

INDULGENCES AND SOLIDARITY IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

by

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Abstract

Medieval indulgences have long had a troubled public image, grounded in centuries of confessional discord. Were they simply a crass form of medieval religious commercialism and a spiritual fraud, as the reforming archbishop Cranmer charged in his 1543 appeal to raise funds for Henry VIII's contributions against the Turks? Or were they perceived and used in a different manner? In his influential work, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise*, R.N. Swanson offered fresh arguments for the centrality and popularity of indulgences in the devotional landscape of medieval England, and thoroughly documented the doctrinal development and administrative apparatus that grew up around indulgences. How they functioned within the English social and devotional landscape, particularly at the local level, is the focus of this thesis. Through an investigation of published episcopal registers, my thesis explores the social impact of indulgences at the diocesan level by examining the context, aims, and social make up of the beneficiaries, as well as the spiritual and social expectations of the granting bishops. It first explores personal indulgences given to benefit individuals, specifically the deserving poor and ransomed captives, before examining indulgences

given to local institutions, particularly hospitals and parishes. Throughout this study, I show that both lay people and bishops used indulgences to build, reinforce or maintain solidarity and social bonds between diverse groups. Bishops used indulgences for indigent individuals to promote solidarity and support for the deserving poor. Ransomed English captives used indulgences to seek communal assistance to purchase their freedom. Hospitals used indulgences to draw the healthy and wealthy of society to the geographic and social peripheries where the sick and the leprous lay, calling for support and solidarity. Finally, parishes used indulgences as a means to smooth over parochial divisions and to encourage greater unity among parishioners, both living and dead. In sum, I demonstrate that, in the years prior to the Reformation, the function of indulgences was multivalent and played an important, unifying role in local communities: they offered spiritual gain as well as social benefits that redounded beyond the mutuality they represented and effected between benefactor and beneficiary.

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Abbreviations

CPR	Calendar of Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland
EETS	Early English Text Society
EEA	Early English Acta
Reg.	Register
CYS	Canterbury and York Society
WHS	Worcestershire Historical Society
SS	Surtees Society

Chapter One:

What is an Indulgence?

The year 1430 was a trying one for John Whitby, a well-to-do burgess and ship owner from Hartlepool in the north of England. Mr. Whitby, like many others in the region, was a victim of the economic disruptions brought about by war: the ongoing battles for Scottish Independence and the never-ending Hundred Years' War with England's perennial enemy (and Scotland's ally), France. Even in the best of times, maritime trade carried great risk for those involved, but in times of war, the depredations of enemy seizure and piracy could make the risk unbearable. Whitby's financial position had become precarious when the enemy French and Scots seized several of his ships in 1429 and 1430. He took a calculated risk, taking out lines of credit to finance his attempts to ransom back his ships and merchandise and redeem the crews from enemy prisons. Whitby's efforts had left him deep in debt, so when yet another of his ships was captured, he lost everything, unable to redeem his crews, pay his creditors or even feed his family. Thus he gambled and lost, and by the summer of 1430, he was in financial ruin. John Whitby, a once wealthy and influential burgess of a bustling port town, was reduced to relying on the generosity of others.¹

¹ *Reg. Langley*, 3:198. Universis sancte matris ecclesie filiis, etc. Thomas etc. salutem etc. Inter opera pietatis ad que fidelis quilibet obligatus existit illud reputamus meritorium et precipua laude dignum pauperibus et egenis affectuose compati, illis specialiter qui de statu felici sine ipsorum culpa et negligencia in egestatem et inopiam casu inciderint et eorum miserie elemosinarum largicionibus misericorditer subvenire. Cum itaque sicut accepimus Johannes Whitby burgensis ville de Hertipole nostre diocesis, cujus naves ac homines et diversa mercimonia sua in eisdem existencia per nonnullos Regis emulos sepius et diversis vicibus in mari capta extiterunt, et jam quedam nuper navis cum hominibus et bonis suis contentis in eadem una cum aliis navibus ville predictae per nonnullos Scotos et Britones Regis et regni inimicos eciam in mari capta fuit, tanto et tam graves pro redempcione et financia navium hominum et mercimioniorum suorum predictorum fecerat a diu sumptus et expensas, per quos ad tantam jam devenit paupertatem et inopiam quod non habet unde navem suam predictam nuper captam cum hominibus et bonis

We know Whitby's story because he asked his bishop, Thomas Langley, the bishop of Durham, for help in the form of an indulgence. Langley granted Whitby the most liberal indulgence he could, according to canon law: forty days' indulgence to all those in the diocese who could give something of their own God-given goods to help the destitute Whitby in the next year. This indulgence meant that anyone who gave money, goods, shelter or any form of assistance to John and his family would receive a spiritual reward for their generosity. Indeed, in his letter of indulgence, the bishop reminded his audience that it is precisely generosity toward the poor, particularly those who fell into hard times through no fault of their own—*illis specialiter qui de statu felici sine ipsorum culpa et negligencia in egestatem et inopiam casu inciderint*—that wins the generosity of Heaven.

This was not the first time the bishop had issued this sort of grant. In his long tenure as bishop of Durham, the impoverishing effects of war, instability, and the vicissitudes of life had shown themselves in the faces of bankrupt merchants, widows, craftsmen, and families of captive soldiers and sailors. In a time and place without government programs or social safety nets, it was to the informal social networks of family and friends and to the local Church that people in difficult situations turned.

Although indulgences were a popular form of religious activity in the Middle Ages, earlier generations of historians have tended to dismiss this popularity as evidence

suis contentis in eadem redimere ac creditoribus suis quibus ex causis predictis indebitatus existit satisfacere nec unde se et suos poterit sustentare nisi sibi Christi fidelium elemosinis in hac parte misericorditer succurratur; nos igitur ipsius Johannis inopie pio compacientes affectu, de dei omnipotentis misericordia etc omnibus parochianis nostris et aliis etc qui ad subsidium et relevamen predicti Johannis aliquid de bonis sibi a deo collatis etc xl dies indulgencie misericorditer in domino concedimus per presentes per unum annum a data earundem tantummodo duraturas. Datum sub sigillo nostro in manerio nostro de Aukland xxv die mensis Augusti anno domini etc. ut supra proximo et nostre consecracionis xxv.

of decadence and decline in the late medieval Church. Such dismissal has led to scholarly oversight: the basic questions of why indulgences were so popular and how they fit into the social and devotional landscape have not been explored until recently. Episcopal and papal registers offer a wealth of information in this regard. Clerks often noted in the records that an indulgence was granted on behalf of a person or institution, and many times, also described the circumstances of the beneficiary. These descriptions offer clues as to why and how indulgences mattered to the late medieval world: they carry not only administrative and legal characteristics of process and technique, but also possess a performative quality that reveals the situation and aspirations of both the bishop and the petitioner. In this regard, Whitby's story and others like it are ports of entry into this late medieval English world.

The central argument of this essay is that indulgences were an important tool in encouraging and fostering greater social solidarity at the local level in late medieval England. In addition to playing a significant role in the religious and devotional landscape, they also performed a social function. Individual petitioners sought episcopal indulgences for assistance after catastrophic property loss, for a helping hand in life-cycle or disability poverty, or for help in ransoming captive loved ones. For such persons in marginal or distressed situations, indulgences offered important material assistance while drawing attention to these people and their situations, validating their claims and active presence in society, and encouraging solidarity with them. Indulgences could also work to counteract divisive forces that could threaten unity in local parish life by encouraging participation in communal activities. Local parishes sought them as a way to reaffirm communal unity and identity as well as to foster greater contribution to communal

financial obligations. Local hospitals used indulgences granted on their behalf to draw the healthy and the relatively wealthy into the sphere of the old and the infirm by encouraging donation and even visitation. This study examines medieval English indulgences as recorded in official, published episcopal registers in order to better understand why people sought them, and to clarify the social context in which they operated, as well as their social impact, specifically their role in creating or augmenting solidarity and social capital in late medieval England.

The chronological limits of this study are determined largely by two principal events in English history: the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the English Reformation. The earliest published *acta*, fleeting and few as they are, date from the period immediately following the Norman Conquest, and, of course, Henry VIII's embrace of Protestant views of authority and justification saw the end of episcopal grants of indulgences in England; under the Edwardian regime, all remaining traces were erased. The years between these momentous events brought growth in literacy, enlargement of government administration and apparatus, development in episcopal chanceries and administration, and increasing lay interest and participation in religious devotions. This confluence of trends translated into ever-increasing numbers of recorded indulgences from 1066 to the Reformation in England.

What is an Indulgence? Origins and History

The Latin words for indulgence, *absolutio*, *relaxatio*, *remissio*, and *indulgentia* came to denote a process by which Christians sought to atone for their sins first through sacramental confession and then through acts of satisfaction, usually some specified good

work that manifested their repentance, in order to gain further extra-sacramental remission from the temporal punishment deserved for sin and to attract divine favor at the Last Judgment. However, this was a very lengthy process of evolution.

The idea that meritorious works could be applied to the debt of sin was an ancient one that had its beginnings in Second Temple Judaism.² Throughout the Torah and the rabbinic commentaries on it, the idioms of sin as debt and good actions as credit or merit abound. In these texts, an idea emerged that it was possible to reduce the debt of one's sin through good, meritorious actions, particularly through almsgiving to the poor.³ Almsgiving and care for the needy were sacrificial acts that went beyond the requirements of the law and demonstrated love of both God and neighbor; therefore these acts would be rewarded with blessing in this life and in the life to come (merit). Indeed, according to the rabbis, it was even possible to store up this cache of merit in *sedaqah*, or treasuries, that could be applied to the debt of one's family and descendants.⁴

The early Christian Church preserved and continued Jewish thinking on sin, debt, credit and merit in its teaching on Jesus' atonement. For the early Syriac Christians such as St. Ephrem (4th c. CE), and Latin Christians such as Augustine (4th c. CE) or Clement of Alexandria (2nd c. CE), Jesus redeemed us from debt-slavery by repaying the bond of our sin-debt by his own death. Moreover, meritorious acts of mercy toward the poor and needy would also redound a hundred-fold to the moral actor in the life to come, reducing

² G. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), especially chapters 2-7, traces the earliest rabbinic thinking on the problem of sin and what to do about it.

³ *ibid.*, 135-151.

⁴ *ibid.*, 144-146, examining St. Ephrem the Syrian's *Hymns to Abraham Kidunaya*, *Hymns on the Nativity* and *Hymns on Faith*, as well as Clement of Alexandria, "Who is the Rich Man that Would be Saved?" See also K. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989); *Clement of Alexandria: With an English Translation*, ed. and trans. G.W. Butterworth (LCL; London: L W. Heinemann, 1919).

the penalty owed for sin and creating a treasury.⁵ Later Christian thinkers like Anselm of Canterbury (11th c. CE) to Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure (13th c. CE) re-articulated the rabbinic and biblical notion of a treasury of merit in their meditations on Christ's atonement. By his death, Christ established a treasury of infinite merit, for which he has no need. Out of his great love for creation and for humanity, Jesus bequeathed this wealth to the Church so that the faithful would have the means to repay their debts.⁶ Thus, ideas about sin and merit extended rather organically from the Second Temple period to the medieval period.

The method by which the treasury of merit was shared out, however, was of great question in the medieval period. The Carolingian and Ottonian bishops of the tenth and early eleventh centuries were accustomed to relieving the penalty of debt by granting extra-sacramental remission (called an *absolutio*).⁷ One's guilt for wrongdoing was forgiven within the confines of the sacrament, but one still owed a debt of satisfaction, which often could be onerous. However, one could be absolved (literally, to be untied or set free) from part or all of this debt through the intercessory prayers of a bishop using the power of the keys to loose one from the debt. By the tenth century, absolution could also be obtained through ritual intercessory prayer during the penitential liturgy in which the merits of Christ and the saints were applied to the debt. However, during the eleventh century, the method by which these merits were dispensed shifted again. Bishops moved away from grants *per modum suffragii* in the liturgical setting and toward absolutions in

⁵ *ibid.*, 111-132.

