

Disabling Consequences of Illnesses on Clerics' Recruitment in 1459:

(Re-)Inclusion of Disabled People within the Church by Pius II.

I. Introduction (1,5 pages = 3 minutes)

[Disability] In this paper, I understand disability as a cultural construct that varies according to a more immediate social or environmental context, and may therefore change according to the documents studied.¹ In the petitions and pontifical letters analysed in this paper, persons with physical, sensory or mental conditions encounter difficulties in exercising certain aspects of clerical or religious rights and duties. They have therefore experienced disability as a social, religious & cultural phenomenon.²

[Context] To sum up, I use the concept of disability when the community denies access to some people to certain functions because of physical, sensory or mental criteria. This paper focuses on the register of the Apostolic Penitentiary *matrimonialium et diversorum* Volume 7, containing the papal letters sent by Pope Pius II in 1459. This register includes around forty papal letters mentioning all types of serious diseases and physical defects mostly due to illnesses. In some petition letters that are now lost, laypeople who wanted to become clerics (monk, nun, priest), and ordained clerics who wanted to be promoted, asked for a dispensation letter from Pope Pius II to contravene the canon law that keeps them apart from the clergy.

[Sources] Sent in answer to such lost petitions, pontifical letters studied here allowed people to contravene prohibitions or regulations contained in canon law by offering a number of alternatives to disabled people. This process of supplication staged a humble prayer in order to obtain a “gracious” privilege on the part of the ruler, while acknowledging the petitioner’s physical or mental incapacity.³ It allowed flexibility in the normative system to adapt the rules to

¹ Martha L. Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus: Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece*, UMP: Ann arbor, 2003, 3.

² Edgar Kellenberger, ‘Children and Adults with Intellectual Disability in Antiquity and Modernity: Toward a Biblical and Sociological Model’, *CROS CrossCurrents*, 63-4 (2013) 449–472.

³ Simona Cerutti & Massimo Vallerani, ‘Suppliques. Lois et cas dans la normativité de l’époque moderne’, *L’Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques. Revue électronique du CRH*, 13 (2015).

individual situations, but also formed a conscious strategy, led successively by the petitioner and then by the pontifical institution itself.⁴

[hypothesis & plan] The disabled people who want to enter or to stay in the clergy wrote mostly once they had recovered from their illnesses as part of a (re-)inclusion process. Indeed, those supplicants had to prove that their diseases have passed and that they were healthy and suitable to enter or stay in the clergy, regardless of the stigmata that illnesses had left on their bodies. However, these visible marks raise the question of the social reintegration of people with disabilities during the Late medieval times and the early modern period. This paper is therefore mainly concerned with the aftermath, i.e. the implications of recovery on the professional and social identity formation of survivors. In the end, how an institution as powerful as the Church handles those disabling effects enlighten us on the contemporaries' interpretations and representations of illnesses' consequences.

II. Clerics' recruitment (1,5 pages = 5 minutes) 3'

[PPT3] **[defectus]** From the fifth century to the 1983 Code of Canon Law, physical or mental disability caused an irregularity and prevented the petitioner who has not obtained a grace from rejoining the clerical state or maintaining his ecclesiastical status. Indeed, disabling consequences of illnesses – called defect of body or mind (*defectus corporis* or *mentis*)⁵ – prevented the future cleric from physical integrity, affected his capacity to carry out his duties, and impacted his social image. However, because the Apostolic See determined the attribution and effects of *defectus*, they could request a way to be included within the Church despite their disabilities.

[2 incapacities] Through these letters, the Holy See delineated the attributions and effects of the favour granted to allow prohibited acts. For example, *Ambrosus de Romanario*, a supplicant from the diocese of Novare asked to be promoted for all orders (minor and major), despite that he lose his right eye of certain diseases, he can be. Nevertheless, the papal letter subordinate the grace to the condition that the illnesses consequences did not generate too great a deformity or

⁴ H el ene Millet, 'Introduction', in *Ibidem* ed, *Suppliques et requ etes: le gouvernement par la gr ace en Occident, XII^e-XV^e si ecle*, EFR: Rome 2003, 8.

