they retained the right to petition the pontiff if so desired.¹⁵ Secular clerics seemed to write progressively less to the Chancery regarding abdication during the fourteenth century. This decrease highlights the attenuation of the role of the Apostolic See in the renunciation of seculars, while the number of resignations of regular clerics remains constant.

Table 2 offers a breakdown of the data relating to the causes cited for resignation in the corpus.

Table 2: Reasons for resignation, provided in papal letters and petitions (when the reason is known)

	Old age and impairment(s)	Old age alone	Impairment alone
Letters from the 13th c. (141)	59 (42%)	15 (11%)	67 (48%)
Letters from the 14th c. (70)	30 (43%)	15 (21%)	25 (36%)
Petitions (1342-1366) (18)	10 (56%)	3 (17%)	5 (28%)
Total	101	35	98

Physical or mental impairment was a major driver (including explicitly permanent conditions such as blindness, paralysis, incurable disease), closely associated with old age.¹⁶ The majority of letters mention advanced age, an effective criterion to garner pontifical favour that would be hard to challenge. By looking at the text of the letters, it seems that all supplicants seeking to resign were over 60 years old.¹⁷ This age appears to be the lower bound for abdication, since the highest-ranked members of the clergy were often elected to their esteemed office at a relatively advanced age, from 22 (subdiaconate) to 30

¹⁵ Rosenthal, "Retirement and the Life Cycle", p. 173-188.

¹⁶ The same conditions are found in the 'retirements' allowed by the coroner (the official charged by the crown with investigating deaths to protect human life, in Anglo-Saxon countries). See Gilchrist, *Medieval Life*, p. 146 or I. Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 122-135.

¹⁷ This age at which incapacity appears to appear is very close to that of current retirement. Its delimitation in medieval times is studied by Cummins, *Attitudes to Old age*, p. 32-39.

years old (bishopric) depending on the rank they wished to reach.¹⁸ Nevertheless, old age alone does not explain the large number of resignations granted: illness and other impairments also justified requests for resignation in 48% of thirteenth-century letters, alongside 36% of fourteenth-century letters and 28% of petitions (see Table 2). The resulting physical disability was considered a legitimate reason for leaving the clergy, in the same way as in noble careers, where capacity took precedence.¹⁹ Indeed, following the Gregorian reform, a bishop wishing to resign was obliged to supply one of the reasons that the pope, Innocent III, considered to be valid for leaving his office. In a letter sent to the bishop of Cagliari and preserved in the *Decretals* of Gregory XI, Innocent envisages that clerics who are weak, ignorant, of bad conscience, irregular, or who risk causing scandal might ask for a resignation.²⁰

Similarly, in his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas asks '[w]hether he who has vowed to enter religion is bound to remain in religion in perpetuity?'. He furnishes the following response:

A man who has entered religion gives neither scandal nor bad example by leaving, especially if he does so for a reasonable motive; and if others are scandalized, it will be passive scandal on their part, and not active scandal on the part of the person leaving, since in doing so, he has done what was lawful, and expedient on account of some reasonable motive, such as sickness (*infirmitas*), weakness (*debilitas*), and the like.²¹

The Angelic Doctor certifies that monks and nuns might leave enclosure if they had a 'good reason', such as illness or bodily weakness, in an effort to avoid generating scandal. This contention is re-iterated in monastic rules regarding the resignation of a useless abbot. The general chapters of the Cistercian order state that an abbot must ask his superior for permission to resign before abdicating.²² The latter was then responsible for judging the legitimacy of the request and verifying the reason given by the petitioner. Letters of grace confirming a supplicant's resignation were therefore often sent directly to the superior of the would-be resigner. This kind of resignation was considered 'express': it formally and imperatively manifested the pope's will to the superiors and colleagues of the resigning cleric.²³ Moreover, a considerable number of letters include a comminatory clause during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries i.e., a clause that stipulated punishments that would be levelled against individuals that did not obey the papal mandate or who had lied in their original petition. Approximately one in three letters with such clauses were sent to individuals charged with enforcing the papal decision, or conducting an investigation on its behalf to verify the legitimacy of the grace the missive offered.²⁴ Even men at the top of the Church hierarchy, vested with substantial ecclesiastical power, could not resign as and when they liked. On the contrary, they remained subject to pontifical authority, which obliged them to provide a

18 Shahaar, *Growing Old*, p. 107.

19 Mornet, "Âge et pouvoir".

20 *Décrétales* de Grégoire XI, book I, title 9 – *De renunciatione* (chapters I; III; IX; X; XI; XV).

21 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae II-II*, q. 189, article 4.

22 Marilier (ed.), *Chartes et documents, Charte de charité et d'unanimité*, statut 23.

23 Durand de Maillane, *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, tome II, article « démission », p. 88.

24 On this, see Introduction.

legitimate justification for their resignation that could be verified by the institution. This was especially important in cases in which resigners had been awarded a pension.

Retirement: pensions and other financial support

In England and Germany, some impaired royal servants and officers were eligible to receive *corrodies*, a kind of pension paid by monasteries, religious communities or the Crown in some contexts, as soon as the thirteenth century.²⁵ Similarly, the petitions and papal letters demonstrate that the papacy granted certain clerics a pension that allowed them to enter, and enjoy, ‘full retirement’, with sufficient funds to live out the rest of their lives in relative comfort. Although the term ‘retirement’ was not yet coined, evidence for such financial arrangements dates to as early as the beginning of the thirteenth century.²⁶ It was not necessarily commonplace, however. In the corpus, pensions are awarded in less than half of resignation cases: 49% of thirteenth-century letters, 39% of fourteenth-century letters, and 44% of petitions.

Table 3: Resigners in receipt of a pension

	Resigners (all)	Resigners with pension
Letters from the 13th c. (141)	Secular (44)	21 (47 %)
	Regular (97)	48 (49 %)
Letters from the 14th c. (70)	Secular (27)	10 (37 %)
	Regular (43)	17 (39 %)
Petitions (1342-1366) (18)	Secular (8)	3 (37 %)
	Regular (10)	5 (50 %)
Total	229	104

The men with the most power in the Church hierarchy – namely archbishops, bishops, wealthy rectors and vicars – left their benefices without fear of economic problems. They had capitalized on the considerable income they had received throughout their careers, endowing them with significant personal wealth.²⁷ Moreover, they often belonged to aristocratic families on which they could rely for financial and other support. Pensions were not ‘means tested’, however: clerics with access to such resources could still petition for a pension, which was supposed to provide for their needs after they left office.

Table 3 demonstrates that regular clerics were somewhat more likely to receive a pension than their secular colleagues. This is almost certainly due to their living arrangements: former abbots remained resident in the monastery for which they were previously responsible, and the institution paid them directly. The highest-ranked secular clerics, chiefly bishops, enjoyed the same salary as abbots of the

25 See Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 129-130; Cummins, *Attitudes to Old Age*, p. 221 and Harvey, *Living and Dying*, p. 179.