⁶ *ibid.*, 189-202, specifically discussing Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur deus homo*.

⁷ B. Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 210-219.

the form of a juridical document that offered the penitent a precisely determined remission of temporal penalty.⁸

The reasons for this last shift are complex. Shaffern has argued that it should be understood in the context of the eleventh-century ecclesiastical and monastic reform movements. In this regard, the popularity of indulgences can be seen as part of a general revival of penitential practice, which presumed and was built upon the inheritances of the late Roman and early medieval Church.⁹ Furthermore, the trend towards commutation of lengthy and strict penances of the Irish penitentials reflected a significant pastoral concern, and both commutation and pastoral concern came to find expression in indulgences.¹⁰ Nonetheless, although the particulars of the process were in flux in the medieval period, the aims were generally fixed. Seeking an indulgence was at once a preventative act, aimed at mitigating the consequences of a sinful mortal life, and an affirmative act in choosing the direction of one's immortal destination.

Thirteenth-century theologians attempted to codify these developments, and described an indulgence as the remission of the temporal punishment deserved for sins that already have been pardoned sacramentally.¹¹ Indeed, Aquinas' thoughts on the subject of indulgences follow hard on the heels of his discussion on the sacrament of penance. In the context of penance, offering acts of satisfaction to repair the damage wrought by one's failings was an act of justice. Satisfaction aimed to balance the scales,

⁸ *Ibid*; see also N. Paulus, *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1922), 2:259.

⁹ R. Shaffern, *Penitents' Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom, 1175-1375* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2007), 39.

¹⁰ Poschmann, 211.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl. Q. 25, art. 1; *Lib. IV Sent.*, Dist. 20, Q. 1, art. 3; Bonaventure, *Sent. Lib. IV.*, Dist. 20, part 2, art. 1, qu. 2.

with the good acts in proportion to the offense.¹² Indulgences, however, went beyond satisfaction and justice: while the bishops' ability to 'bind and loose' made it possible for them to absolve penitents' guilt in confession, it also made possible the relief of the remaining temporal *poena* (that is, punishment or debt) through application of the overflowing, superabundant merits of Christ and the saints. Theologians borrowed the ancient Jewish notion and called this collection of spiritual wealth a *thesaurus superogationis perfectorum*, a 'treasury of merit.'¹³

But what did sinners need to do in order to avail themselves of this resource? Was it sufficient to simply ask for an indulgence? Yes and no. Although the use of mercantile imagery has caused some to assume that indulgences were a simply a matter of exchange, or of buying heaven, the criteria necessary for an indulgence to be effective meant that obtaining one required more than performing mere external actions. Theologians, prelates and preachers alike emphasized the need for interior contrition and conversion, both generally and in the context of indulgences. Indeed, in order for an indulgence to be effective, the recipient needed to have the appropriate interior condition. One must be sorry for the offenses committed against God and neighbor, and express that contrition in the sacrament of penance. Later indulgences nearly always stipulated that a grant could have value only for those who were *vere poenitentibus et confessis*, that is, *truly* penitent and confessed. In addition to possessing the appropriate interior

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl. Q. 12, art. 2.

¹³ Paulus argued that Alexander of Hales invented the term. Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica* (Quarrachi: Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1948), 3: lix-lx. See also H.C. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church*. 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea Bros. 1896), III, 21-23. Shaffern, however, argued that the mercantile imagery of debt, debtor, repayment and redemption and laying up merit had its precedent in the New Testament and in early Christian and medieval liturgical texts, homilies, and drama. R. Shaffern, *Penitents' Treasury*, 79-106. Recent research by Gary Anderson finds the origins of these metaphors in pre-Christian, Second Temple Judaism. G. Anderson, *Sin: A History, passim*.

disposition, one also needed to perform some generous and sacrificial act such as almsgiving to the poor and needy, visiting some holy site, or offering prayers. A generous act that required sacrifice on the part of the sinner demonstrated the sinner's love for God and man and his confidence that God rewards generosity.

One could also tap into the limitless treasury of merit on behalf of the dead. In this case, an indulgence was more of a super-effective prayer on behalf of the dead, much like the early medieval liturgical prayers for the dead.¹⁴ It had been customary in the early medieval period for Christians to have masses said and perform pious penitential acts on behalf of the dead of their family and the community, in the belief that vicarious penance would help to speed the dead toward heaven by aiding them in their process of atonement.¹⁵ In this way, family members could give aid to those who died before completing their penances and paying their debt for sin. By the thirteenth century, there is evidence that Christians were obtaining indulgences on behalf of their dead.

As so often is the case in this period, liturgical and devotional practice preceded the theological justifications for it. Most theologians accepted that it was possible to obtain indulgences on behalf of the deceased; the question was what effect they could have for the dead and by what authority and jurisdiction this action could be accomplished. The Franciscan Bonaventure argued that indulgences of the dead acted *per modum suffragii*, as a very powerful intercessory prayer by the living on behalf of the dead.¹⁶ He preferred the old usage of *relaxationes* and understood them as suffrages, the

¹⁴ M. McLaughlin, *Consorting with the Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 221.

¹⁵ P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); M. McLaughlin, *Consorting with the Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 220-234.

¹⁶ R. Shaffern, "Learned Discussions of Indulgences for the Dead in the Middle Ages," *Church History* 61:4 (1992): 367-381.

value of which could be greatly amplified by the disposition of the penitent and by good works. In addition, because the pope had no authority and jurisdiction over souls who had passed into Purgatory, he could not release souls in Purgatory from the punishments they had incurred through sin while living and for which they had not yet made reparation.¹⁷ Dominicans Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, argued that souls in Purgatory were indeed under the jurisdiction of the pope, as they were *viatores*, still in passage to their final destination in heaven. Therefore, indulgences for the dead were more than a powerful intercession, but were not as efficacious for the dead as they were for the living.¹⁸ Thus, Dominican theological commentaries favored the term *indulgentiae*, and, following Aquinas, tended to emphasize episcopal authority in dispensing them and determining their worth. Although the Dominican view was popularized in the widely circulated *Summa confessorum* of John of Frieberg, theologians and canonists continued to debate these points until Bonaventure's view ultimately triumphed in the fifteenth century, when Sixtus IV effectively settled the debate by granting an indulgence for the dead and explaining that it acted *per modum suffragii*.

Thus, the process of codifying the doctrine and practices surrounding indulgences lagged behind actual practice. From the middle of the eleventh century until the sixteenth, scholastics and prelates debated and refined their opinions and practices, but it was not until Luther's later attacks on indulgences that Pope Leo finally standardized the teaching on indulgences in the bull *Cum postquam* (1518).¹⁹

¹⁷ Bonaventure, *Commentaria in IV libros sententiarum* 4.20.1.5 (*Opera Omnia*, 4:538).

¹⁸ Albert the Great, *Commentarii in IV sententiarum* 4.20.18 (*Opera Omnia*, 29:855); Thomas Aquinas, *Commentum in IV libros sententiarum* 4.20.1.3.1 (*Opera Omnia*, 7:843) and Aquinas, *Commentum*, 4.45.2.3.2 (*Opera Omnia*, 7:1127).

¹⁹ J. Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 134-135.

Historiography from the Sixteenth Century to the Present

Early Modern Historiography

The historiography of indulgences finds its origins in the Reformation. Even today, it is a textbook commonplace that it was the issue of indulgences that set spark to the tinder of the Church, resulting in the conflagrations of the Reformation. When Martin Luther pegged to the door of the Wittenberg Church his *Disputatio pro declaratione virtutis indulgentiarum*, often called the *Ninety-Five Theses*, he called into question the authority of the Church to relax penalties for sin and criticized the practices and structures that had grown up around indulgences.²⁰ In the years that followed the publication of the *Ninety-Five Theses*, followers of Luther and other Protestant scholars came to see indulgences as one more piece of evidence of a decadent and declining Church. Like Luther, they argued that indulgences were a medieval innovation lacking scriptural basis, an accretion that obscured the purity of the *ecclesia primitiva*. Catholic scholars protested that indulgences were based on ancient antecedents in the penitential practices of the early Church, and thus were an equally valid practice in a lively and vigorous medieval Church.

²⁰ David Bagchi points out that Luther's initial critique of indulgences "simply raised questions that had been raised before, or were being raised elsewhere, without incident." Indeed, his early critique of indulgences developed alongside the growing rigorism in his thought about contrition, penitence and suffering. In his 1518 *Explanation of the Ninety-Five Theses*, Luther issued retractions of several of his criticisms of indulgences, which he admitted were mischaracterizations of the Catholic position. Luther's position on indulgences and on purgatory were quite fluid. In the *Explanation*, he reaffirms his belief in purgatory and that indulgences acted *per modum suffragii* for the dead, but by 1530, denies the existence of purgatory in the *Disavowal of Purgatory*. D. Bagchi, "Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and the Contemporary Criticism of Indulgences," in *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in the Late Medieval Period*, ed. R.N. Swanson (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 331-355; Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, 137.

The response on both sides was to seek out and find the belief and practices of the primitive, apostolic Church. The object of this teleological quest: the Catholics to provide proof of ancient antecedents to indulgences, and the Protestants to provide a proof from the silence of the ancients on the matter, which they believed demonstrated evidence of indulgences' much later invention. Marshalling the latest humanist techniques in research, languages, translation and interpretation, Protestant and Catholic scholars scoured the libraries of Europe in search of evidence that would favor their position.²¹ A circle of sixteenth-century Protestant scholars known as the Centuriators challenged the validity of indulgences by claiming that the Catholic Church had innovated, altering the teachings of the early Church. Centuriator methodology eschewed narrative development, which could readily demonstrate continuity or change, and rather offered a pastiche of decontextualized passages with interpretive introductory apparatus.²² Robert Bellarmine countered their arguments in *De indulgentiis*, maintaining that indulgences had their roots in the Mosaic mandate to remit sins in years of jubilee. This practice was carried forward in the early Church in the teaching that good works erased punishments incurred through sin. Bellarmine's examination of the sources and use of historical argumentation meant that his *De indulgentiis* became the authoritative text for the Catholic position on the matter.

²¹ Rummel points out that sixteenth-century debates about the validity of indulgences took place in the context of on-going wars of words between humanists and scholastics about method, discipline and professional competence. E. Rummel, "'Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit': The Conflict between Humanists and Scholastics Revisited," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992): 713-726. See also E. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

²² Shaffern, *The Penitents' Treasury*, 6-8. See also S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900-1500*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History, n.s. (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2001), 9-10. For an introductory overview of the aims and work of the Centuriators, see D. Hay, *Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the VIIIth to the XVIIIth century* (London: Methuen, 1977), 123-5.