⁵ Irina Metzler, 'Then and Now: Canon Law on Disabilities', in Christian Laes ed, *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies, a capite ad calcem*, Brill: Boston (2013) 455-467.

scandal.⁶ The assumption was that the Pontifical Chancery would evaluate the disabled by proposing a normative definition of disability. In this documentation, the physical and mental integrity (*integritas*) of clerics is manifested in two ways.⁷ First, chancery officers judge idoneity (the individual capacity of the person) to exercise ministerial acts or to respect religious obligations such as Lent, penance, etc. Secondly, they assess the social repercussions of disability (*claritas*), i.e. the effect that a disability can have on the faithful, or even the scandal leading to ostracism, marginalization, etc. As a result of this process, the Chancery recognizes the status of the disabled person and, without erasing the disability, deletes its institutional effects by, for example, putting in place special arrangements or adjunct a substitute for the cleric.

[PPT 4] [**Waiting for recovery**] In order to ensure that each cleric is suitable and respectable, the Curia systematically evaluated the people it employs. Popes mobilized the authority of superiors in several ways to supervise clerics more effectively. The examination can thus take place at the time of entry into the orders or at each promotion during the control of the "canonical condition of priest", i.e. the future cleric physical idoneity, morality, and intellectual capacities organised by the bishop or his representative or even during pastoral visits when the bishop controlled the quality of the personnel attached to the church.

The recognition of the disabled condition was the place of bitter negotiations, and has effects both on the lives of the disabled and in the government of the Church. During those negotiations, the physician appeared to be an expert to prove that the argument advanced by the petitioner is correct. However, the invocation of the disease is often vague and poorly contextualized in the papal letters. This lack of precision indicate that the moment to be reported to the Apostolic See was not when the infirmity occurred, but when it began to pose a problem for the cleric wishing

⁶ Fol. 257R, first of December: *Ambrosus de Romanario*, from the Diocese of Novara, tells us that, due to certain illnesses, he has lost his right eye but still wishes to be promoted in all clerical orders thanks to a pontifical dispensation. For this reason he begs us, if the aforementioned impediment does not prevent him, to be promoted in all clerical orders and thus be able, after having been promoted, to receive ecclesiastical benefit with or without a cure. Done with a special and express grace, provided that this does not generate too great a deformity or scandal. [*Ambrosus de Romanario, Novariensis diocese, exponit ex parte propter certas infirmitatis, oculum dextrum amisit cum autem desideret ad omnes ordines promoveri hoc facere potest sine dispensatione, supplicat igitur ut impedimento huiusmodi non obstante ad omnes ordines promoveri possit et post quare promotus fuerit altissimo perpetuo famulari ac beneficium ecclesiasticum etiam si curiam habeat animarum obtinere dispensere dignemini, fiat de speciali et expresso si non sit magna difformitas et scandalum non generetur, Philippo sancti Laurenti in Lucina.*]

⁷ Gilbert Guaydier, *Les irrégularités "ex defectu corporis"*, thèse présentée pour le doctorat en droit canonique, Société Générale d'Imprimerie et d'Édition, Paris, 1933.

to continue his ecclesiastical career. For example, *Johannes la Quaille*, a priest of the diocese of Noyons, has once lost a large part of his thumb and two toes of his right foot due to illness. The letter said that, because the missing part of these toes do not prevent the celebration of Mass nor do they risk inducing scandal among the people, he was dispensed to receive the orders.⁸

The supplicants used several types of strategies to obtain pontifical graces. First, they could choose a date to begin the petitioning process. In this way, they acted on the effectiveness of the petition by transmitting it at an opportune moment. This process implies that they waited long enough before revealing their infirmity, so that it was considered ancient and well established, and therefore considered as a serious criterion by the Pontifical Chancery. Indeed the petitioners may wish to certify that they deserve a grace, since their incapacity lasts for a long time and affects the management of their ecclesiastical benefit.