26 Gonzales, “L’heure de la retraite a sonn ”, p. 258.

27 Shahaar, *Growing Old*, p. 31.

largest convents, and therefore also received a generous income.²⁸ All clergymen had, in principle, the right to receive a pension. If a cleric fell into poverty after resigning his office, this could taint the reputation of the office itself, and the Church as an institution – hence, the need to selectively award financial support to resigners. A similar logic is evident in the construction of special hospices for clergymen, a topic discussed in depth below.²⁹ Despite this rationale, pensions were not, it seems, awarded on a needs basis. In fact, the majority of petitioners writing directly to the pope are illustrious ecclesiastical dignitaries. It is possible that smaller allowances granted to minor clerics did not merit the attention of the pontiff. It is also possible that such clerics were left entirely empty-handed by the Apostolic See, and, without a pension, were forced to live off charity, or even take up begging. Indeed, some were left to fend for themselves when they become too old to fulfil their office. In such cases, deprived clerics could sometimes find ways to finance their pension from secular powers, as some institutions founded by kings and dukes, for example, also offered care for elderly clergymen.³⁰ In their letters and petitions some clerics appealed to the pope explicitly for permission to leave their posts and receive an income to allow them to survive in retirement.³¹ According to the documents, the papacy could provide a subsidiary income for their retirement.

At a basic level, pensions offered by the Chancery had to be sufficient to allow retired clerics to live comfortably, or at least without lacking necessities. The precise value of the pension varied in each case. It appears that the sum was usually equivalent to approximately one third of the income previously accrued by the petitioner from his benefices.³² The raw figures are rarely explicitly disclosed in the corpus, though the highest award for which we have such data amounted to 100 florins per year.³³ Whilst the Church awarded pensions, the institution was not responsible for their payment: the funds came instead from the revenues of the diocese or monastery to which the supplicant belonged.³⁴ In fact, letters always state where the funds are supposed to be drawn from.

The case of Nicolaus, abbot of the Benedictine convent of St Stephen in the Ligurian city, is illuminating here. A missive from Boniface VIII, addressed to the archbishop of Genoa on 23 August 1295, details the allocation of a pension to the ailing abbot:

It has been stated before us by the dear son Nicolaus, abbot of the monastery of St Stephen of Genoa, Order of St Benedict, that, already broken by his illness and the weakness of his

28 Cummins, *Attitudes to Old age*, p. 222.

29 Shahrar, *Growing Old*, p. 110.

30 Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 135-137

31 Gonzales, “L’heure de la retraite a sonné”, p. 262.

32 Orme, “Sufferings of the Clergy”, p. 62-73.

33 Letter RV 49, f. 36 V concerns friar Philipus, formerly bishop of Fiesole, who is ‘old and weighed down by infirmities’ and who resigns before the pope. He is authorised to receive 100 gold florins a year as long as he lives. In this case, the Pope obliges the bishop of Spoleto to pay Philipus’ pension on the eighth day of October, Ascension Day, to the house of the Friars Minor in Perugia. The mention of this date perhaps indicates that Philipus returned as a brother to this monastery. Text edited by Digard, Fawtier, Faucon and Thomas (eds.), *Les registres de Boniface VIII*, n° 2 558.

34 Elderly religious may face financial difficulties. The granting or not of a pension may lead to disparities among the clergy. See Rosenthal, “Retirement and the Life”, p. 180-183.

own aged body, he has become unable to ensure the government of his monastery in an efficient manner, and therefore he wishes to resign (freely) from his abbacy. Thus, this abbot has begged us to take care of his resignation. Therefore, we ask your brotherhood [the Archbishop of Genoa] by apostolic letter that, if this is so, this abbot be released from his abbacy by our authority and that his virtuous and judicious resignation be received. If he ever suffers from the lack of certain necessities, let him receive a stipend from the goods of this monastery in order to be able to feed himself sufficiently according to what may be assigned by the monastery and for as long as you deem it appropriate.³⁵

Nicolaus, broken by illness and old age, is no longer able to run his monastery. His resignation, authorized by the pope, was the result of impairment. Nevertheless, Nicolaus will receive material support after his abdication in the form of a pension from the abbey, paid thanks to the abbacy's property. The exact amount is unknown, as the Chancery simply specifies that the allowance should enable Nicolaus 'to feed himself sufficiently'. Furthermore, the pope mandates that the monks should take care of the former abbot as long as he lives. Resignation is characterized as a positive action, a mechanism by which a cleric could be offered additional support, not as a negative consequence of physical or mental impairment. This is equally illustrated by the famous example of Francis of Assisi, who withdrew from his order, leaving it in the hands of his followers, from as early as 1219, as a result of a leprosy-like disease that scarred his body and made him visually impaired.³⁶ What's more, Francis is not a unique example of a 'retiree' saint. Various hagiographic accounts and monastery chronicles present similar accounts of other holy men and women entering retirement in a highly positive light.³⁷ In these cases, which necessarily inspired clerics' writing to the popes, the saint's decision to renounce their office was applauded: it prevented the ruin of ecclesiastical goods and affairs.

Clerics at the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, seculars and regulars alike, were then endowed with the same kind of privileges in 'retirement' as they had held in post. This is thus probable that the highest-ranking clergy did not resign their office without compensation even if we do not have all their graces registered.³⁸ On the other hand, lower-ranked clerics, who had not amassed enough resources to capitalize on their ecclesiastical income in post, and who were not generally members of wealthy families, did not benefit from these pensions. In some instances, disadvantaged clerics chose to retire to a monastery without seeking a pontifical pardon, thereby disappearing from our records. At other times, however,

35 RV 47, f. 142 V – Boniface VIII to the Archbishop of Genoa, 23 August 1295. Text analysed by Digard, Fawtier, Faucon and Thomas (eds.), *Les registres de Boniface VIII*, n° 639, which we transcribe from the register: "*Ex parte dilecti filii Nicole abbatis monasterii sancti Stephani de Janua, ordinis sancti Benedicti, fuit expositum coram nobis quod ipse debilitate, infirmitate ac senio proprii corporis iam confractus ad gerendum ipsius monasterii regimen inhabilis est efficiens propter quod intendit abbatiam ipsius monasterii libere resignare. Quare idem abbas nobis humiliter supplicarunt ut cessionem eius recipere curaremus. Quocirca fraternitate tue, per apostolica scripta mandamus quatenus, si est ita, libera ab eodem abbe auctoritate nostra predictae abbacie ac virtutum et pertinentiarum ipsius resignatione recepta eius ne defectum in necessariis patiat de bonis dicti monasterii per sustentatione sua sufficientes redditus percipiendos ab eo quamdiu vixerit studeas assignare prout prefatis facultatibus eiusdem monasterii videris expedire*".

36 Trembinski, "An Infirm Man".

37 Cochelin, "In senectute bona".

38 Shahaar, *Growing Old.*, p. 103.

patrons provided destitute retirees with secular pensions, or they transferred to hospitals for the remainder of their lives, leaving traces in the papal archives.

Transferral to Specialist Institutions

Diagnosis, or at least acknowledgement, of an impairment was crucial in terms of practical care arrangements. Once diagnosed, an impairment could perhaps be cured, whether by doctors, surgeons, barbers or by the adoption of a healthier diet. In such cases, clerical patients with notionally curable conditions were sometimes temporarily transferred to hospitals for treatment. By contrast, if their impairment was untreatable – for example, a condition or disease that was incurable (e.g., blindness) or fixed (e.g., old age, limb loss) – clerics had to formally resign their duties, and move to a place that offered them adequate care. From the twelfth century onwards, the convent is portrayed in medieval texts as a kind of ‘retirement home’ for elderly nobles.³⁹ The existence of such places, which were mostly run by ecclesiastical institutions before the thirteenth century, reveals the integration of sick and impaired individuals in the fabric of the medieval community. Originally, the purpose of hospitals was not to cure patients, as is the case today, but rather to take care of them in a more generalized sense. Staff worked to restore the health of hospital residents through a balanced diet and the provision of temporary accommodation.⁴⁰ This functioned more as a social solution to the ‘problem’ of sickness, rather than offering substantive medical care for sick patients. The petitions and pontifical letters reflect this reality, while highlighting the progressive medicalization of these places of refuge between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in parallel with the medicalization of medieval society more generally.⁴¹ Analysis of documents in the corpus further supports the contention that such institutions gradually became places of care that specialized according to the publics that they served.⁴²

As the *Decree* of Yves of Chartres testifies, the Church’s mission was to support widows, adolescents and the ‘weak of body’ (*corporis debilis*).⁴³ Thus, hospitals provided care for certain conditions in the name of the common good, under the umbrella of ‘general health measures’.⁴⁴ The establishment of secular charity from the thirteenth century onwards led to the secularization of such care-giving institutions. At the same time, it propelled the specialization of institutions according to the populations to which they provided care – hospitals dedicated to treating clerics, for example – and/or the type of impairment for which they offered treatment, such as in the case of leprosaria.