Modern Historiography

Between the sixteenth and later nineteenth centuries, there was little movement on the issue of indulgences, and little new written about it, particularly in English. Nineteenth-century historians largely preserved the dominant confessional frameworks provided by sixteenth-century scholars. Henry H.C. Lea's monumental *History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Middle Ages* depended heavily on the Centuriators, as well as on Robert Bellarmine's counter arguments. Lea believed indulgences to be an innovation, a corrupted departure from the practices and beliefs of the *ecclesia primitiva*, the early Church. In particular, doctrines central to practice of indulgences, specifically the treasury of merit and the power of the keys, were medieval inventions of a papacy bent on consolidating and increasing its power.²³ Especially pernicious for Lea was the rapid growth in the number of papal indulgences in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the purpose of which he believed was financial gain born of greed and a lust for power. French Catholic scholars responded, with Auguste Boudinhon pointing out that Lea had overlooked the link between ancient/early medieval

²³ H.C. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences*; Adolf Gottlob supported Lea's thesis in *Kreuzablaß und Almosenablaß. Eine Studie über die Frühzeit des Abblaßwesens* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1906). Several historians and theologians wrote to redress Lea's charge of medieval innovation. A. Lepicier, *Les Indulgences*, 2 vols. (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1903) was the first response; historian Nikolaus Paulus also responded by publishing an extensive series of articles and texts on the subject: "Die Ablässe der römischen Kirche vor Innocent III," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 28 (1907), 1-8; "Die ältesten Ablässe für Almosen und Kirchenbesuch," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 33 (1909), 1-40; "Die Abblaßlehre der Frühscholastik," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 34 (1910), 433-472; "Die Anfänge des sogenannten Ablasses von Schuld und Strafe," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 36 (1912), 67-96, 252-279; "Die Einführung des Kirchenschatzes in die Abblaßtheorie," *Theologie und Glaube* 6 (1914): 284-98; "Die Anfänge des Ablasses," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 39 (1915), 193-230; "Die Bedeutung der älteren Ablässe," *Historische-politische Blätter für das Katholische Deutschland* 167 (1921), 15-25; *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter*, 3 vols. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1922); among others. Historian Bernhard Poschmann took up Paulus' thesis and extended it: *Der Ablass im Licht der Bussgeschichte* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1948).

penitential practice and indulgences,²⁴ and Alexis Lepicier arguing that the proliferation of indulgences was a result of an increase in demand for them by the faithful, rather than an increase in supply.²⁵

In the early twentieth century, the German Catholic scholar Nikolaus Paulus re-oriented the discussion with the publication of *Geschichte des Ablasses im Mittelalter* by proposing that a proper history of medieval indulgences should proceed from the earliest medieval evidence, rather than working backward, as the sixteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars had done. A counter-point to Lea, Paulus' work was ground-breaking for the *via media* it carved out between the two dominant positions. His rigorous and broad use of the sources firmly located origins of the first indulgences, as they were understood and practiced in the Middle Ages, in the eleventh century. This seemed to reaffirm in part the traditional Protestant claim that indulgences were a medieval invention. However, his use of textual evidence from the Carolingian and Ottonian period also clearly linked medieval indulgences to ancient and early medieval penitential practices, which seemed to reaffirm the Catholic position. Paulus also marked the transformation of indulgences from ritual intercessory prayer to juridical grants as the essential connection between the early Church and medieval Church practice. He observed that eleventh-century indulgences were essentially a juridical development of earlier ritual intercessions in the penitential liturgy, dispensed by bishops in the early Christian and early medieval Church.²⁶ Paulus' method and meticulous examination of a

²⁴ A. Boudinhon, "Sur l'histoire des indulgences," *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuses* 3 (1898), 436-437.

²⁵ A. Lepicier, *Les indulgences*, 2 vols. (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1903).

²⁶ N. Paulus, *Geschichte*, 2:259.

broad range of sources gave weight to his argument, and his revision generally has been accepted by scholars of both sides of the debate ever since.

Bernhard Poschmann took up Paulus' work on indulgences in *Der Ablass im Licht der Bussgeschichte*, published in 1948. Poschmann accepted Paulus' indications that the origins of indulgences should be found in the early medieval period, and further reinforced the argument that the Carolingian rite of absolution, and its attendant document, also called an *absolutio*, was the precursor to the indulgence of the later Middle Ages.²⁷ He likewise noted the transitional period from ritual intercession to juridical grant, and then traced out the efforts of medieval theologians to systematize earlier writings on the practice. After the work of Paulus and Poschmann, there was a long period of relative silence on the subject. Certainly they had shifted the parameters of the discussion, but because much of what they had written was in German and was not translated, their contributions did very little to influence the discourse of English-speaking audiences.²⁸ For English readers, then, Lea's work has been the definitive authority on the subject until the present.

Scholarship on indulgences in the second half of the twentieth century, although still bearing the marks of the confessional debates of earlier generations, was driven less by teleological questions. After World War II, English-speaking scholars began to reorient the discussion and placement of indulgences within the broader history of late medieval Europe. There was less worry about gaining ground in a confessional war on the subject, and more interest in the nexus of psychology, sociology and twentieth-

²⁷ Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, 210-219.

²⁸ Shaffern, *Penitents' Treasury*, 20.

century social movements with the history of the Middle Ages.²⁹ While isolated calls for greater exploration of indulgences were heard after 1948, discussion of indulgences usually came in the context of broader studies in religious, institutional and women's history.³⁰ The social questions of the twentieth century also shaped perceptions about indulgences. Jacques LeGoff and André Vauchez, among others, posited a distance between the religion of the people and the religion of the educated elite. LeGoff seemed to take a dim view of Purgatory and indulgences, regarding them as the inventions of scholastic elites, to be used as tools for manipulating an uneducated and naïve laity.³¹ For Vauchez, the popular religion of the laity was cold toward the teaching and practice of the educated elite's institutional religion, but indulgences and Purgatory were two isolated instances when elite religious culture managed to imprint itself on popular religion.³² Roughly a decade later, Miri Rubin's study of the Corpus Christi devotion also seemed to present a monolithic and manipulative clergy who used indulgences to promote a feast centered on a clerical elite.³³

²⁹ Shaffern attributes the interest in revisitation to the reform movements that culminated in Vatican II, arguing that ecumenical attitudes softened confessional polemics and allowed for reconsideration of the subject from new angles. *Penitents' Treasury*, 19-23.

³⁰ For example: J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). In his short and sweeping survey, Bossy began to place indulgences within the context of medieval religious and social culture. He accepted indulgences as part of what he termed "traditional religion," meaning those religious beliefs practiced by most Christians in most places most of the time, and followed Lea's lead in finding papal greed at the root of the proliferation of indulgences in the fifteenth century. Richard Southern, following Huizinga's interpretations of the later Middle Ages, saw the proliferation of indulgences as part of a broader "inflationary spiral" that brought with it a concomitant devaluation of the spiritual capital of indulgences. R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Penguin, 1970), pp. 136-143; J. Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, R. Payton and U. Mammitzsch, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

³¹ J. LeGoff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 209-234; 289-333. LeGoff does not go so far as Jean Delumeau, who subscribed to a medieval "Christianity of fear." Jean Delumeau, *La peur en occident, XIVe—XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 1978). Nonetheless, LeGoff does seem to see the laity as passive recipients of doctrine, rather than as possible contributors to such developments in doctrine and practice.

³² A. Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, M. Schneider, trans. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993).

³³ M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 210-212.

New Directions

Indulgences in their Religious Context

More recently, some have questioned the usefulness of the elite/popular and clerical/lay interpretive binaries, arguing for a perception that admits a more complex understanding of the interplay between religion and society.³⁴ The interest in the individual and interiority has also opened space for a more nuanced appreciation of devotional practices like indulgences in their social and devotional contexts. In this line, David L. D'Avray has suggested that the popularity of indulgences across the various social and religious groups pointed to a need for a fresh look at indulgences in the context of the great religious movements of the thirteenth century, which Herbert Grundmann first identified.³⁵ Richard Kieckhefer has also argued for the study of the spirituality of indulgences. Shaped by questions about interiority, sanctity and its pursuit, Kieckhefer's interest is in understanding whether, or to what degree, late medieval saints, like their lay counterparts, saw indulgences as needful provisions on the path to interior conversion and holiness.³⁶

In the last fifteen years, some historians have moved beyond incidental consideration of indulgences and have begun to reassess the development of theory and

³⁴ J. Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986):519-52; R.W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon, 1987); S. McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities, 1420-1530* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 137-142. E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale, 1992).

³⁵ D.L. D'Avray, "Papal Authority and Religious Sentiment in the Late Middle Ages," in D. Wood (ed.), *The Church and Sovereignty c. 950-1918*, Studies in Church History Subsidia 9 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 395. H. Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

³⁶ R. Kieckhefer, "Holiness and the Culture of Devotion: Remarks on Some Late Medieval Male Saints," in R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. Szell, eds., in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 290. Shaffern attempted to answer this question in his article, "Learned Discussions of Indulgences for the Dead in the Middle Ages," *Church History* 61 (1992), 367-381.

practice of indulgences. Setting aside the theological debates about validity, these scholars explore how indulgences were understood and practiced in specific regional or local contexts. One such example of this modest revival are Robert Shaffern's articles exploring the canonistic and theological discussions on indulgences in the thirteenth centuries,³⁷ the development of both the image and jurisdictional control of the treasury of merit,³⁸ the connections between veneration of the saints and indulgences,³⁹ and most recently, the Church's largely effective efforts to rein in false pardoners.⁴⁰ Most recently, Shaffern has published *The Penitent's Treasury: Indulgences in Latin Christendom, 1175-1375*, in which he reaffirms Paulus and Poschmann's discussion on the origins of indulgences and then reworks and elaborates his earlier, narrower research into the more general context of medieval Christian West.

New Directions: Indulgences in Late Medieval England

Many of the interpretive frameworks that shaped the history of indulgences into the early twentieth century were generally operative within histories of the English medieval Church. Of course, one may not turn to the study indulgences in England without first mentioning Lunt's massive compilations in *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England, 1327-1534*, which aimed to test the earlier assumption that indulgences were important medieval innovations designed to increase papal power and revenue. In

³⁷ R. Shaffern, "A New Canonistic Text on Indulgences: *De quantitate indulgentiarum* of John of Dambach (1288-1372), O. P.," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law* 21 (1991), 25-45; R. Shaffern, "Learned Discussions of Indulgences for the Dead in the Middle Ages," *Church History* 61 (1992), 367-381.

³⁸ R. Shaffern, "Images, Jurisdiction, and the Treasury of Merit," *Journal of Medieval History* 22 (1996), 237-247.

³⁹ R. Shaffern, "Indulgences and Sainly Devotionalisms in the Middle Ages," *Catholic Historical Review* 84 (1998), 643-661.

⁴⁰ R. Shaffern, "The Pardoner's Promises: Preaching and Policing Indulgences in the Fourteenth-Century English Church," *The Historian* 68 (2006), 49-65.

devoting fully half of his research to indulgences, Lunt clearly assumed that a large portion of the revenue received from England by the papal camera originated from indulgences, yet he found papal revenue generated by indulgences other than crusading indulgences difficult to determine, if not negligible.⁴¹

More recently, research on indulgences in England has sought to place them in their religious and devotional developments. In doing so, they have firmly established the popularity of indulgences across perceived lay/elite divisions. In his brief discussion of the English contribution to the twelfth-century debates at Paris on the question of indulgences, Nicholas Vincent suggested that the theological concept of the treasury of merit had roots in the customary linkage between indulgences and honoring the relics of the saints.⁴² Flora Lewis also noticed the linkage between relics and indulgences, in her analysis of the textual culture of devotional books of hours, and charted the evolution of their relationship from the late thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries.⁴³ Prayers with indulgences attached to their devoted recitation, usually before a specific image of a relic, were a way to honour a relic and confirm its status; the popularity of these prayers later served as an impetus for their inclusion, along with illustrations of the relics, into early commissioned books of hours.⁴⁴ Eamon Duffy and others have argued that any

⁴¹ W.E. Lunt, *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England, 1327-1534* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1962), pp. 471, 481, 506-511.

⁴² N. Vincent, "Some Earlier Pardoners' Tales: The Earliest English Indulgences." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 23-58. As Vincent's study of indulgences before 1215 indicates, the back-history to the wide-ranging and complicated twelfth-century discourse on indulgences has yet to be fully developed.

⁴³ By the fifteenth century, however, the mass-production of books of hours led to the dissociation of the indulgenced prayer from its illustration, with the indulgenced prayer eventually being supplanted by other devotional prayers. F. Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images" in *The Church and the Arts*, D. Wood, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 179-194. idem, "'Garnished with Glorious Tytles.' Indulgences in Printed Books of Hours in England." *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 10 (1995): 577-590.