III. (Re)Inclusion (2 pages = 6 minutes) 8'

[PPT 5] In view of the accommodations proposed by the pontifical institution, it appears that pontifical graces allow supplicants to modify their identity, whereas individual identity is understood as plural.⁹ Infirmity, illnesses or old age are fundamental elements in the construction of an actor's identity and influence it in two ways. On the one hand, infirmity affects the way someone appropriates his identity (ipseity). On the other hand, a person is constructed through society's categorization (ideality).¹⁰ Indeed, the social response to disability also contributes to the recognition of the disabled persons' condition.¹¹ Consequently, identity is at the crossroads of

⁸ Fol. 138 R, the 3th of May: *Johannes la Quaille*, a priest of the diocese of Noyons, has explained to us that he once lost a large part of his thumb and two fingers of his right foot due to illness, knowing that, Holy father, the missing parts of these fingers do not prevent the celebration of Mass, not do they risk generating scandal among the people, he begs that, notwithstanding what has been said above, he may be dispensed to receive orders if he is worthy of them. Done in form, Philippe sancti Laurenti in Lucina. [*Johannes la Quaille presbyter Noviotensis diocese, quare ppe olim exposint quod ppe olim exquandam infirmitate perdiderit grossoriam induram pollitis sint grossos II digiti pedis dextii cum autem pater sancte dritus expevens partem predicta dicti digiti ammiserit tam in divinis non posset impedimentum nec in populo scandalum generit seu inducat supplicat quare (?) cum ipso non obstante perduto in suis sit subtextus ordinibus dispense et dignemini fiat in forma Philippo sancti Laurenti in Lucina.*]

⁹ Caroline SMITH, « Conflict or Compromise? Identity and the Cathedral Chapter of Girona in the Fourteenth Century », in Laura DELBRUGGE (dir.), *Self-Fashioning and Assumptions of Identity in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, Leiden, Brill, 2015, p. 277-297.

¹⁰ Rosalyn Benjamin DARLING, *Disability and Identity : Negotiating Self in a Changing Society*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013, p. 129.

¹¹ Bianca FROHNE, « Performing Dis/Ability? Constructions of "Infirmity" in Late Medieval and Early Modern Life Writing », in Christian KRÖTZL, Katariina MUSTAKALLIO et Jenni KUULIALA (dir.), *Infirmity in Antiquity and the Middle*

personal elaboration and social construction. In it, the judgment of others appears to be fundamental in the construction of an identity, particularly when it is based on a visible bodily criterion – as in the case of physical sometimes mental, disabilities.

[**Personal identity**] Also defined as a "hegemonic cultural practice", the supplication expresses the relationship between a petitioner and an institution to forge a privileged bond with their subjects even in banal matters, in order to establish their prestige.¹² Nevertheless, the petitioner writing to the pontifical institution did not remain passive in this relationship of domination. The petition not only participated in the subjectivation of the petitioner in relation to the chancery, but allowed him to build himself as an individual with a precise request.¹³ A person's individuality is formed by an accumulation of several personal attributes (age, gender, birth rank, wealth rank, etc.¹⁴) among which capacity forms a primary criterion, as shown, for example, by onomastics.¹⁵ Some elements that constitute it can change during life: social or marital status, military capacity, clerical rank, degree of expertise in crafts or physical and mental abilities are bound to evolve.¹⁶

[PPT 6] For example, Franciscus Leonardi, a cleric from the diocese of Venice, desired to be promoted in all clerical orders, even though he was hunchbacked, without his gibbosity being so excessive, making him incapable of celebrating the divine services.¹⁷ The papal letter insists that

Ages : Social and Cultural Approaches to Health, Weakness and Care, Farnham ; Burlington, Ashgate, 2015, p. 51-65 (p. 52).

¹² Amanda Whiting, *Women and Petitioning in the Seventeenth-Century English Revolution: Deference, Difference, and Dissent*, Brepols: Turnhout 2015, 2.

¹³ Didier Fassin, 'La supplique. Stratégies rhétoriques et constructions identitaires dans les demandes d'aide d'urgence', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 55-5 (2000) 955–981.