39 Irsigler and Lassotta, *Bettler und Gaukler*, p. 18–20.

40 Crislip, *From Monastery to Hospital*.

41 Dubourg, “Deo iudicio percussit”.

42 Metzler, “Liminality and Disability”.

43 *Decretum* of Yvo of Chartres, book 8, chapter 326.

44 Grmek, “Le concept d’infection”.

Clerical hospitals

From the fourteenth century onwards, hospitals specialized in the type of care they offered and/or the type of patients they admitted, following their founders' wishes.⁴⁵ Previously, the ecclesiastical model of charity was dominant: support was provided to any and all poor people free of charge. As hospitals gradually became financed and administered by municipalities, institutions offering ecclesiastical charity became specialist endeavours, rather than standard. This shift was also linked to changing attitudes towards the poor. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, ever more attention was paid to moral taxonomies of poverty: a distinction was made between the deserving poor, who were genuinely incapable of working, and the fraudulent poor who were not worthy of any social aid, as they could help themselves, if only they made the effort.⁴⁶ At the same time, the institutionalization of assistance meant that financial support, which had previously chiefly taken the form of donations to specific individuals, now more often took the form of bequests to communities that took direct care of the poor, acting on donors' wishes and thereby structurally displacing them.

Patrons or founders of hospitals laid down general sanitation measures to which 'their' institution had to conform. The form and function of hospitals derived from their aspirations, their family ties or the needs of the community.⁴⁷ The foundation of a hospital allowed individuals to demonstrate, and concretize, their elevated social status, reflected in the number of poor people admitted, the size of the premises, or the particular type of needy souls that it served. A letter written by Clement VI, in response to Joan, Queen of Sicily, concerning her late husband Robert's desire to build a chapel in Naples, attests to this.⁴⁸ The chapel was intended to feed and house one hundred people who would otherwise go hungry, chosen from among the king's familiars or their heirs, whether they were knights, squires or of inferior status, on the condition that they suffered from old age or other 'legitimate' impediments that rendered them incapable of working to support themselves.⁴⁹ This letter reflects a shift occurring throughout Christendom: alongside its increasing institutionalization, Christian mercy was becoming more geographically limited, typically concentrated on the donor's home diocese, or even just on their entourage.⁵⁰ It also illustrates the existence of a classification of 'good reasons' for seeking assistance, a hierarchy between the poors that emerged as early as the eleventh century, and that remained operative in the fourteenth century.⁵¹

Institutions offering care were discriminating in terms of which patients they would admit for treatment. Some physical and mental conditions were deemed permissible, whilst others rendered the patient ineligible for admission.⁵² For example, the 1144 founding charter of St John's Hospital in Oxford

45 Brodman, *Charity and Welfare*, p. 73.

46 Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 185.

47 Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital*, p. 19.

48 RV 162, f. 95 R – Clement VI to Joan, Queen of Sicily, 20 September 1343.

49 Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 158.

50 Rawcliffe, *The Hospitals of Medieval Norwich*, p. 11.

51 Agrimi and Crisciani, "Charité et assistance", p. 158.

52 Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 158.

stated that lepers, paralytics, people suffering from dropsy, ulcers or chronic diseases, lunatics, and epileptics were not to be admitted to the hospital.⁵³ The chronically ill were often excluded from care facilities, as they took up valuable hospital resources that could be better used for the cure of patients with acute, i.e., temporary, conditions.⁵⁴ By consequence, from the thirteenth century onwards, founders began to designate the specific purposes for which their institutions had been established.⁵⁵ A letter written by Alexander IV to the Bishop of Norwich on 10 March 1255 offers insightful testimony:

Your serial petition which we have heard contains that you, out of your own property and acquisitions through your activities, found in the city of Norwich a hospital in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Giles, for the service of priests who, sick (*debilis*) or broken down by old age, cannot celebrate divine mass or cannot or will not sustenance themselves, and also for the service of a number of poor students who study in this city, as well as thirteen poor and sick people, in order to help them daily, you build of your own will [this hospital] and institute that the master, the brothers and the ministers of this hospital must carry out the initial steps necessary [...].⁵⁶

In this letter, the pope authorizes the bishop to found the hospital of St Mary and St Giles. This facility was to offer care for ailing or elderly priests who could no longer perform divine services or feed themselves, the needy schoolchildren of Norwich, and thirteen poor or sick people per day. These were amongst the city's most vulnerable, the destitute and the socially marginalized. The foundation is likely authorized in recognition of the lack of care available for elderly or sick priests in the bishop's diocese. As residents of the hospital, disadvantaged clerics in Norwich received care in a safe location, whilst remaining integrated in the community's social fabric.

Alexander IV's decision in this case follows in the wake of several pieces of legislation that emphasized the need to provide ongoing care to elderly or impaired priests. As early as 816, at the Aix-la-Chapelle assembly, the pontifical institution had authorized a bishop to make a house available to elderly and sick canons.⁵⁷ Priests, in theory at least, had no children of their own to take care of them, and thus could not always, or even often, rely on family members for support in later life. Likewise, if priests suffered from incurable conditions, including age-related impairment, they were refused entry to the public hospital as anyone else. Without access to care, they were at substantial risk of

53 The example of St John's Hospital in Oxford is discussed by Buhrer, "But What is to Be Said of a Fool".

54 Metzler, "Liminality and Disability", p. 284.

55 Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital*, p. 112.

56 RV 24, f. 28 V – Alexander IV to the Bishop of Norwich, 10 March 1255. Text edited by Bourel de La Roncière, de Loye, Canival and Coulon (eds.), *Les registres d'Alexandre IV*, n° 254, which we transcribe from the records: "*Sane petitionis tue seriem audivimus continentem quod tu [...] in proprio fundo tuo in civitate Norwicensi de bonis per tuam industriam acquisitis, quoddam hospitale in honorem beate Marie Virginis ac sancti Egidii ad opus sacerdotum qui debilitate vel senectute confracti divina celebrare non possunt seu non habeant unde valeant sustentari, et etiam ad opus certi numeri pauperum scolarium in civitate predicta studentium ac tredecim pauperum reficiendorum ibidem cotidie necnon infirmorum illuc declinare volentium construxisti, magistro, fratribus et ministris in eodem hospitali ad executionem premissorum necessariis nichilominus institutis [...]*".