⁴⁴ F. Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion," 192.

discussion of indulgences must take into account the wider religious milieu of traditional religion, such as books of hours, pilgrimage, fraternities and confraternities, to mention a few, in later medieval and early modern England.⁴⁵ The effects of all of this religious activity were not limited to the Churchyard, as R.M. Haines briefly pointed out.

Devotion had its effects in English social life, influencing the development and maintenance of a whole host of social and civic works, from hospitals to bridges.⁴⁶ The picture that emerges is one in which clergy and laypeople alike participated in and fostered the growth of indulgences as part of broader penitential and devotional practice.

One of the more significant contributors to the history of indulgences in England in the last decade has been R.N. Swanson, who has written extensively on the history of indulgences in medieval England. In a series of localized studies, Swanson examines indulgences within their devotional context. In his examination of late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century episcopal registers from Lincoln, particularly of indulgences that encouraged prayers for the dead before the Black Death, he concluded that indulgences for the dead were a significant devotional practice, and the dramatic decrease in this type of grant in the latter part of the fourteenth century was likely due to shifting religious

⁴⁵ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 287-298; E. Duffy, "Elite and Popular Religion: The Book of Hours and Lay Piety in the Later Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 42 (2006): 140-161. N. Orme, "Indulgences in the Diocese of Exeter, 1100-1536," *Report and Transactions of the Devon Association* 120 (1988): 15-32; R.M. Haines, "A Liskeard Confraternity Document" in *Ecclesia Anglicana*, 192-200; N. Morgan, "The Scala Coeli Indulgence and the Royal Chapels," *The Reign of Henry VII: Proceedings of the 1993 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. B. Thompson (Stamford, Lincolnshire: P. Watkins, 1995), p. 84-103; D. Maxfield, "St. Mary Rouncivale, Charing Cross: The Hospital of Chaucer's Pardoner," *The Chaucer Review* 28:2 (1993): 148-163; M. Aston, "Iconoclasm at Rickmansworth, 1522: Troubles of the Church Wardens," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40:4 (October, 1989): 524-552; J. Harris, "Publicising the Crusade: English Bishops and the Jubilee Indulgence of 1455" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50 (1999): 23-37, among others.

⁴⁶ R.M. Haines, "Indulgences as Social Insurance" in *Ecclesia Anglicana: Studies in the English Church of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 183-191. N. Morgan suggests that indulgences associated with contemporary royal devotion enjoyed wide dissemination and could be used as a measure of status. Morgan, "The Scala Coeli Indulgence and the Royal Chapels," 84-103.

fashions; in this case, an increased popularity of chantries and fraternities to supply prayers for the dead.⁴⁷ In his analysis of the Norwich cathedral priory sacrists' rolls, he compared receipts from the various indulgences offered at the priory, arguing that indulgences operated within the context of a religious economy of competing devotional *foci*, and concluding that revenue resulting from indulgences was a small proportion of the cathedral's total income.⁴⁸ As Swanson himself observes, such an approach is not without its problems, for medieval accounting methods tended not to produce accurate nor full accounts of receipts from collection boxes. Nonetheless, his research has been instructive, placing indulgences firmly in the broader religious and devotional context of late medieval England.

Swanson has actively promoted scholarship on the subject on the continent as well. *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merit* originated as a conference panel organized by Swanson.⁴⁹ The majority of contributions deal with indulgences and various aspects of late medieval spirituality, as well as the perception, use, or criticism of indulgences in continental Europe. Many of the essays explore the different ways in which individuals or groups appropriated indulgences into their own religious experiences, and as a whole, the collection challenges the older assumption about the indulgences as symbol of late medieval decadence and decline. Lay people used indulgences to shape their own devotional experience in their own specific communities, and their criticisms generally had to do more with abuse of mechanisms of delivery than

⁴⁷ R.N. Swanson, "Indulgences for Prayers for the Dead in the Diocese of Lincoln in the Early Fourteenth Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 52:2 (April 2001): 219.

⁴⁸ R.N. Swanson, "Indulgences at Norwich cathedral priory," *Historical Research* 76:191 (Feb 2003): 28.

⁴⁹ R. N. Swanson, ed. *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merit: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition Series. Leiden: Brill, 2006.

with indulgences *per se*.⁵⁰ Two studies focused on indulgences in the English context. Swanson's own contribution looked at "bead pardons," through which the punishments due to sin could be commuted in exchange for prayers said rather than for any monetary contribution to a particular cause. Many times these pardons were attached to devotional images, prayers, or attendance at specific masses. He observes that the abundance of devotional pardons encouraged both individual and collective participation in a wide variety of devotional activities.⁵¹ Diana Webb examined pardons within the pilgrimage economy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, noting that pilgrims probably paid less attention to numbers of days, months or years remitted in an indulgence, and focused more on the penitential experience of pilgrimage and the inner conviction of freedom from the burden of sin.⁵²

Swanson's latest contribution is his thick and detailed work, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise*, which has established him as the pre-eminent scholar in the study of indulgences in medieval England. *Passports to Paradise* is significant as it is the first substantial work to be published on the history of indulgences in England. It is a work dense in details, making use of a trove uncovered by patient archival research, which is characteristic of so much of Swanson's earlier work. The sheer amount of material at Swanson's fingertips makes *Passports* a cornerstone of the history of indulgences in England. He begins by outlining the theological discourse on indulgences, the various types of indulgences and the sources in which they are found, as

⁵⁰ The clear exceptions to this form of criticism were the Wycliffites and later, the Hussites, who challenged the jurisdictional claims of the papacy and bishops to bind and loose the faithful from sin and punishment, as well as accused the practice of venality, particularly when good works were commuted to monetary donations. Anne Hudson, "Dangerous Fictions: Indulgences in the thought of Wyclif and his Followers" in *Promissory Notes*, 198.

⁵¹ R.N. Swanson, "Praying for Pardon: Devotional Indulgences in Late Medieval England," in *Promissory Notes*, 240.

⁵² Diana Webb, "Pardons and Pilgrims" in *Promissory Notes*, 275.

well as the minutiae of the mechanics of how indulgences were procured, promoted and distributed. He examines the more controversial aspects of indulgences, particularly pardoners, the protest of Wycliffites, and the eager and frequent acquisition of pardons. Swanson brings to bear on these controversies a wealth of archival material, which lead him to conclude that while pardoners like Chaucer's were a reality, attempts by Church authorities adequately curtailed criminous pardoners. Challenges to indulgences by Lollards and others were generally localized in time and space, most especially in academic circles and during the turmoil of the Great Schism. Moreover, Swanson contends that those acquiring indulgences were not fools or tricksters who believed they could buy heaven, and instead argues that medieval people possessed a mature understanding of sin, satisfaction and redemption. Less successfully, he attempts to place indulgences in the broader English economy, arguing that they contributed significantly to the flow of money in England; however, because of the dearth of reliable financial records, this is a harder case to make. The study ends with the abolition of indulgences under Henry VIII. The popularity of indulgences continued, ending only with the ascension of evangelical Protestants in the reign of Edward VI. Swanson's overarching conclusion reaffirms those of his earlier articles: indulgences were a vital, integral part of a vibrant late medieval religious culture in England and constituted one of many "strategies for eternity."⁵³

In the last decade or so, new directions in research have allowed us to understand more clearly the debates, practices and structures that surrounded indulgences in the Middle Ages. Even so, more work needs to be done in order to place this penitential and

⁵³ Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 224.

devotional practice in its social context and to understand why it was that, despite the critiques of some early schoolmen and socio-religious commentators such as Langland and Wycliffe, the practice of seeking indulgences not only persisted, but flourished, in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. We also do not sufficiently understand what late medieval Christians thought they were doing by obtaining an indulgence, nor do we understand how they used them to shape their own social experiences.

Although the historiography frequently has viewed indulgences through the interpretive lens of power and authority and focused primarily on the doctrinal aspects, Swanson's work in particular suggests the necessity of re-orienting the framework toward a more communal, horizontal approach. The popularity of indulgences points to the complex relationships among groups within a community that was at once an institution and a way of life. Change, then, whether devotional or doctrinal, seems not to have originated solely from a single, dominant source but from a multiplicity of competing sources. A reconsideration of indulgences from a wider perspective will not only allow us to understand how and why they flourished, but will also enable us to understand their social context in later medieval England.

Method

With these issues in mind, this study proposes to examine indulgences in terms of their social impact, specifically their role in creating, maintaining or augmenting social cohesion and solidarity in late medieval England. This study will draw ideas about solidarity found in social theory and in social philosophy. Social theorists such as Robert Putnam have examined what holds societies together and have persistently argued that

there are mechanisms within societies that can foster greater social understanding and cohesion, whereas social philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre argue that social cohesion or solidarity occurs when the inherent mutual dependency in social actors is recognized.⁵⁴

Sociologists have maintained that traits like mutuality, reciprocity, participation and social trust are characteristic of socially coherent societies.⁵⁵ More recently, sociologist Robert Putnam has argued that social capital is another characteristic of solidarity within a community. He defined social capital as the “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”⁵⁶ In other words, “social capital” describes the resources and benefits that accrue to an individual and his or her community because of social ties based on trust and reciprocity. Thus, a society’s functional health is evident in the number and strength of its social networks or bonds, and these bonds simultaneously depend upon and reinforce social characteristics such as general reciprocity, social trust, and participation. Both the individual and the community benefit from a society that has two types of social ties: those that are inward in nature, between groups or individuals who share a common

⁵⁴ A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999).

⁵⁵ Emile Durkheim was one of the first social theorists to consider the issue of social coherence and was one of the founding fathers of sociology. In his consideration of the effects of the seismic social displacements caused by industrialization, Durkheim proposed two categories of solidarity: a solidarity based on interdependent, complementary difference (organic solidarity) bound complex industrial societies together, replacing the agrarian solidarity of sameness (mechanical solidarity) that characterized pre-industrial societies. E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1933).

⁵⁶ R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 19. See also Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Putnam’s research initially analysed empirical data from Italy and the U.S. in order to assess the relationship between social networks and civic engagement, and resulting political and economic outcomes from that relationship. Putnam clearly sees social capital as a public and individual good, whereas other theorists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, see social capital as a limited resource giving rise to competition and social conflict. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital” in *The Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, JG Richardson, ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986): 241-58.

interest or characteristic, what Putnam refers to as “bonding” ties.⁵⁷ Equally important are those “bridging” ties that cut across differences, linking together otherwise discrete groups or individuals.⁵⁸

What has social capital to do with indulgences? The act of seeking an indulgence was an inherently relational one that relied on trust, reciprocity and participation. For instance, the solution to John Whitby’s pirate-induced poverty was based on participation: anybody giving at any amount (or in kind) could receive an indulgence. Immediate and generalized reciprocity were also at work. Those who helped Mr. Whitby were offered the immediate opportunity of obtaining an indulgence (provided that they satisfied all of the requirements), but also implied in the exchange was mutual obligation or generalized reciprocity, the sense that, should the donor later need help, Mr. Whitby or some one else would assist.⁵⁹ Furthermore, indulgences could reinforce “bonding” ties within groups of shared interest or background, such as those obtained when joining a confraternity or participating in parish dedication festivities. Indulgences could also promote “bridging” across differences, such as those offered on behalf of hospitals or leprosaria and aimed at drawing the relatively healthy and wealthy in to support the infirm and relatively poor. And sometimes they could do both: those who assisted John Whitby, with whom this chapter opened, may or may not have been known to or associated with him. Thus, the work of social scientists such as Robert Putnam in examining the ways in which social bonds are formed in modern societies can offer us

⁵⁷ Putnam, 22. Bonding social capital, “by choice or necessity, [is] inward looking and tend[s] to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. Examples of bonding social capital include ethnic fraternal organizations, Church-based women’s reading groups, and fashionable country clubs. ... Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity.”