¹⁴ Nerys Thomas PATTERSON, « Self-worth and Property : Equipage and Early Medieval Personhood », in William O FRAZER et Andrew TYRRELL (dir.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, Londres, Leicester University Press, 2000, p. 53-68 (p. 64).

¹⁵ Martin AURELL, « Conclusions », in Catalina GİRBEA, Laurent HABLLOT et Raluca Luria RADULESCU (dir.), *Marqueurs d'identité dans la littérature médiévale : mettre en signe l'individu et la famille (XII^e-XV^e siècles)*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014, p. 275-285 (p. 278). On onomastics, see also John E. SEXTON, « Difference and Disability : On the Logic of Naming in the Icelandic Sagas », in Joshua EYLER (dir.), *Disability in the Middle Ages. Reconsiderations and reverberations*, Farnham ; Burlington, Ashgate, 2010, p. 149-166.

¹⁶ Wout Jac van BEKKUM et Paul M. COBB, « Introduction : Strategies of Medieval Communal Identity », in Wout Jac Van BEKKUM et Paul M. COBB (dir.), *Strategies of medieval communal identity : Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Louvain ; Paris, Peeters, 2004, vol. 1/ p. 1-10 (p. 4).

¹⁷ Fol. 214 R, the 15th of October: Franciscus Leonardi de Imuanitum, a cleric from the diocese of Venice (Mantoue exactly), told us that he strongly desires to be promoted in all clerical orders even though he is hunchbacked, through this is no fault of his own, but on the contrary the manifestation of the divine will, without his gibbosity being so excessive as to render him incapable of celebrating divine service. He asks that, notwithstanding this

Franciscus was born this way. This youthful experience implies an elaboration of identity taking into account on his gibbosity. At different episodes of life there are repertoires of specific habits called periods of "primary" and "secondary" socialization.¹⁸ The first moment conditions how the child with physical or mental disability is constituted within the family environment, which seems favourable for Franciscus since his education allowed him to seek ecclesiastical benefits.

On the other hand, gibbosity, like other physical or mental infirmities, could prevent the person from fulfilling some of his or her functions that we may call his or her social role. This concept, borrowed from sociology, suggests that each actor must behave in a certain way, according to several criteria, in order to be fully integrated into his or her social environment.¹⁹ It is indeed conceivable that harassment related to disability also influenced the reputation (*fama*), in the sense of "common fame", of the hunchback person.²⁰ In these cases, the image sent back to the disabled person by the "social mirrors" that are the others immediately becomes a crucial part of the construction of identity and society.²¹

[PPT 7] [**Professional identity**] Social identity is a grouping of the elements of a person's identity in relation to the groups to which he or she belongs.²² Clerics adhere to many similar identity factors thanks to the restrictions of canon law: they are male and wear tonsure and a

defect, he may be promoted in all sacred orders and serve Mass and obtain a benefice with a cure of souls. Done with a special letter if he is not deformed and does not risk causing a scandal among the people. [*Franciscus Leonardi de imuanitutum clericus Venetiarum exponit quare tum prope magne devotionis favore accensus ad omnis promoveri cupiat ordinis sed qua aliquali gilbosus existit quod non es sui culpa sed a dei voluntate sibi supervenit cum tamen pius facere dicta gilbostas non recipiatur excessens ut eo nimia inhabilis rursi (?) debeat ad divina celebrando supplicat quatenus senimut dicto non obstante deffectu ad omnis sacros ordines posset promoveri et in possit ministrare et beneficium obtinere etiam si mran (?) habeat animarum fiat de speciali si non habentiat difformitatem vel scandalum in populo et committatur ordinario, Philippi sancti Laurentii in Lucina.*]

¹⁸ Bernard LAHIRE, *L'homme pluriel : les ressorts de l'action*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2005, p. 35.