57 Shahaar, *Growing Old*, p. 110.

marginalization.⁵⁸ Consequently, a second provision made at the Council of Mainz in 1261 decided to release funds to create or maintain hospices for elderly priests.⁵⁹ Places of refuge for vulnerable clerics thus became institutionalized from the thirteenth century onwards.⁶⁰ Above all, the Church aimed to prevent resignees from resorting to begging, an activity that jeopardized their ecclesiastical dignity.⁶¹ For this reason, resignees who were not fortunate enough to receive a sufficient pension were always accepted by specialist hospitals catering to clerics. Created by the Church, these institutions bear witness to the pontificate's recognition that retirees without a large, or any, pension, could find themselves in dire straits.⁶² Such open reception arrangements, which guaranteed care for impaired clerics, spread in the thirteenth century to encompass entrance to 'hostels of God' (hôtels-Dieu) operated by religious and lay congregations, and subsequently to hospitals in cities in the fourteenth century.⁶³

Then, in the fourteenth century, papal authority was frequently invoked to allow for the construction of new care facilities of various types, including hospitals, hospices, and houses of charity. Founders wished to secure papal protection for their institution, contributing to its prestige and their own. Thus, the papal institution played a fundamental role in the construction and set up of certain care institutions, though their day-to-day running and management was later entrusted to ecclesiastics or lay confraternities. The papacy also directly advanced the standardization of charitable practices, in particular through the injunction that all hospitals and leprosaria were obliged to follow the rule of St Augustine that was first issued in the Council of Paris in 1212.⁶⁴ With the foundation of care facilities, the Church likewise contributed substantially to the development of the European therapeutic sector between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁶⁵ Indeed, Popes also founded their own hospital, such as the hospital of the Holy Spirit in Rome, evidencing the rapid expansion of medical activity in the medieval era.⁶⁶

Leprosaria

Leperous clerics appear to have had two choices: either they could enter enclosure in a private house, or they could join a leper colony (*leprosarium*). In certain cases, clerics were allowed to split the difference, and given permission to live as recluses outside leprosaria. This is the fate, for instance, of the leper Rogerius (known as Renardus), a priest and rector of the church of Cormelles in the diocese of Bayeux. In a letter dated from the 23 October 1256, Alexander IV allows Rogerius to retain the income from his rectory to obviate any need for begging. He is also permitted to live in a house built by his own hand, as

58 Cummins, "Attitudes to Old Age", p. 225.

59 Bertram (ed.), *The Chrodegang Rules*.

60 The hospital for elderly priests in Tournai is the first we know of, see Albou, *L'image des personnes âgées*, p. 76.

61 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse*, p. 259.

62 Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 110.

63 Agrimi and Crisciani, "Charité et assistance", p. 169.

64 The obligation to follow the rule of St. Augustine is found in the Councils of Paris in 1212, Rouen in 1214 and Lateran IV in 1215.

65 Brodman, *Charity and Welfare*, p. 93.

66 Lazard, "L'Ospedale di Santo Spirito".

long as it is minimally a stone's throw away from other buildings. The distance was necessary to avoid the creation of any scandal owing to his presence outside the leprosaria.⁶⁷ In other cases, clerics were obliged to transfer to leprosaria, and were thus subject to broader social exclusion. Such examples illustrate the relative degree to which impaired resignees faced marginalization. The issue was especially acute for clerics with leprosy: the figure of a leprous cleric raised the potential for immense *scandalum*, and due to fears of contagion, a diagnosis of leprosy typically separated an individual from his community forever.⁶⁸ The supplications and papal letters indicate, however, that the social exclusion of lepers, even residents of leprosaria, was not necessarily total. The sources confirm the porous nature of the boundary between the leprosarium and the world, both secular and ecclesiastical, beyond its confines.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the Chancery functionally arranged for the relative ostracization of leprous clerics, by taking an active role in the endowment and regulation of leprosaria on occasion.

In the few cases in which the Apostolic See directed retirees to enter leprosaria, all clerics transferred of their own free will. A diagnosis of leprosy placed individuals at the margins of medieval social space, yet equally accorded them a well-defined role within it. Lepers were routinely indigent, owing to the severity of the condition and the stigma it carried. In this context, begging became an organized activity for lepers, managed by the communities that derived income from lepers' mendicancy, alongside legislation enacted by public authorities.⁷⁰ The latter wanted to curb the number of vagrants by determining which recipients of charity were 'good paupers' and thus deserved to be supported, achieved in part through the introduction of *matriculae*.⁷¹ It makes sense, then, that transferral to a leprosarium, a relatively welcoming institution in which they would receive care, was the preferable choice for some clerics. By appealing to the pope for transfer to a leper colony, leprous clerics retained agency, inasmuch as they subjected *themselves* to the ostracization of the leprosarium. In this context, the Chancery's approval of such transfers demonstrates its respect for supplicants' wishes.

In a letter dated 8 May 1342, for example, we learn that Johannes de Peredo, a married cleric with leprosy from Pauillac in the diocese of Auxerre, apparently made this kind of calculation:

The devoted cleric, Johannes de Peredo, stricken with the disease of leprosy, a native of Pauillac sur Loire, in the diocese of Auxerre, where his wife and offspring remain, who for sixteen years was a teacher and notary for the king of France, asks out of mercy and with a benevolent and godly eye to join a house of St Lazare, in the city of Béziers, in order to, in his own words, endure the divine scourging patiently, [...] and because his last day approaches, he wishes to receive his chair quickly. Done. R.

67 Shahar, *Growing Old*, p. 104.

68 Those two examples can be found in Dubourg, "Clerical Leprosy".

69 See Tabuteau, *Lépreux et sociabilité*; Brenner and Touati (eds.), *Leprosy and Identity*.

70 Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 175.

71 Rouche, "La matricule des pauvres".

The postscript to the previous block quote and pontifical “fiat” states that:

He may transfer himself, by the grace pious attention of God, and notwithstanding the customs of this house [of St Lazare], which is done in such circumstances thanks to contrary grace. Done, R.⁷²

Johannes’ request to enter a leprosarium in order to ‘endure the divine scourge with patience’ was approved by Clement VI, and the Curia sprung into action to ensure that his transfer was successful.

The Chancery sent a letter to multiple addressees – the unnamed archbishop of Béziers; Arnaldus Eronget, canon of Béziers; and to an anonymous official of the same church – to ensure that Johannes would be provided with all ‘necessary things’ (*neccessaria*) to join the local leprosarium, including food and clothing, and that he would receive appropriate care once installed:

With paternal piety and sense of duty, we ask [you] to provide for his needs, since he is stricken with leprosy by divine will. Therefore, we accept [the request] of our dear son Johannes de Peredo, a married cleric from the diocese of Auxerre, where he is originally from and where he has a wife and offspring in Pauillac sur Loire, in the same diocese, where he practised as a teacher and public notary for sixteen years according to his own words, because he is stricken with this disease by divine will. [...] We undertake and mandate at your discretion by apostolic letter that, the aforementioned Johannes be assigned by you or another man to live at the house of St Lazare of Béziers and be considered suitable to receive food, clothing and all other necessary things.⁷³

The recipients of the letter were thus responsible for Johannes’ care, financially and more practically. Entrance into a leprosarium came at a cost. Generally, lepers did not enter the community empty-handed, but were obliged to bring with them the necessary items to establish their new lives. According to the

72 RS 6, f. 341 R – Johannes de Peredo, cleric of the diocese of Auxerre to Clement VI on 8 May 1342. Text of which we give the transcription from the registers: “*Devote Johannes de Peredo clericus morbo lepre percussit, oriundus commorans apud Poilliacum super Ligerem in Autisiodiorenensis diocesis, huius uxore et liberis qui quidem Johanes ibidem scolas regit tabellio quare domini regis Francie fuit per spacium sexdecim annorum quatenus intuitu misericordie ipsum instituere dignemini oculo pietatis eidem Johannem mansionem in domo sancti Lazarii, civites Bitericensis misericorditer impendendo ut ibidem verbera suum Creator pati valeat patienter [...] ut cum diem extremum clausit cum superis, valeat celeriter cathedraris. Fiat. R.*

Transeat gratis pro Deo intuitu pietatis non obstante consuetudinibus pro dicta domo hunc gratie contrariis si que fuit. Fiat. R.”.