⁵⁸ Putnam, 23. “[Bridging] networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages. ... Bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40.”

⁵⁹ Putnam, 20-21.

new ways of thinking about indulgences and how they formed and reinforced the social bonds in medieval English society.

The social philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre also informs this study, particularly his argument that notions of sufficiency and absolute autonomy or independence are characteristic assumptions of modern, wealthy, industrialized societies. Modern societies go to great lengths to minimize vulnerability, disability and dependence in ways that tend to obscure the vulnerability and dependence inherent in all human beings by virtue of their animality. Every human body and human being experiences varying degrees of vulnerability and dependence at various stages of the life cycle, and none, therefore, can ever be said to be completely sufficient or autonomous at any stage.⁶⁰ Recognition of this dependence inherent in every person, regardless of status, gender, or age can foster greater solidarity in social interactions.

In the Middle Ages, reminders of one's vulnerability abounded, particularly in the years after the Black Death, the period in which many of the indulgences in this study were given. Sermons, plays, devotional literature, art and architecture all conspired to urge, "*Frater, memento mori!*" Preachers also emphasized the mutual dependence among the living, particularly between the wealthy and impoverished, and the duty to assist, in ways that echoed the ancient Jewish traditions: almsgiving to those in genuine need was essential to obtaining heaven. In a pre-modern society such as post-Black Death medieval England, the awareness of vulnerability and mutual dependence were at the heart of many of the charitable and social exchanges in which indulgences were involved.

⁶⁰ MacIntyre, 63-79.

Finally, this study also falls within the purview of what is usually referred to as “popular” religion. This designation is often inadequate in both teaching and writing, particularly in regard to indulgences. Notions of “popular” religion posit an illusory dichotomy between the religion “of the people” and the religion of “élites,” obscuring more than it reveals, especially in a study of indulgences. Men and women, rich and poor, clerical and lay, requested, sought and obtained indulgences in strikingly similar ways. Thus, Eamon Duffy’s term, “traditional” religion, is rather more useful. The culture of traditional religion, writes Duffy, “is rooted in a repertoire of inherited and shared beliefs and symbols, while remaining capable of enormous flexibility and variety.”⁶¹ The notion of a shared symbolic world sufficiently supple to admit development and variation begs fewer questions than the popular/élite binary, and allows us to examine a wide assortment of religious action and intention over time.

Sources

This study relies primarily on the analysis of indulgences found within 96 published collections of episcopal registers, 42 collections of early episcopal *acta*, as well as 20 Calendars of Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland. Approximately 1,200 indulgences are recorded within the episcopal registers; published *acta* record approximately 480 indulgences. These are grants for a wide range of purposes, such as prayers for the dead, chapels and parish Churches, roads and bridges, monasteries and hospitals, distressed individuals, among others. Moreover, thousands of indulgences are recorded within the papal calendars, ranging from grants of indulgence *in articulo mortis* to grants for local parishes and devotional altars. For the purposes of this study, I

⁶¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 3.

examined approximately 150 indulgences for hospitals, 140 indulgences for indigent or impoverished people, 75 indulgences for ransoming captives of war or piracy, and 370 indulgences for parish fabric, parish fraternities, Church dedications and prayers for the parish dead.

Papal and episcopal registers and collections of episcopal *acta* provide us with useful data on the indulgences offered by the English bishops, which can be aggregated or broken down according to various measurements such as year, diocese, prelate, type and duration of the grants, to name the most obvious. The *acta* and many of the register entries are also valuable sources of information about the aims and expectations of the granting bishop and the petitioner. The *arengae* or opening hortatory clauses of the grants express wider episcopal concerns of theological justification as applied to the specific situation of the Church and the petitioner. Bishops openly discussed within the *arengae* their desire that grants of indulgence should also be a tool for shaping social behavior and expectations. Moreover, the *narratio* (or *dispositio*) of the grants often detail the circumstances and expectations that led the petitioner to seek assistance from the bishop in the first place.

Caution is advised when assessing indulgences according to the numbers, as the episcopal registers and *acta* of the period present difficulties for historical analysis. The practice of keeping a formal register of the bishops' charters and documents was a relatively late development. The earliest extant registers come to us from Lincoln diocese in the rolls of Hugh of Wells (1209-1235), the keeping of which began c. 1214-15.⁶² Most dioceses did not begin registering acts until the second half of the thirteenth

⁶² D.M. Smith, *Guide to Bishops' Registers of England and Wales* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1981), 105.

century, and then in an uneven manner; the archiepiscopal see of Canterbury did not begin until the 1270s and London not until the 1280s.⁶³ Bishops' charters and acts created prior to the advent of registers are recorded in the *English Episcopal Acta* series; however, the *acta* which remain extant tend to be from those institutions or persons with the capacity or interest in preserving records of transactions with, or special grants from, their ordinary or other bishops, the king or the pope. Thus, grants to individuals or smaller, short-lived institutions such as hospitals or leprosaria, are generally not found in the published *acta*. However, the consistency of the record improves after the 1250s, reflecting "the changing nature of business and . . . the growing need to provide greater legal precision to the matters being transacted."⁶⁴ The method of enrollment, in imitation of the royal chancery, relied on chronological enregistration, with little room for subdivision within the roll. The later method of subdividing and categorizing material into several quires was in general use by the end of the thirteenth century, although rolls were not abandoned entirely.⁶⁵

The variation is substantial not only in the methods of record-keeping at any one time, but also in the contents of the registers. As D.M. Smith observed, the diocese of Norwich kept meticulous records of institutions and ordinations, but were less meticulous about what they recorded as general memoranda, the subsection in which most grants of

⁶³ *ibid.*, vii.

⁶⁴ B.R. Kempe, ed. *EEA* 18, lxxxiii; see also C.R. Cheney, *English Bishops' Chanceries*, 56-98; J. Barrow, *EEA* 7, lxii-cxiv; and J. Barrow, "From the lease to the certificate: the evolution of episcopal acts in England and Wales (c. 700-c.1250)," in *Die Diplomatie der Bischofsurkunde vor 1250*, ed. C. Haidacher and W. Kofler (Innsbruck 1995), 529-42. H. Mayr-Harting saw the development of "scientific government" within the Church as springing from the Hildebrandine movement and the councils of the twelfth century that freed bishoprics from lay control while at the same time placing greater responsibility on the bishops for a whole range of legal, administrative and pastoral provisions. Mayr-Harting, ed., *Acta of the Bishops of Chichester 1075-1207*, Canterbury and York Society (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1964), 3.

⁶⁵ Smith, x-xi; M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, 1066-1307* (London, 1979), 53-55.

indulgence were often inscribed. Other dioceses, such as Lincoln or Exeter, were much more careful to record general memoranda and have large memoranda sections as a result.⁶⁶ Thus, in dioceses where the recording of general memoranda was not of prime importance, many episcopal indulgences may have gone unrecorded. Even if a diocese considered indulgences important enough to be enregistered in the general memoranda, the clerks could either transcribe the act in full or as a brief summary of the act. The summaries themselves vary in the amount of detail included.

In addition to the internal variation among the registers, there is also the problem of losses. Fire, flood, acts of God, war, and damp have all left their mark. While some registers have gone missing in their entirety, some registers seem to be missing parts of their full contents, leaving only institution or ordination records, for example. The result is a marked unevenness in the data, making quantitative analysis of the registers suggestive at best. The papal registers also share similar difficulties. Based on comparisons between the papal registers and collections of papal missives and grants extant in England, we know that some papal grants either went unrecorded or have gone missing from the papal collections.⁶⁷

Because of the state of the episcopal and papal record, a quantitative study of indulgences would be misleading, and any use of quantitative analysis is suggestive, rather than definitive. Nonetheless, while English episcopal acts and registers may not lend themselves to a strict numbers-crunching approach, they are useful for qualitative inquiry. More generally, they offer insight into the kinds of indulgences offered and hint at which types of indulgences were sought more often. They also reveal how indulgences

⁶⁶ Smith, x.

⁶⁷ L. Boyle, *A Survey of the Vatican Archives and of its Medieval Holdings* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 2001), 7-12.

may have functioned alongside other means to meet the social, civic and devotional needs of a diocese. At a closer level, particularly in fully-inscribed indulgences, clerks often recorded the particular hopes and concerns of those who had approached the bishop for the indulgence; they also detail the bishop's reasons, sometimes theological but mostly pastoral, for responding to the request with a grant of indulgence. The fully inscribed indulgences are also remarkable in that they have a quasi-performative aspect to them and were likely guides for preaching or publicizing the indulgence.

In order to redress gaps in the literature and to explore the social impact of indulgences and the ways in which they encouraged bridging solidarity between disparate communities and bonding solidarity within associative groups, this study will be arranged in two parts. The first two chapters will address indulgences offered on behalf of distressed individuals; the second two will examine indulgences offered on behalf of local institutions, specifically hospitals and parishes. Chapter One considers indulgences in the context of attitudes toward poverty and schemes of poor relief and argues that indulgences encouraged greater solidarity with the deserving poor. Chapter Two explores the expectation of solidarity expressed in episcopal indulgences for captives of war and piracy. Chapter Three addresses the role of indulgences in the subvention of hospitals and leper-houses, and the ways in which indulgences helped to retain and enmesh these institutions in the social networks of late medieval England, while building social capital with donors. Finally, Chapter Four examines the social impact of indulgences on an associative group such as the parish, arguing that indulgences encouraged unity and solidarity within a group often challenged by conflict and sectionalism.

Chapter Two

Indulgences and Solidarity with the Poor

Ac olde and hore, that helpless ben nedy,
And wymmen with childe that worche ne mowe,
Blynde and bedredne and broken in here membres,
And alle pore pacient, apayed of Goddes sonde,
As mesels and pilgrims and parauntur men y-robbed
Or bylowe thorw luther men and lost here catel after,
Or thorw fuyr or thorw flooded y-falle into pouerte,
That taketh these meschiefes mekeliche and mydeliche at herte,
For loue of here lower hertes goure lord hath hem y-graunted
Here penaunce and here purgatorye vpon this puyre erthe.⁶⁸

William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, C Passus IX

For most people in late medieval England, the insecurity and precariousness of one's health, possessions, or livelihood were facts of life. Particularly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, recurring bouts of famine, visitations of plague, demographic disruptions and the wars between England and France contributed to political, economic, social and personal instability. In an age in which there was no systematic provision for those in distress, fire, flood, illness, old age, imprisonment, or the death of a spouse, among other events, had the potential to wreak havoc in even the most carefully husbanded domestic or commercial order. Alice Laurenceson discovered this in a series of unfortunate events in the early 1430s that left her impoverished. The death of her husband left her a widow and was certainly a blow, but he had provided her with relative

⁶⁸ But the old and grey, helpless and needy, and women with child who can work no more, the blind and the bedridden and the crippled, and all the poor who patiently accept God's will, such as lepers and pilgrims and those who were robbed by evil men and lost their goods, or through fire or through flood have fallen into poverty: for love of their humble hearts, Our Lord has granted those that suffer these troubles meekly and mildly penance and purgatory here upon earth. (Author's translation)

comfort and a sizeable farm: a barn, granaries, outbuildings, fifteen cows and six horses. A devastating fire, however, destroyed that security, and reduced the widow to poverty.⁶⁹

What was Alice Laurenceson to do? To whom or to what could she turn to help alleviate this unexpected and unaccustomed penury? Recent research by historians of poor relief in later medieval England creates a more comprehensive picture of the channels through which the poor could access relief. A “mixed economy of care” made up of formal and informal sources offered a patchwork of assistance:⁷⁰ parish assistance in the form of disbursements from priest and poor boxes,⁷¹ bequests,⁷² funerals and their anniversaries;⁷³ monastic assistance in the form of doles of food and clothing;⁷⁴ guild and fraternity assistance in the form of charity to members and non-members;⁷⁵ hospital

⁶⁹ *Register of Thomas Langley, Bishop of Durham, 1406-1437*, Surtees Society 170 (Durham: Andrews & Co., 1956), 5. “11 February 1431. Grant of indulgence on behalf of Alice Laurenceson of Thorpe in the parish of Grindon. Indulgencia. Eisdem die et loco dominus concessit litteras indulgencie Alicie nuper uxori Thome Laurenceson de Thorp in parochia de Grendon sue diocesis cujus horreum et alia edificia sua granaque et iumenta sua in eisdem existencia, videlicet xv capita bouum et vaccarum et vi capita equorum, ac alia bona et utensilia sua repentini supervenientis incendii flamma nuper sunt consumpta, ipsaque tam gravi infirmitate senioque confrica existit quod nichil sibi acquirere poterit unde vivat nisi sibi etc usque ad festum sancti Michaelis proximo futurum duraturas etc. in communi forma.”