¹⁹ On assigned or acquired social roles, see Raymond CHAPPUIS et Raymond THOMAS, *Rôle et statut*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1995 et Patrick FOUGEYROLLAS et Kathia ROY, « Regard sur la notion de rôles sociaux. Réflexion conceptuelle sur les rôles en lien avec la problématique du processus de production du handicap », *Service social*, 3, 1996, p. 31-54 (p. 43). Patrick Fougeyrollas et Kathia Roy provide us with a synthesis of the social role: "1. The role imposed by the attributes of the individual, such as age and sex; 2. the acquired role, which is a function of the individual's actions, such as his or her professional role; 3. the prescribed role, which corresponds to the set of behaviours and behaviours expected according to the individual's status; 4. The actual role, which refers to the prescribed role but is subjectively put into action" (my translation).

²⁰ Claude GAUVARD, « La *Fama*, une parole fondatrice », *Médiévales*, 12-24, 1993, p. 5-13 (p. 7).

²¹ The *looking glass self* is an expression from Charles Horton COOLEY, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York, Scribner, 1902, p. 183.

²² William O. FRAZER et Andrew TYRRELL, « Introduction », in William O. FRAZER et Andrew TYRRELL (dir.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, Londres, Leicester University Press, 2000, p. 1-22 (p. 3).

very specific uniform.²³ Moreover, they must be literate and represent models, as humble and forgiving as they are chaste and measured, forming what some call a "third gender".²⁴ They stand out from the other dominant groups: they are, for example, "those who pray" as opposed to "those who fight".²⁵ In addition, they must theoretically be free of physical or mental defects, since this is a primary criterion for being part of the clergy. Thus, when a man became a cleric, he recovers a particular social role, constituting a marker of his identity.

For example, *Johannes benitus*, while he was present at the Roman curia for affairs, lost, by chance and through no fault of his own, the vision in his right eye and asked to be promoted to Holy Orders, which is not possible without a dispensation.²⁶ It is common that the physical defects mentioned in the documents affected mainly the hands and eyes of the petitioner. These disabilities are most frequently found in canon law and in petitions, because of their visibility and their consequences on the ability of clerics. Indeed, they are likely to pose a problem in the context of promotion in major orders, because they are the two most solicited and visible parts of the body during religious ceremonies.

²³ Krijn PANSTERS, « Norm and Form : Virtues as Constituents of Identity in Medieval Religious Communities », in Mirko BREITENSTEIN, Julia BURKHARDT, Stefan BURKHARDT et Jörg SONNTAG (dir.), *Identität und Gemeinschaft : vier Zugänge zu Eigengeschichten und Selbstbildern institutioneller Ordnungen*, Berlin, Lit, 2015, p. 99-124 (p. 100).

²⁴ On the clerical model after the so-called Gregorian reform, see Antoine DESTEMBERG et Thierry KOUAMÉ, « Aux origines de l'*homo academicus* : Les signes de distinction sociale chez les universitaires médiévaux », in Jean-Philippe GENET et E. Igor MINEO (dir.), *Marquer la prééminence sociale*, Paris, Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2015, p. 45-55 (p. 50). See also Jacqueline MURRAY, « One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders ? », in Lisa M. BITELE et Felice LIFSHITZ (dir.), *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe : New Perspectives*, Philadelphie, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, p. 34-51.

²⁵ Jacqueline MURRAY, « Masculinizing Religious Life : Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity and Monastic Identity », in Katherine Jane LEWIS et Patricia H. CULLUM (dir.), *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, Cardiff, University of Wales press, 2004, p. 24-42 (p. 24).

²⁶ Fol. 136R, first of May: *Johannes Giuidissalm benitus*, cleric from the diocese of Burgos, tells us that, while he was present at the Roman Curia for his trade and other affairs, he lost, by chance and through no fault of his own, the vision of his right eye and asked to be promoted to Holy Orders, which is not possible without a dispensation. He therefore asks that, notwithstanding his vision in his right eye, he may be promoted to all sacred orders by receiving a special grace. Done with a special and express and commutative letter from the ordinary to dispense, provided that the deformity is not too excessive. [*Johannes Giuidissalm benitus clericus Burgensis diocese remonitus sancte Juliane de Srutillana Burgensis diocese exponit quod cum ipsum existiret in romana curia pro suis negosus (?) per et alius et agendus (?) visum oculi sui dexteri non ex sui culpa sed casu fortuiro precedidit penitus et amisit propter quod ad sacros ordines promoveri non potest sine dispensatione. Quare petit ut non obstante visu oculum dexterii ad omnes sacros ordines promoverii possit et valeat dispensando de gracia speciali, fiat de speciali et expresso et commutative ordinario quod dispa dispaset (?) si non est nimia difformitas Philippo sancti Laurentii in Lucina.*]