73 RV 162, f. 218 R – Clement VI to the archbishop of Béziers, to Arnaldus Eronget, canon, and to the official of the same church, 8 May 1342. Text of which we give the transcription from the registers: “*Paterne pietatis officium tunc diligenter exequimur cum morbo lepre beneplacito Divino percussis mandamus in suis necessitatibus subveniri. Cum itaque sicut accepimus dilectus filius Johannes de Peredo, clericus coniugatus in diocese Autisiodorensis, commorans habens uxorem et liberos qui apud Poylliacum super Ligerem, dicte diocese, scolas rexisse et officium tabellionatus per sexdecim annos mandauisse dicitur, sit nutu Divino, dicto morbo percussus. [...] discretioni vestre per apostolica scripta committimus et mandamus quatenus vos vel duo aut unus vestrum per vos alter alium seu alios dicto Johanni in domo beati Lazari, Bituricensis, auctoritate nostra mansionem assignari congruam faciatis sibi in ea victum et vestitum et alia necessaria”.*

statutes of the leprosarium of Nîmes, for example, new residents should arrive with a trousseau consisting of ‘a bed, a mattress, a cushion, 6 sheets, 2 blankets, 6 bowls, 2 pewter dishes’.⁷⁴ In this respect, entry into a leprosarium was similar to entry into the orders. For example, the residents of the Dover leper-hospital were tonsured like monks, visually affirming their cloistered identity.⁷⁵ In the documents studied, supplicants might choose to enter a leper community rather than be isolated. The fraternity that arose from the common life of men, and sometimes women, brought together in sickness might offer a better social bond than the alternative: partial integration into the orders, considering that some lepers were authorised to live in individual houses.

In his letter, Clement VI authorizes Johannes de Peredo to join the leper colony of St Lazare in Béziers. By his own testimony, he preferred to leave his wife and children in Pauillac and enter the leper community alone. This raises the thorny issue of marital relationships for lepers and more specifically wretched matches – marriages in which one spouse is leprous – though the topic is not broached explicitly in the missive. Initially, the Church held that marriage was indissoluble, including in cases of spousal illness. A diagnosis of leprosy for one spouse was not grounds for the dissolution of the union. However, the rules evolved during the fourteenth century, gradually becoming more lenient and moving towards the annulment of ‘mixed’ marriages between healthy and leprous partners. Entry into a leprosarium became a legitimate reason for breaking off a marriage. If one spouse joined a cloistered institution, the other could annul the union by going before the bishop’s tribunal.⁷⁶ Johannes’ desire to be taken care of exclusively by the leprosarium suggests, perhaps, that he had broken all family ties. No longer able to rely on his wife and children for support, he turned to his ecclesiastical family and the pontifical institution for care. Entry into the leprosarium served as a rite of passage for new members, a symbolic break from the world beyond the institution’s bounds and residents’ previous lives. This included, for example, an initiation that marked an individual’s arrival in the fraternity, which had much in common with the monastery.⁷⁷ At the end of the medieval period, entrance rites sometimes took the form of mock funerals for new residents conducted by the bishop. Such services are documented in at least thirty-six European dioceses, although it is impossible to know if the rites actually took place.⁷⁸ In any case, analysis of petitions and papal letters shows that a small number of clerics chose to join the leprosarium, rather than to remain within the monastery, perpetually isolated from other residents and ostracized by clergymen. Whilst transferral to the leper colony led to social exclusion, within the marginalized space of the institution, retirees could find meaningful fellowship with others in the community.

A diagnosis of leprosy was required for an individual to join a leper colony.⁷⁹ Numerous rules were applied in such institutions in order to control lepers, but also to protect the healthy population from the

74 Le Blévec, “Les lépreux peuvent-ils vivre en société?”.

75 Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, p. 303.

76 Le Blévec, “Les lépreux peuvent-ils vivre en société?”, p. 283.

77 Bériou and Touati, *Voluntate dei leprosus*, p. 65.

78 Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux*, p. 215.

79 The most recent research shows the medicalisation of leprosaria. See Hermann, “Lépreux et maladies dans l’ancien diocèse de Genève”.

risk of contagion.⁸⁰ This included, for example, strict enclosure, which functioned as a kind of quarantine. Leprosaria demanded almost monastic discipline of their residents, allowing municipal authorities to reinforce the isolation system from the thirteenth century onwards.⁸¹ Then, the whole system of leprosaria was set up to mandate that residents were highly obedient to regulations, so municipal authorities could exert ever greater control over lepers. The pope, however, had the authority to contravene or modify such rules, if an alternative was permitted by the statutes of a given institution. Another letter written by Clement VI is illustrative on this point. Clement writes to Robertus de Bours, known as Peuboin, a cleric of the diocese of Thérouanne on the 30 April 1343, to discuss the matter of the cleric's marital arrangements:

Since dear brother Robertus de Bours, known as Peuboin, a married cleric of the diocese of Thérouanne, is stricken with the disease of leprosy, and together with the dear daughter of Christ Margareta Dailly, his wife, they live separated from others because of this, and reside in the hospital of the poor St Mary's of Reims among the brothers and sisters, submitting themselves to the service of God with the sick and the poor. We desire, with regard to her praiseworthy request to live together, and we ask at your discretion by apostolic letter that Margareta can be authorised by you, or another people to join the service of the sick and the poor and be received among the brothers and sisters in this hospital.⁸²

After contracting leprosy, Robertus wishes to join the hospital for the poor of St Mary's of Reims. He petitions the pope to allow his transfer, and also requests that his healthy wife, Margareta Dailly, be allowed to enter service at the same institution as a sister serving the poor and the impaired. For this reason, the letter is registered in the category *de religionis ingressu* ('on entering religion'). Clement authorizes Robertus' request. This raises fundamental questions about the presence of the healthy (or minimally, non-leprous) laity in hospitals and leprosarium as carers for leprous residents.⁸³ Indeed, from the earliest days of leprosaria, healthy lay people had entered communities in order to serve lepers. This activity was spiritually beneficial: lepers were considered to be privileged intermediaries between God and man from the eleventh to the twelfth century.⁸⁴ However, Margareta might have chosen to join the service of the ill and pious of this hospital to live near her husband, with little consideration of the positive religious implications. For Robertus and Margareta, joining a leper colony functioned to ostracize them

80 Agrimi and Crisciani, "Charité et assistance".

81 Tabuteau, "Historical Research Developments on Leprosy".

82 RV 151, f. 30 R – Clement VI to Robertus de Bours, cleric of the diocese of Thérouanne, 30 April 1343. Text of which we give the transcription according to the register: "*Cum dilectus filius Robertus de Bours, dictus Peuboin clericus coniugatus Morinensis diocesis sit morbo lepre percussus et ob hoc dilecta in christo filia Margareta Dailly eius uxor ab eius consorcio separari et in hospitali pauperum beate Marie Remensis in quo fratres et sorores existunt cupiat in infirmis et pauperibus Domino famulari. Nos volentes ipsam in huiusmodi suo laudabili proposito consovere, discretioni vestre per apostolica scripta mandamus quatenus vos vel duo aut unus vestrum per vos vel alium seu alios prefatam Margaretam in eodem hospitali ad servitium infirmorum et pauperum recipi faciatis in fratrem et sororem [...]*".