⁷⁰ J. Innes, “The ‘Mixed Economy of Welfare’ in Early Modern England,” in *Charity, Self-Interest and Welfare in the English Past*, ed. M. Daunton, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 139-180; P. Horden, “Small Beer? The Parish and the Poor and Sick in Later Medieval England,” in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. C. Burgess and E. Duffy (Donington, U.K.: Shaun Tyas, 2006), 335.

⁷¹ R.M. Haines, “Bishop Carpenter’s Injunctions to the Diocese of Worcester in 1451,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 40 (1967), 206; M. Rubin, *Charity and Community* 237-245.

⁷² P.H. Cullum, “‘For Pore People Harberles’: What was the Function of the Maisondieu?” in *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Late Medieval History*, D. Clayton, R.G. Davies and P. McNiven, eds. (Phoenix Mill, UK: A. Sutton, 1994), 36-51; P.H. Cullum and P.J.P Goldberg, “Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: ‘To the Praise of God and the Use of the Poor,’” *Northern History* 29 (1993), 24-39.

⁷³ M. McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 104-105; Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 262; B. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England, 1100-1540* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 29-30.

⁷⁴ Harvey, *Living and Dying*, 7-33; J. Kerr, “Cistercian Hospitality in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, J. Burton and K. Stöber, eds. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008): 25-39; N.S. Rushton, “Monastic Charitable Provision in Tudor England: Quantifying and Qualifying Poor Relief in the Sixteenth Century,” *Continuity and Change* 16 (2001), 9-44; N.S. Rushton and W. Sigle-Rushton, “Monastic Poor Relief in the Sixteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16 (2001), 193-216.

⁷⁵ J. Bennett, “Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England” *Past and Present* 134 (1992), 19-41; G. Rosser, “Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations,” *Journal of British Studies* 134 (1994): 430-446; G. Rosser, “Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Parish, Church and People*, Susan Wright, ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 29-55.

assistance in the form of reserved beds and doles at the gates;⁷⁶ assistance from local nobility;⁷⁷ and, probably first and foremost, the informal assistance offered through social networks of kin and community.⁷⁸ Alice Laurenceson could have drawn on any, all or some of these sources in her quest to rebuild. However, we do know that Alice did make use of a somewhat unexpected source: an indulgence from her local bishop, and it is from this grant of indulgence on her behalf that we know Alice's story at all.

Indulgences do not normally appear in taxonomies of poor relief, and this is likely due to the uneven nature of the sources. In his recent monumental study on indulgences in England, R.N. Swanson made passing note of grants of indulgences to impoverished individuals, but did not situate them within the broader context of poor relief.⁷⁹ R.M. Haines observed that some indulgences granted by English bishops were issued for reasons of the general public good, such as bridges and roads, indigent parishes or chapels. He also noted that they were offered for individuals such as Alice Laurenceson, persons whose welfare was undermined by "personal tragedies" such as damage or loss to property, or by injury or infirmity of body.⁸⁰ Haines argued that, although they possessed a variety of immediate goals, all of these indulgences shared a common social focus and could thus be considered a form of social insurance.

⁷⁶ C. Rawcliffe, "The Seventh Comfortable Work: Charity and Mortality in the Medieval Hospital," *Medicina & Storia* 3 (2003), 11-35.

⁷⁷ C. Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale, 1999).

⁷⁸ E. Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside," *Journal of British Studies* 33 (1994) 381-406; E. Clark, "The Quest for Security," in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. Sheehan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 189-200; P. Horden, "Household Care and Informal Networks: Comparisons and Continuities from Antiquity to the Present," in *Locus of Care*, ed. P. Horden and R. Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 42-43; M. McIntosh, "Local Responses to the Poor in Late Medieval and Tudor England," *Continuity and Change* 3 (1988): 209-245.

⁷⁹ R.N. Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?* 57-58.

⁸⁰ R.M. Haines, "The Indulgence as a Form of Social Insurance," in *Ecclesia Anglicana: Studies in the English Church of the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 183-191. For this short study, Haines relied primarily on the published collections of episcopal registers from the northern diocese of Durham and the southern diocese of Hereford.

An analysis of indulgences granted on behalf of indigent individuals adds more depth to Haines' observation, for while it is true that these indulgences could be seen as a form of social insurance for individuals in impoverished states, it is also clear that indulgences granted for one's benefit could not simply be had for the asking. Bishops discriminated in their choices to whom to grant an indulgence, using a set of criteria to first determine the quality and the worthiness of the petitioners' poverty before issuing a grant on their behalf. At the same time, bishops were eager to promote solidarity with the poor, encouraging parishioners to attend to the material needs of the petitioner. Moreover, offering of an indulgence encouraged broad-based participation in the support of the poor. Men and women with purses large or small could give: no specific amount of donation was required in order to obtain the indulgence. The only limitations placed on these indulgences were the duration of the grant's validity and the boundaries of the granting bishop's geographic jurisdiction. Finally, closer examination of these types of grants reveals indulgences as a channel for the establishment of reciprocity (immediate and generalized) and solidarity with the worthy poor.

Indulgences were one resource among several available to the impoverished in the patch-worked landscape of agencies and actors that aimed to alleviate material poverty in late medieval England. Like many of the other sources, bishops' indulgences reflect a growing concern to ensure that relief reached those most in need, discriminating in favor of those who suffered from life-cycle poverty or who were victims of mischance.⁸¹ At the same time, the bishops also reinforced the expectation of solidarity with the poor in an age in which poverty was viewed with increasing suspicion. This chapter will examine indulgences and poverty in three sections. The first part of this chapter will

⁸¹ McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, 4-9.

explore modern and medieval approaches to defining poverty and beggary in the middle ages: who could be defined as poor? Were all kinds of poverty morally equal? What was the individual Christian's responsibility to the poor? The second section will address the variety of resources available to the impoverished, in order to put indulgences in the context of wider attempts at mitigating material poverty. The final section will offer an analysis of the grants themselves, by gender, status, and primary cause of poverty. This will enable us to understand who sought indulgences and why, as well as the motivations of bishops to grant them in the first place.

Defining Poverty and Beggary in Medieval England

Modern Approaches

Much of the discussion of the social history of poverty and charity in England has been shaped by studies focused on continental Europe. Michel Mollat defined a pauper as someone "...who permanently or temporarily found himself in a situation of weakness, dependence, or humiliation, characterized by privation of the means to power and social esteem,"⁸² whom people of sufficiency and social standing regarded as a threat. For Mollat, poverty was not just material but cultural as well, referring not only to physical deprivation but to perceived or real social and political dispossession as well. In the same decade, Bronislaw Geremek argued that Christian attitudes toward poverty gave rise to deep structural-material inequities and marginalization of poor persons, a marginalization

⁸² Michel Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: A Social History*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New Haven: Yale, 1986), 5.

that reinforced the normative coherence and social prestige of the rest of society.⁸³ For a society consumed by an overriding concern for securing status in this life and the next, resolving the issue of poverty was of secondary importance. Poverty was an intractable reality for which there was ultimately no solution; after all, Christ had said, “the poor you will always have with you.” Subsequent studies of medieval poverty in England adopted this interpretation. Miri Rubin, for example, argued that charitable activity in late medieval Cambridge was primarily about the search for personal salvation and only secondarily about the poor themselves. This preoccupation with the afterlife prevented the development of policies aimed at righting structural and material wrongs; W.K. Jordan argued that no real attempts to provide long-term structural solutions to poverty existed prior to the Tudor policy reforms of the sixteenth century.⁸⁴ The underlying general assumption seems to have been that medieval donors’ charitable activities were primarily oriented toward self-interest, which makes the issue of charitable motivation perhaps overly tidy.

The picture of poverty and charity in late medieval England has enjoyed increasing refinement due to recent detailed analyses of the various channels for charitable donation. In the last two decades, studies of the charitable activities at the local level of hospitals, monasteries, parishes and the great households of the nobility have added to our understanding of the variety and capacity of these channels to address poverty. As Christopher Dyer points out, these studies have modified the claim that those with wealth did little to assist those without, and argued that medieval people did more,

⁸³ Bronislaw Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans. Agnieszka Kolakowska (Oxford: Blackwells, 1994). See also Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁸⁴ W.K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1959).

earlier, to address poverty in their local communities.⁸⁵ Perhaps a new interpretive approach is in order, one that marries this increasingly complex picture of medieval poverty and charity with a more complicated understanding of human dependency and charitable motivations that takes into account the multiplicity of intentions articulated by medieval people. Alasdair MacIntyre offers one possible approach for understanding a moral action such as charitable giving. Basing his argument on feminist approaches to care and caregiving, MacIntyre argues that no human being—rich or poor, powerful or vulnerable—is radically autonomous, and indeed, all are radically dependent, albeit to varying degrees.⁸⁶ The emphasis on mutual disability and dependence opens up a space in which historians can allow for a more “problematized” interpretation of medieval charity, one that admits a multiplicity of motivations in charitable activity and that the expectations of justice and solidarity expressed in medieval prescriptive writings could also inform the charitable behavior found in descriptive accounts. This emphasis also offers broader possibilities as to the motivations of donors obtaining indulgences from the impoverished.

Defining Poverty and Beggary: Medieval Approaches

One of the greatest unifying factors shared among the recipients of personal grants of indulgence was their material, and sometimes physical, poverty. The Church fathers had long taught that those burdened by poverty were to be shown mercy, and that

⁸⁵ C. Dyer, “Did the Rich Really Help the Poor in Medieval England,” in *Ricos y pobres; opulencia y desarraigo en el Occidente medieval*, ed. N. Miguel, G. Pinto and G. Piccinni (Pamplona: Gobierno de Navarra, 2010), 307-322.

⁸⁶ A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 1999), 73-74. He writes: “There is a scale of disability on which we all find ourselves,” he writes. “Disability is a matter of more or less...and at different points of our lives we find ourselves, often unpredictably, at very different points on that scale.”

those with means should give generously.⁸⁷ Indeed, giving alms out of one's superfluity was simply a matter of precept, of what was owed; to deny oneself and give out of one's own necessity was a matter of counsel, and a great good.⁸⁸ Almsgiving was firmly linked to penance in the doctrinal and pastoral literature, and was presented in homilies and penitential handbooks as an essential key to unlocking the gate of heaven.⁸⁹

Preachers and pastoral leaders often emphasized the Augustinian teaching that there existed a mutual need between beggars and benefactors.⁹⁰ The rich man stood in need of the pauper's spiritual wealth, and the poor man in need of the rich man's material wealth. This mutuality was part of a divine structure that presumed interdependence: "When God could have made all men strong, wise, and rich, he was unwilling to do so," wrote the English preacher Ralph of Acton. "He wished instead that these should be strong, those weak; these wise, those foolish; these rich, and these poor. For if all were strong, wise and wealthy, none would be in need of the other."⁹¹

Mutuality aside, most theologians and canonists were of the opinion that spiritual wealth was superior to material wealth. Nonetheless, all acknowledged the Augustinian teaching that *justicia est in subveniendo miseris*, the demands of justice require the relief

⁸⁷ A. Haddan and W. Stubbs, eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 459. Walter Ulmann, "Public Welfare and social legislation in the early medieval councils," *Studies in Church History* 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 4-5; G.R. Owst, 445.