Indeed, during public worship, clerics embody a certain image of themselves recognizable by others: the social positioning that divine service implies allows them to create their own identity.²⁷ Work, along fatherhood or marriage – two functions from which clerics are excluded – it is one of the main components of a person's identity.²⁸ It allows an individual to define his role in the community and to be useful to the society of which he belongs.²⁹ Consequently, all forms of irregularities (defects of age, birth or body and mind) force clerics to change their identity since they can no longer fulfill their social role. Through the grace, disabled clerics were recognised as suitable by the pontifical institution: although they could no longer fulfill their mission because of their incapacity or social inability, they retain part of their clerical identity by incorporating their disability. Disabled clerics gain the right to live, work and occupy public space while maintaining their social role. They then obtain an undisputed place in medieval society and remain included in the ecclesiastical sphere. In these cases, the disabled person detached himself from his group and acquires an identity of his own, specific to his needs and abilities: his individuality is updated. This process is called individualization, because the disabled person receives new elements to update his identity. Finally, his multi-faceted identity is enriched by the authority of pontifical letters.³⁰

IV. Conclusion (0,5 pages = 1 minute) = 14'

The study of the petitions received by the Penitentiary reveals that the norms disseminated by the pontifical institution are part of the practices. In theory, disability becomes an accessible object if the historian, anthropologist or sociologist succeeds in understanding the endogenous or emic categorization of people with disabilities and in determining what experiences are gathered

²⁷ Richard C. TREXLER, « Introduction », in Richard C. TREXLER (dir.), *Persons in Groups : Social Behavior as Identity Formation in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, Binghamton, Center for medieval and early Renaissance studies, 1985, p. 3-16 (p. 11).

²⁸ According to the reading of Jacques Le Goff, confessors' manuals emphasize that every Christian is defined "essentially in relation to his profession". In these statutes, the cleric is the one who is most severely punished for his faults. Voir J. LE GOFF, *Pour un autre Moyen Âge*, op. cit. « Travail et système de valeur », p. 172. On the link between work and personal identity, see Hélène GARNER, Dominique MÉDA et Claudia SENIK-LEYGONIE, « La place du travail dans les identités », *Economie et Statistique*, 393-1, 2006, p. 21-40.

²⁹ Michael P. KELLY, « Disability and Community, a Sociological Approach », in Gary L. ALBRECHT, Katherine D. SEELMAN et Michael BURY (dir.), *Handbook of Disability Studies*, Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications, 2001, p. 396-411.

³⁰ Jorge J GARCIA, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages*, Munich, Philosophia-Verl., 1984, p. 19.

under this name. To study it, it is necessary to analyse how the institution brings together individuals eligible for specific rights and to examine how it acts in order to activate the rights granted to them. Thus, when public authorities put in place rules to recognize the status of persons with disabilities, the resulting discrimination, whether positive or negative, has stigmatizing effects on the population that are reflected in both normative frameworks and practices.

Then, the study of the letters received and issued by the Pontifical Institution makes it possible to highlight the social mechanisms at work in the face of disability and enlighten the construction of norms. In fact, popes include the dispensed supplicants in an environment in which they would have been rejected without pontifical grace, and then, allow them to enjoy a recognized place in the community. Therefore, the authority that defines the invalidity of petitioners through the enactment of restrictive laws can also empower them. The institution thus proves to be potentially inclusive as well as exclusionary. It therefore appears that the definition of disability constitutes an act of government. At the end, those documents shed light on our understanding of the life experiences of people with disabilities in the late medieval times and early modern period.