83 The Saint Margaret's leprosarium in Barcelona is a good example of the links between the urban context, the city's network of hospitals and the role of carers in everyday life. The issues of mobility that these links reveal are developed extensively by Jáuregui, "Inside the Leprosarium".

84 Schelberg, "Leprosen in der mittelalterlichen".

from broader society, but, at the same time, it allowed them to stay together and build a new life within a supportive community. Moreover, the latest research minimizes the marginalization of these institutions, insisting more on their preponderant place in the social fabric. For example, it was long imagined that lepers used rattles and other noisy instruments to signal their presence and repel other road users. Yet, in fact, such noise-makers were used to indicate the presence of beggars, leprous and non-leprous alike.⁸⁵ Similarly, leprosaria were not closed off from the rest of the city or village community, but were instead open to the world.⁸⁶ As with monastic enclosure, the claustration of the leprosarium was not absolute. Whilst the petitions and papal letters show that residents of leprosaria were always subject to some degree of spatial segregation, they also indicate that this did not necessarily lead to residents' social ostracization. Clerical resignees who entered leprosaria retained links to broader society and to the wider clerical community, both spheres in which they continued to participate through the porous walls of their living quarters. The petition process, and the accommodations secured by engaging with it, directly contributed to this sense of inclusion, by ensuring that all clerics, even those who had technically left the clergy, could receive care and support.

Monasteries as Retirement Homes

In the papal letters, numerous impaired clerics ask to end their days by retiring to a monastery. Even so, the corpus likely offers only a partial glimpse of what is almost certainly an even broader phenomenon. 4% of supplicants in thirteenth-century letters and 16% in fourteenth-century missives were explicitly allowed to enter conventual life after their resignation. However, 44% of supplicants asking for letters of permission to resign announced their desire to join monastic orders in their petitions, an issue which was never spoken of again in their case documents. We can, thus, legitimately assume that details regarding supplicants' transfer of institution after resignation was not always included in the letters, or that later letters following up on this topic were not conserved. We can suspect that given that they were allowed to resign by the Popes, the request of retiring in the monastery was also granted. The focus of petitions was squarely on resignation; the post-resignation adoption of monastic status was a secondary issue, and, in any case, such arrangements were sometimes settled at the local level. The pope may have chosen to elide all discussion of such transfers to focus instead on the core components of the petition, which all related to supplicants' ecclesiastical status: whether they were regular or secular clergy, and whether they sought to enter, or remain, in monastic spaces.

Staying in the monastery

The majority of cases in which supplicants request permission to quit their functions in the monastery or the convent feature monks or nuns who, overwhelmed by their physical or mental incapacity, were obliged to resign their office. Monastic resignees from both male and female convents often obtained a

85 Tabuteau, "Vingt mille léproseries au Moyen Âge?".

86 Brenner, *Leprosy and Charity*.

pension that replaced their benefit, but they remained resident in their ‘home’ monastery, unless other arrangements were put in place. After resignation, abbots essentially received a demotion, and thereafter lived as monks in their own community or in a neighbouring convent. Indeed, 85% of the petitions and letters on impaired regulars clerics that wish to stay in the conventual life concern abbots who asked to remain in their home community as monks. The exemplary case of the elderly Augerius, former abbot of the community of St Mary of Lagrasse, sheds light on such arrangements. On 15 April 1309, Clement V writes a letter summarizing Augerius’ circumstances:

When, dear son Brother Augerius, then abbot of the monastery of Lagrasse, you asked by your supplications to our heart that, since it is known that you had reached a decrepit age, you be granted and deputed, since you live from day to day, a share of the fruits, revenues and products of the aforementioned monastery, up to the sum you judge necessary, that is to say, enough to feed you properly, in recognition of your service to the monastery of Lagrasse and to the Benedictine order of which it is a part.⁸⁷

Augerius had asked to be awarded a ‘retirement pension’, paid by the cenobitic community of which he had been a faithful steward during his abbacy. The Chancery concurs, permitting him a ‘pension’ as compensation for services previously rendered to the monastery, and authorizes Rogerius to determine a sum that would be sufficient to support him appropriately. However, the framing of the payment makes it clear that this allowance is not a legal obligation, but rather a goodwill gesture by the institution.⁸⁸ In the sixth century, the last lines of the Rule of the Master, a collection of monastic regulations, settled the question of individual housing, stating that: ‘for two brothers who have become decrepit with age, a dwelling shall be built within the gates of the monastery and near them’.⁸⁹ These elderly monastics were given the task of interviewing visitors: they were set aside and permitted separate lodging by virtue of their wisdom. In contrast, in the Rule of St Benedict, the elderly are given better access to communal and individual facilities because of their physical weakness (as bath, rooms etc.). In the provisions of the Council of Vienna of 1312, monastics were prohibited from living alone outside the monastery. Indeed, religious were not permitted to live independently, but were obliged to share their dwelling with at least one other person if they must stay outside the monastery.⁹⁰ The monastic life remained communal, even after retirement. No mention is made of any financial allowance granted to retired abbots in canon law, meaning that they, theoretically, had to live like their brothers, albeit according to a modified (easiest) rule of life. Similarly, canons had to remain in their convent until death, though they were exempted from

87 RV 56, f. 110 V – Clement V to Augerius, the former abbot of the monastery of St Mary of Lagrasse (Carcassonne), 15 April 1309. Text analysed by BENEDICTIN MONKS (eds.), *Regestum Clementis papae V*, n° 4 250, of which we give the transcription according to the register: “*Cum dilectus filius fratrem Augerius dudum abbas tui monasterii Crassensis sicut ex parte tua fuit propositum coram nobis ad decrepitam etatem pervenisse noscatur [...] tuis supplicationibus inclinati concedendi et deputandi dicto fratri Augerio quoad vixerit aliquos fructus, redditibus et proventibus dicti monasterii, usque ad summam que tue discretioni videbitur, de quibus detentus valeat sustentari quibuscumque ipsius monasterii et ordinis sancti Benedicti qui in dicto monasterio servari dinoscitur*”.

88 Shahaar, *Growing Old*, p. 105.

89 Minois, *Histoire de la vieillesse*, p. 187.

90 Hourlier and Le Bras, *Histoire du droit et des institutions de l’Église*, p. 223.

attending matins after they reached the age of 70.⁹¹ Augerius appears to have been a dynamic force during his abbacy. He made various advantageous arrangements for the abbey, and reformed the observance of the rule. In another letter, dated 22 February 1310 and written to Guillelmus, Augerius' chosen successor, a candidate selected with the help of the Bishop of Agde, Clement V recapitulates certain decisions Augerius had made during his time as abbot. This second letter begins with a reference to the former abbot's retirement, with his departure motivated by his advanced age which had rendered him useless, unable to govern the monastery adequately.⁹² Strikingly, this second letter, written almost a year after the letter expressly pertaining to Augerius' resignation, gives us more information than its predecessor about the circumstances of his abdication, including his physical and mental condition, even though its subject matter is quite different.