⁸⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II q.32 a. 5-6.

⁸⁹ J. McNeill and H. Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 233, 320; R. Morris, ed, *The Blickling Homilies*, EETS 58 (London: EETS, 1967), 96-97; M. Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge*, 62-64.

⁹⁰ E. Clark, "Responses to Begging in Medieval England," *Social Science History* 26 (2002), 451; B. Thorpe, ed. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1971), 257; M.A. Devlin, *The Sermons of Thomas Brinton, Bishop of Rochester 1373-1389*, Camden Society 85 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1954), 194.

⁹¹ G.R. Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 561.

of misery.⁹² Too many moral pitfalls lay in the path of the rich man,⁹³ and sharing his wealth with the poor would help him to avoid a too-close attachment to the material world. Those with wealth ought never to regard the pauper with contempt, said Bishop Thomas Brinton of Rochester, for penitential gifts of alms to the poor would help the rich to obtain heaven.⁹⁴

Not all poverty was equal, however, particularly if indigence came by way of sloth or idleness. While preachers and councils encouraged the charitable impulse, canonists and other ecclesiastical thinkers were distinguishing between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor.⁹⁵ Particularly because resources were often insufficient to meet the demands for charity, charity and almsgiving should be ordered,⁹⁶ and preferential distinctions should be made when distributing charity. The twelfth-century canonist Rufinus, glossing Gratian’s *Decretum*, was one of the first to work out the basic criteria to guide the administration of alms: the quality of the beggars, one’s available resources,

⁹² B. Tierney, *The Medieval Poor Law*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 35. For an overview of the theological, canonistic, and pastoral tradition on charity and almsgiving in late medieval England, see Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 54-98.

⁹³ Langholm observes that many medieval authors acknowledged that “it is possible for the wealthy to be saved, but it is difficult. This is so, partly because a number of sins are wealth-dependent, partly because having wealth can easily cause men to love wealth and so to love God less, and partly (and perhaps most importantly) because the wealthy, even if they desire to be virtuous, will be preoccupied with the management of their wealth and thus neglect their spiritual lives.” O. Langholm, *Economics in the Medieval Schools* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 566-7.

⁹⁴ Devlin, *Sermons of Thomas Brinton*, 194-96. “I preach this against certain rich men and against the ingratitude of wealthy folk who, if they give a pittance to the poor, first criticize them with speeches, then condemn them, so that it would be better for the poor to go without than to receive alms with so much scorn.”

⁹⁵ B. Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, 55-63; B. Tierney, “The Decretists and the ‘Deserving Poor,’” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* I: 360-73.

⁹⁶ Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 68-71, citing the *Summa elegantius*, “Sextum apostolice regule capitulum est hospitale esse. In quo utrum delectus personarum habendus sit queri potest. Videtur quod sic, inde quia species est elemosine. In elemosina autem delectus personarum habendus, ut potius suis quam alienis, infirmis quam sanis, mendicare erubescenti quam effronti, egenti quam habenti, et inter egentes iusto prius quam iniusto des. Hec est caritas ordinata. . . .” *Summa ‘elegantius in iure divino’ seu Coloniensis*, ed. G Fransen, Monumenta iuris canonici ser. A: corpus glossatorum I, Vatican 1969, c. 54, p. 67. Aquinas also dealt with the question of discrimination in charity: *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 32 a. 5-6.

why the beggars sought charity, and for how much they asked.⁹⁷ Generations of canonists struggled with the criteria for ordering charity, and many took Rufinus' four points as a basis for discussion. While there was certainly disagreement, two points were generally agreed: alms should be given first and foremost to the beggar who is *honestus*, who, for whatever reason, is unable to provide for himself by his own work. Those able to work and support themselves ought to do so. However, those who prefer to beg and be idle rather than work, or who are poor because of vice, deserve not alms, contended the thirteenth-century canonist, Huguccio.⁹⁸ His treatment of the question became the norm for succeeding generations of canonists, and thus the willfully idle became the standard category of undeserving poor in the canonistic discourse.⁹⁹

This distinction was increasingly present in the secular discourse as well, from the fourteenth century onward, particularly in the years following the Great Famine of 1315-17 and the recurring outbreaks of plague beginning in 1348. In the previous century, and especially by the late thirteenth century, England had experienced an economy unable to absorb surplus laborers, leading to chronic underemployment and problems of vagrancy and social instability as wage laborers migrated in search of work or begged in order to survive.¹⁰⁰ However, the fourteenth century was a different story. The demographic crises brought on by famine and plague created tremendous social and economic upheaval, particularly as certain regions experienced the loss of 10-15 percent of their

⁹⁷ B. Tierney, "The Decretists and the Deserving Poor," 364.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 370. Other canonists such as the English author of the *Summa Omnis qui iuste* argued further that undeserving beggars should not only be refused charity, but should be offered correction instead. *ibid.*, 367.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 369.

¹⁰⁰ C. Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 140. E. Clark, "Social Welfare and Mutual Aid in the Medieval Countryside," *Journal of British Studies* 33 (1994), 383.

population to famine and hunger in 1315-18,¹⁰¹ only to lose 30-50 percent more to plague in 1348-50.¹⁰² Fewer workers meant greater opportunity for wage laborers, and consequently, greater demands for higher wages.¹⁰³ It also translated into greater social and geographic movement, as more wage laborers began to leave their home parishes in search of optimal pay. It also meant that there were ample opportunities for able-bodied individuals to find work.

Thus, the demographic shifts of the fourteenth century did not lead necessarily to higher levels of poverty, but they did have profound effects on the existing socio-economic structures and the perception of poverty. Reaction to this up-ending of social structures was expressed in a variety of ways: in an expansion of the definition of “undeserving poor” in the secular discourse, and in legislation aimed at curbing social realignment. Elaine Clark has pointed out that it was during these years that secular definitions of poverty began to shift, and beggary came to include not only those affected by life-cycle poverty, but migrant laborers and servants seeking higher wages.¹⁰⁴ The traditional criteria for the deserving poor remained largely intact, including first and foremost the widow, the orphan, the elderly, the infirm and the disabled,¹⁰⁵ but the definition of those undeserving of charity was further expanded to encompass not only those able-but-unwilling to work, but also those willing to work only for better pay or conditions. Social commentators worried about these “masterless men,”¹⁰⁶ able-bodied

¹⁰¹ Dyer, *Standards of Living*, 140; D. Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 43.

¹⁰² Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (New York: John Day, 1969), 230.

¹⁰³ Dyer, 217-219.

¹⁰⁴ Clark, “Institutional and Legal Responses to Begging,” 463-464.

¹⁰⁵ M.K. McIntosh, “Local responses to the poor in late medieval and Tudor England,” *Continuity and Change* 3 (1988), 210-211.

¹⁰⁶ A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560-1640* (London: Methuen, 1985).

wage earners whose willingness to shift employers and location for better pay led them to be classed as vagrants, undeserving of charity and threatening to local order.¹⁰⁷

Late medieval parliamentary legislation reflects this shift in discourse. Landowners and employers, accustomed to plentiful labor at cheap rates and frustrated at their inability to hold down wages, put pressure on the government to act. Economic change thus forced a reevaluation of social relations. The result was the Statute of Laborers of 1349, which sought to curb “excessive wages” and prevent wage laborers from leaving their employers to seek better pay elsewhere. Lumped together with the prohibitions on migrant workers were similar proscriptions against giving alms to “valiant,” i.e. healthy, beggars, under penalty of imprisonment.¹⁰⁸

The migrations of laborers concerned not only employers but also officials charged with doling out charity. The task of poor relief fell to the parishes and monasteries as well as other informal networks of care in the English system. It worked well enough in the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁹ However, the widespread demographic migration brought about by the economic and social changes of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries put pressure on that system, causing it to buckle in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹¹⁰ Legislation under Richard II attempted to fix the problem of vagrancy and migration of the poor by forcing people dependent on alms back to their home parishes.¹¹¹

Strategies toward Sufficiency: Indulgences in Context

¹⁰⁷ McIntosh, “Local Responses,” 211-212.

¹⁰⁸ 23 Edward III, c 1-7.

¹⁰⁹ Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, 89-109.

¹¹⁰ Wood, *Medieval Economic Thought*, 57-58; Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, 109-133.

¹¹¹ 12 Ric. II c. 7.

The options for relief for the deserving poor fell generally into two categories: the personal and informal resources of family and friends, and the formal or institutional, and indulgences lay somewhere betwixt the two. In the case of the latter, institutions such as guilds, parishes, monasteries, hospitals, and almshouses all had mechanisms for charitable provision and formed a patchwork safety net for people suffering from poverty. When informal networks of family and friends could no longer assist, or could not assist sufficiently, people who had fallen on hard times, parishes were often a resource of first resort. Canon law and the councils stipulated that vicars ought to provide relief for the poor of their parishes, “according to their revenues and resources.”¹¹² Diocesan statutes communicated these expectations to priests in synod, and urged beneficed clergy, monastic appropriators of parishes and non-resident rectors to honor their canonical obligations to the poor.¹¹³ There has been considerable debate about the degree to which vicars could adequately provide for poor parishioners, but evidence seems to indicate that, up to the thirteenth century, parish based poor relief worked tolerably well. However, the complex and changing socio-economic environment of the later Middle Ages proved the mechanism of the parish administration of charity to be increasingly inadequate.¹¹⁴

Guilds are often cited as an important source of charitable relief in the Middle Ages, but, as Virginia Bainbridge points out, their effectiveness was limited.¹¹⁵ The gild

¹¹² F.M. Powicke and C. Cheney, *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, vols. 1 and 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964). Statutes directed at beneficed clergy: *Councils & Synods*, 27, 64, 128, 188, 232, 289-90, 362, 393, 397, 400, 461, 465, 513, 951, 1014, 1079, 1233, 1239; statutes directed at non-resident clergy: *Councils & Synods*, 564-65, 713, 907; statutes directed at religious: *Councils & Synods*, 64, 122, 232. See also, *Charters and Documents Illustrating the History... of Salisbury*, ed. W. Jones and W. Macray, Rolls Series 97 (London, 1891), 135.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, see also B. Tierney, *Poor Law*, 97-102.

¹¹⁴ B. Tierney, *Poor Law*, 109-133; McIntosh, “Local Responses,” 217-225.

¹¹⁵ V. Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval Countryside* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 1996), 105.

returns of 1389 show that nearly every gild had a statute which required the subvention of impoverished people, but placed strict criteria on who could be helped: they had to be members, and they had to be deserving. Membership was often costly and came with dues, which naturally limited membership to those who could afford it.¹¹⁶ Often, as with the Carpenter's Gild of Norwich, ordinances explicitly stated that gild members seeking assistance had to establish that their poverty came through God's will or chance, and not due to a vicious life.¹¹⁷ Others promised help only to those suffering from life-cycle poverty, while others limited their assistance to those impoverished by catastrophic commercial loss.¹¹⁸ Gilds did provide relief for non-members, in the form of funeral doles and at fraternity feasts, but these activities were not intended to provide continuous support, and were intermittent and limited at best.

Almshouses and hospitals were also mechanisms for addressing poverty, but these too, were limited in scope and aim. Founders of almshouses and hospitals arranged to provide food, shelter and clothing for a symbolic number of poor, usually thirteen. Such institutions were often intended for the chronically poor suffering from life-cycle poverty or illness. These were institutions geared to house poor individuals, or perhaps couples, but were by no means arranged to provide shelter for families.