Equally, new retirees could enjoy special facilities that had some connection to their (former) home institution. The Benedictine abbess Elissandra de Noeriis of St Mary of Jicro, in the diocese of Meaux, requested such privileges from Clement VI:

The petition that you brought to our attention contained that, now a nun, while you were until recently abbess of the Benedictine monastery of St Mary of Jicro, belonging to the Roman Church, in the diocese of Meaux, in the last moments of your life you ardently wished to devote your humble desires, all your actions and worldly concerns to God only, to submit yourself in quiet peace and conscious devotion, which was not possible when you were abbess, because of the abbatial dignity and administration of the monastery, tired by the difficulties and concerns of the aforementioned monastery and weighed down by old age. In short, we wish, based on your merits, to respond favourably to your requests in this regard, so that you may live in the house and manor of Clareo, belonging to the Jicro estate of this monastery, with a portion of bread and wine for you and your four servants, and a pension of 300 *livres tournois* in the currency of the kingdom of France, to take care of you for the rest of your days.⁹³

91 Gutton, *Naissance du vieillard*, p. 17.

92 RV 57, f. 222 V – Clement V to Guillelmus, abbot of the monastery of St Mary of Lagrasse (Carcassonne), 22 February 1310. Text edited by BENEDICTIN MONKS (eds.), *Regestum Clementis papae V*, n° 6 065.

93 RV 165, f. 27 V – Clement VI to Elissandra de Noeriis, from the Benedictine monastery of St Mary of Jicro, 9 May 1345. Text of which we give the transcription according to the register: “*Cum itaque sicut petitio tua pro parte nobis exhibita continebat nuper tu nunc monialis tunc abbatissa monasterii beate Marie de Jicro ad Romanam ecclesiam nullo medio pertinentis ordinis sancti Benedicti, Meledensis diocesis, ultimis temporibus vite tue cupiens ferventi desiderio abiectis omnibus actus et secularibus curis soli Deo adhaerere, et in tranquillitate pacis et conscientie devotionem reddere famulatum quod facere non posses quamdiu esses diversis oneribus et curis dicti monasterii fatigata et senectute gravata dignitati abbaciali et regimini eiusdem monasterii [...] Nos igitur volentes promissorum meritorum obtentu tibi super hoc quantum cum Deo possumus salubriter providere huiusmodi supplicationibus inclinati domum seu manerium de Clareo prope dictam villam de Iocro ad prefatum monasterium pertinentem ac portionem panis et vini de ipso monasterio pro te et quatuor servitoribus tuis necnon pensionem trecentarum librarum Turonensis parvorum fortis monete nunc in regno Francie curetis quod vixeris [...]”.*

Elissandra freely relinquished her office in light of her advanced age and associated exhaustion. Rather than remaining within the convent proper, she preferred to move by herself to a residence near the village of Jocro that was owned by the institution. In theory, the former abbess was prohibited from living outside enclosure, hence the need to appeal for papal grace to authorize her transfer. Elissandra also asked to receive a pension of 300 *livres tournois* per year. She wished not only to break enclosure and the mandate to live communally, but also to retain the material support from which she benefited as a cloistered nun, including her portions of bread and wine. Moreover, she appealed for permission to appoint four servants to her household, who would care for her in her old age.⁹⁴ Clement VI approves the retiree's request in full, which suggests both that Elissandra genuinely did leave enclosure, and that she maintained close links with her former monastic life at the convent and its current occupants. The petitions and letters again confirm the way in which monastic rules could be adapted to allow for the physical separation of impaired clerics from their various communities, whilst simultaneously minimizing their social exclusion.

Entering the monastery

From the twelfth century onwards, the monastery became known as a 'retirement home' for elderly nobles and clerics. Many medieval commentators criticised the assumption of the habit late in life as a calculated move to secure a comfortable life and care in one's advanced years, rather than a reflection of any sincere vocation.⁹⁵ The late conversion movement began to spread from the middle of the eleventh century in parallel with the increase in lay donations to religious communities.⁹⁶ In the thirteenth century, hospitals transitioned from spaces of general care for the needy and vulnerable to hospices for patients with acute sickness, conditions that were both curable and time-limited. Consequently, these institutions often refused to accept long-term 'invalids', the chronically ill and elderly. Monasteries plugged this care gap, and filled up with elderly people with varying degrees of impairment.⁹⁷ They accepted individuals excluded from other care institutions, offering care both for palliative patients at the end of life and for elderly residents on an ongoing basis.

Retirement to the convent was a complicated issue for priests with secular benefits. Nevertheless, many favoured joining orders rather than transferring to a hospital.⁹⁸ Of the secular clergy seeking such arrangements in the corpus, bishops, i.e., clerics invested with a share of papal authority, are by far the most numerous. Indeed, of the 132 seculars requesting permission to retire to a monastery, only two held positions below the level of bishop: a prior and a chaplain. Clerics asked to leave the priesthood and enter the monastery because their impairments were likely to cause 'scandal' in the community.⁹⁹ In such cases, the Church took particularly good care of high-ranked elderly clerics: both Yves of Chartres' and

⁹⁴ On assistance, see Chapter 4.

⁹⁵ On the debate about the late assumption of the monastic habit, see Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 146.

⁹⁶ Miramon, "Embrasser l'état monastique".

⁹⁷ Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital*, p. 60.

⁹⁸ Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 144 gives several examples of these defectors from the 11th to the 15th century.

⁹⁹ Fossier, "La contagion des péchés", p. 30.

Gratian's *Decree* established that a bishop could not be ousted from his role, even if were ill and incapable of satisfying the requirements of his office, unless and until he resigned.¹⁰⁰ This provision encouraged the pontifical institution to ask for the resignation of clerics that were perceived to be harming their benefits, owing to their disability. Thus, this could have opened up a negotiation, that could be advantageous for the retiring bishop. So the bishop now had leverage – he can ask for special privileges in his petition, requesting transfer to a specific monastic institution, receive some income, etc.

The supplication addressed to Urban V on the 22 August 1363 by Baldewinus, bishop of Tripoli, affiliated to the Cistercians, demonstrates the negotiation that could take place:

It is granted to him [Baldewinus], by special grace in order to relieve his insufficiency (*inopia*), for he is old and ill, a monk's prebend in the monastery of St Paul in Utrecht and another in the Benedictine monastery of Oestbroec in the city of Utrecht insofar as these are worth about sixty florins (guilders) if you consider him worthy of receiving them, notwithstanding his privileges or customs. Made again if he renounces the episcopate [crossed out in the original: and if he wishes to become a monk, B] without further reading. Done. B.¹⁰¹

The bishop petitions the pope to ask for more income to support himself in old age, as he needs to live comfortably and pay for care etc. He then receives two monastic prebends, worth about 60 florins. Urban V is happy to honour the cleric's request, on one critical condition: Baldewinus must resign his episcopal office in exchange. Canonical support for such clerical transfers is found in Gratian's *Decree*. The text prescribes that a priest in a very weak condition may enter the regular clergy, if he had first resigned.¹⁰² This was almost certainly what he had in mind when formulating his initial request, as Tripoli and Utrecht are very distant. Strikingly, the original supplication featured another condition that was included when the text was read to the pope, yet subsequently removed by the Chancery. Urban V had requested explicit assurance that Baldewinus really did want to become a monk, or in other words, that he would transfer to the monastic orders at some point in the future. The elision of this prerequisite, and the supplicant's success in securing his desired prebends in and around Utrecht, suggests that Baldewinus' principle goal was to return to the Netherlands from his posting in Tripoli. Embracing the monastic life seemed like a practical– and lucrative – way to achieve this aim, rather than a purely spiritual endeavour. Transfer to monastic orders later in life was a sensible choice for secular clerics. Monasteries were well equipped to

100 *Decretum Gratiani*, second part, causa 7, canon 1. *Decretum* of Yvo of Chartres, book V, chapter 305 et 307.

101 RS 40 f. 43 V – Baldewinus, bishop of Tripoli to Urban V, 22 August 1363. Text analysed by HAYEZ, MATHIEU and YVAN (eds.), *Urban V*, n° 327, which we transcribe from the register: “[...] *Specialem gratiam facientes ad relevandam inopiam suam cuius sit senex et valitudinariis eidem unius monachi prebenda in monasterio sancti Pauli Trajectensis et unam aliam in monasterio de Oestbroec extra muros Trajectensis, ordinis sancti Benedicti quarum quolibet istarum valet sexaginta florenum vel circa vester dignemini conferre quibuscumque privilegiis seu consuetudinibus suis et aliis quibuscumque non obstante ut in forma, fiat in altero si renunties episcopatum B. [cassere in originali: et velis esse monachus B.], sine alia lectione, fiat, B.*”.

102 *Decretum Gratiani*, second part, causa 17.

shelter and care for sick and impaired residents, thanks particularly to their infirmaries.¹⁰³ However, there was a risk that the community would refuse to accept a candidate who was judged to be too old, even if he were a secular cleric.¹⁰⁴ Point 60 of the Rule of St Benedict warns the chapter not to admit new members ‘too quickly’.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, many religious orders expressly stipulated that old age, impairment or illness rendered an applicant ineligible for entrance, as he would be unable to cope with the rigours of monastic life.¹⁰⁶

Alongside secular clergymen transferring to monasteries, the corpus documents instances in which wealthy nobility, both men and women, were allowed to enter monastic institutions later in life, regardless of their previous activities. The circumstances of Conradus de Marcha, a former knight and current lay member of the Order of Friars Minor, is detailed in two letters written by Clement VI, dated 17 January 1342. This case allows us to address the question of lay ‘retirement’, especially in cases of professions *ad succurrendum* (‘to the rescue’, i.e., late in life):

Because, therefore, as we have recently accepted from you that you, who are now a novice of the order of Friars Minor, formerly a secular knight, founded and endowed the nunnery of Clarenbergh of the order of St Clare with your own property, and now, appearing at a decrepit age, your supplications make us inclined to allow you to enter with six mature and aged brethren of your aforementioned order into the aforementioned nunnery, notwithstanding any statutes and customs of the nunnery and any contrary constitutions, and when you will be able to enter lawfully, provided that you are the head of the aforementioned nunnery, it will be permitted that you enter, but the aforementioned brothers shall not be allowed to remain there to eat nor to stay there overnight, we hereby authorize it through this letter.¹⁰⁷

As a knight, Conradus had founded and endowed the Clarian monastery of Clarenbergh in the diocese of Cologne, a community of female religious. It made sense, then, after his adoption of the religious life and becoming a Franciscan novice, the elderly Conradus would ask to transfer to Clarenbergh with six fellow friars and end his days in comfort the profits from his secular life had provided. These documents demonstrate that the convent could also be used as something like a retirement home for powerful members of the laity, if they were no longer able to work due to illness or impairment. What’s more, they

103 Orme, “Sufferings of the Clergy”, p. 63.

104 Numerous examples of letters from the Penitentiary showing the fear of integrating an elderly petitioner are collected by Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 146.

105 Schmitz and Borias, *Règle de Saint Benoît*, chapitre 60.

106 Metzler, *A Social History*, p. 147.

107 RV 172, f. 159 V – Clement VI to Conradus de Marcha, 17 January 1342. Text edited by Volbert Sauerland (ed.), *Urkunden und Regesten*, n° 478, p. 188: “Cum itaque, sicut ex parte tua nuper accepimus, tu, qui nunc es in ordine fratrum minorum novitius, olim miles secularis existens monasterium monialium in Clarenbergh ordinis sancte Clare Coloniensis diocese, de bonis tuis propriis fundaveris et dotaveris et nunc in etate decrepita constitutus existas, nos tuis supplicationibus inclinati, ut cum sex provecis et honestis fratribus tui predicti ordinis dictum monasterium monialium quibuscumque ipsius monasterii statutis et consuetudinibus ac quibuslibet constitutionibus contrariis nequaquam obstantibus libere ingredi, quando tibi videbitur licite valeas, dummodo illi[us], que ipsi monasterio prefuert, ad id accedat assensus et tu dictique fratres ibidem non comedatis nec etiam pernocetis, tenore tibi presentium indulgemus”.

emphasize the role of professions *ad succurrendum* in terms of elevating the status of a monastic retiree's family, signalled by the high-profile location in which family members were buried.¹⁰⁸ Conradus benefitted from papal grace by being allowed to live amongst the nuns of Clarenbergh, even if his friar companions were allowed only to visit, rather than reside there. In a second letter, Clement VI even permitted his burial in a suitable place in the abbey.¹⁰⁹ Then, we can imagine that he had in mind the transformation of the community he had founded out of personal devotion to constitute a family mausoleum.¹¹⁰ The Papal Chancery offered dispensations for monastic transfers both to individuals who genuinely desired to change their clerical status, and those who simply sought a place to retire and receive care, regardless of whether supplicants were actually suited to the religious lifestyle. Such authorizations ran counter to the edicts of canon law promulgated directly by the Curia. Conradus' case is particularly dramatic in this regard, as he was granted entrance to a *female* community, which, in theory at least, was absolutely prohibited to men. It is clear, however, that the papal institution was highly selective to whom it offered such license. Above all, the Church supported the powerful, whether they hailed from the clergy or laity. For these privileged few, resignation and 'retirement' to the monastery provided a strategic and practical route to ensure they received high-quality care in a safe environment until their dying day.

Conclusion

The Papal Chancery showed a genuine interest in providing care to those in need, including impaired clerics, as parts of its overarching remit of managing medieval society. To achieve its lofty goals, however, the Church first had to stigmatize impairment following certain criteria. For this purpose, the institution relied on provisions in canon law outlining the moral and ecclesiastical consequences of impairment, alongside medical knowledge which purportedly demonstrated the ways in which impairment concretely impacted clerics' suitability for office. The right to endorse and/or contravene laws relating to impairment was exclusively held by the pope. This further legitimized the pontiff's authority over the clergy, as clerics were obliged to appeal to his judgment if they wished to modify the religious lifestyle in order to accommodate their impairment. In this context, hospitals played a relative significant role in the care of impaired and sick individuals. The ecclesiastical institution was instrumental to the foundation and upkeep of such therapeutic institutions from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. The petitions and papal letters emphasize the role of the papacy in the construction and endowment of such charitable institutions. Whilst this certainly serves to boost the pope's reputation, it does not necessarily preclude the notion that the Chancery had an authentic interest in offering care to communities.

Whether the papal institution devoted its efforts to specialist institutions for impaired clerics, or into condition-specific hospitals like leprosaria, the Church's activities in this sphere reveal its flexibility in

108 Gougoud, *Dévotions et pratiques ascétiques*, p. 129.

109 Volbert Sauerland (ed.), *Urkunden und Regesten*, n° 479.

110 Miramon, "Embrasser l'état monastique"

the application of monastic rules and canonical laws. What's more, institutional specialization – with leprosaria for lepers, or 'hostels of God' for the blind – suggests that assistance could be adapted according to an individual's unique circumstances. For the most privileged clerics, resignation could offer practical solutions to physical and/or mental impairment, and a means to secure ongoing financial support and care for the remainder of their lives, if they were awarded pensions or other material assistance. Supplicants from both the secular and regular clergy benefited from annuities and other special provisions transmitted by episcopal or pontifical favour that enabled them to end their lives with dignity. In their old age, they found safe refuge, for example, in monasteries which functioned something like retirement homes. The corpus demonstrates that the ecclesiastical institution also supported lower-ranked clerics with impairments, albeit to a lesser degree than their more illustrious colleagues, by transferring them to care facilities, either on a short-term or more permanent basis