It is within the broader context of medieval poor relief and canonical and secular legislation that the nature and aims of indulgences for the poor can be more clearly

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ J.T. Smith, ed., *English Gilds: the original ordinances of more than one hundred early English Gilds* (London, 1892), 38. "Also þese breþerin han ordeyned, be weye of charite, that if any broþer or sister of this gilde falle in any meschef or pouerte, be godis sendyng, or be any chaunce of the world, and nat be his owne folye ne riotous lyuyng, and he may nought withe his craft ne with his godis helpen him selfe, he shal han, of eueri broþere and sister of þis gilde, eueri woke, a fertheyng, lestyng his meschif: and þese ferthings shal be gaderid at eueri moneth ende, and delid forth to þe needful man, in honor of crist and his moder, and for alle cristene soules."

¹¹⁸ Bainbridge, 115.

understood. Individuals and families impoverished by calamitous loss could perhaps be served by their parishes to an extent, but most parishes were not in the position to rectify their financial loss. Furthermore, while almshouses and hospitals could perhaps be of assistance to some of the beneficiaries suffering from longer-term life-cycle poverty or illness, these institutions were not intended to provide short-term help for families. Guilds perhaps could have offered subvention, particularly to members, but a good number of the beneficiaries, while financially sufficient prior to loss or illness, may have been excluded from membership because of inability to meet entry fees or dues. Furthermore, while many guilds aimed to provide doles or shelter for indigent members and their families, they were not in a position to foot the cost of rebuilding a home or replacing lost or stolen merchandise. None of these mechanisms for poor relief were organized to provide indemnity. Membership in a parish, almshouse, hospital or guild did not guarantee compensation for loss; at the very least, they were bulwarks against extreme necessity.

In many ways an indulgence acted as much like a begging certificate for the beneficiary. Secular law, particularly the Statute of Laborers of 1349, had outlawed begging by the able-bodied, a category into which fell many of those suffering poverty through loss rather than through illness or age. Furthermore, the Ricardian legislation that tried to force beggars back into the care and jurisdiction of their home parishes limited the geographic range in which they could seek charitable relief. An episcopal indulgence enabled these deserving poor to circumvent, to a certain extent, the restrictions and obstacles that secular legislation had erected. In two specific ways, indulgences such as these acted as begging certificates. First, the language of the grants

established that persons in specific situations were indeed “deserving poor,” in spite of the fact that they were able-bodied. The grant also acted as a tool of legitimization for men and women in this situation: at first glance, some might have looked as if they were undeserving of charity, but further explanation by a bishop verified their story and established them as legitimate and worthy of relief. Second, a grant of indulgence allowed a pauper to licitly seek relief outside of the boundaries of his or her home parish. An indulgence was valid only within the boundaries of diocesan jurisdiction of the bishop, of course, but it certainly gave a poor beneficiary of an indulgence broader access to communities and donors that had greater means to administer charity than their home parish.

That indulgences functioned as a begging certificate is indicated in some of the records. In situations where the bishop was not present and available to grant an indulgence, his vicar-general could issue what amounted to a begging certificate, but without the added inducement of an indulgence to encourage giving.¹¹⁹ Most indulgences probably granted forty days, the maximum relaxation from penance allowed to bishops in most cases. The indulgence benefiting Agnes Baker the cloth worker, for

¹¹⁹ While only a bishop had the authority and jurisdiction to issue an indulgence, there are instances of vicars-general issuing a document that truly was a begging certificate. Bishop Langley’s vicar-general issued one such certificate in 1417 to a man seeking charity to help with medical treatment for a badly broken arm. *Reg. Langley*, n. 1395. “Thomas decanus etc. vicarius in spiritualibus generalis universis et singulis rectoribus vicariis et capellanis parochialibus per civitatem et diocesim Dunelmenses constitutis salutem, in auctore salutis. Gratum et acceptum obsequium tociens deo impenditur quociens miserabilibus personis divine contemplacionis intuitu misericorditer subvenitur. Dum itaque pauper vir Robertus de Topclife presencium portitor, cujus una tibia nuper per infortunium fuit confracta, in sirurgicis et medicinis omnia bona sua consumpserit et nullum adhuc sanitatis remedium adinvenerit, jamque ut asserit virum medicum repperit qui ipsum manucepit pro duabus marcis sibi pro labore suo solvendis, quam summam idem Robertus ut asseritur nunquam solvere valebit nisi sibi de Christi fidelium elemosinis caritative succurratur; vestram universitatem attente rogamus et exhortamur in domino quatinus cum idem robertus ad loca vestra venerit elemosinas petiturus, vos ipsum benigne recipere et suam indigenciam subditis vestris exponere dignemini cum favore, excitantes eosdem ut de bonis sibi a deo collatis huic pauperi viro in hac sua necessitate subvenire dignentur, sic quod ipsius inopie consulatur et illi qui sibi subveniunt propter suam suvencionem hujusmodi et alia bona que domino inspirante fecerint ad eterna valeant gaudia pervenire. Datum apud Aukland sub sigillo vicariatus nostri xx die Octobris anno domini MCCCCXVII.”

instance, gives us particular insight into how these individuals used their grants. The clerk only enregistered Agnes' grant as memoranda rather than as a fully-inscribed text, but included the note "when she comes collecting,"¹²⁰ indicating that Agnes herself received donations from benefactors. Other grants specify that a family member may have served as the proctor for the beneficiary, as in the case of Robert Bard of York, who was imprisoned, but whose wife Theobalda was to collect donations for his relief.¹²¹ Brief notes similar to these offer insight as to how individuals may have used the grant to their benefit. Agnes was using the grant to collect alms herself; others received grants that permitted them or an appointed proctor, usually a family member or friend, to seek alms.

Even though an indulgence gave a poor beneficiary the right to seek alms anywhere throughout the diocese, it was not a guarantee of adequate compensation or of sufficient income, for a petitioner, indulgence or not, was still dependent upon the mercy of the giver. Robert Proctour had to seek an extension to the original, year-long grant accorded by his bishop, as whatever donations he had received were not enough to stabilize his financial situation.¹²² And even Agnes Baker the cloth-worker's experience

¹²⁰ *Reg. Langley*, 164, 188. "Grant, until Easter, of indulgence on behalf of Agnes Baker of Kyrkelethom in Cliveland (York), who has been robbed of 220 yards of linen given to her to prepare and cannot make this loss good (per quorundam latronum fallaces insidias et versutias de CCXX virgis panni linei quem diverse persone sibi tradiderant suis labore et opera preparandum ac de aliis bonis suis extitit spoliata, pro quo quidem panno lineo sic furtive sublato non habet unde satisfaciat personis quarum erat nec unde aliter se sustentet.) When she comes collecting, etc. Aukland, 16 Jan. 1430."

¹²¹ *Reg. Stafford*, 13. "Bard, Robert, a merchant of York, having become surety for one Robert Sauplers of that city, had been imprisoned for a half year, for default. The Bishop grants and Indulgence to all the faithful who should provide Theobalda, his wife, with funds for his relief."

¹²² *Reg. Langley*, n. 693 and n. 809. The first entry (693) reads: "Grant for one year, of indulgence on behalf of Robert Proctour of Moorton (Durham), whose buildings and other property have been destroyed by fire so that he has nothing to support his wife and children. Aukland, 30 December 1427." The second (809): "27 march 1429. Renewal of indulgence for Robert Proctour. Indulgencia. Vicesimo septimo die mensis Marcii anno domini MCCCCXXIX in manerio de Aukland dominus concessit litteras indulgencie Roberto Proctour de Moorton sub forma qua alias concessit eidem, de qua ut supra in registro, videlicet penultimo die Decembris anno domini MCCCCXXVII."

demonstrates that the grant of an indulgence on one's behalf did not necessarily guarantee sufficient donations to remedy a loss, as she too requested and received an extension of her grant.¹²³ Thus, indulgences are perhaps best seen as one of several strategies to find relief for those struck by misfortune and poverty.

Analysis of Grants of Indulgence for the Impoverished

Petitioners for Grants of Indulgence: Status and Gender

It is against a backdrop of an increasingly complicated discourse about origins of and remedies for poverty and begging that the bishops issued indulgences to individuals pressed by poverty. Leaving aside impoverished religious communities and others who took vows of poverty or chastity,¹²⁴ we find approximately 145 instances of people seeking an indulgence for material need in published episcopal records. One hundred men petitioned for assistance because of fire, flood, theft or life-cycle poverty; of those 113 men, 33 claimed to have dependent spouses, children or parents. Only 12 women were recorded as petitioning bishops for assistance, usually claiming poverty because of debt inherited at the death of a spouse, theft, or loss of income-producing property. All were widowed or single, and only one claimed dependents. Finally, 21 couples appeared

¹²³ *Reg. Langley*, 164. "Indulgencia. Eisdem die et loco dominus concessit litteras suas indulgencie Agneti Baker de Kyrklethom in Cliveland Eboracensis diocesis post festum sancti Petri ad vincula minime valituras sub forma quas alias concessit eidem Agneti litteras consimiles datas in manerio suo de Aukland xvi die mensis Januarii anno domini MCCCCXXIX." This appears to be an extension of the earlier grant.

¹²⁴ Hermits regularly appear in the record, as for instance in the indulgence granted on behalf of Philip Schipham, hermit of Bath and Wells diocese: "Universitatem vestram rogamus et exhortamus in Christo, vobisque nihilominus in virtute sancte obediencie firmiter iniungentes, quatinus cum dilectus nobis in Christo Philippus Schipham qui se in parochia de Wynescumbe in loco quodam qui sancti Romani vulgariter nuncupatur, pauperem constituit heremitam; cujus pretextu quoddam ibidem beneficium ut dicitur inchoavit, ad vos et vestrum quemlibet accesserit fidelium elemosinas petiturus, ipsum vel procuratorem suum eius nomine has nostras litteras deferentem, in ecclesiis et locis vestris benignius admittentes, negocia dicti pauperis heremite clero et populo vobis subiectis diligenter et fideliter exponatis. Quicquid vero in hac parte collectum fuerit vel collatum, dicto heremite vel procuratori suo predicto volumus integraliter liberari. Nos insuper...omnibus Christi fidelibus nostre diocesis indulgencie capacibus, qui dicto heremite subsidium prestiterint, etc." *Reg. Shrewsbury*, 70.

as co-petitioners, none of which mentioned dependents. Seven couples mentioned poverty due to catastrophe, while four others cited debt as the source of their poverty. The rest either explicitly mentioned disability due to old age, or the record offered no account of their poverty. It should be noted that episcopal registers recorded only successful petitions to obtain an indulgence. They offer no insight into the number of people whose claims did not meet the threshold necessary for establishing the worthiness of one's poverty.

<i>Indulgences and Poverty, by Primary Cause</i>	
Fire/flood	68
Theft/loss	14
Life-cycle/disability	18
Debt	22
Not listed	24
Total	146

<i>Indulgences and Poverty, Petitioners by Gender</i>			
	Men	Women	Couples
Fire/flood	58	4	6
Theft/loss	11	2	1
Life-cycle/ disability	14	0	4
Debt	13	5	4
Not listed	17	1	6
Total	113	12	21

Socio-economic status is difficult to determine from these records. As with most indulgences for individuals, the information is fragmented. Most individuals appear in the record with little context: what we know of them is filtered through the clerk, who may or may not have chosen to inscribe the full grant. Fully inscribed grants themselves offer little social or economic context, no information on family or kinship ties. Most appear before the bishop only once, and then disappear from the record: we cannot know if their attempts at seeking financial stability were successful. Only three individuals appear at least twice in the record, usually in order to ask for an extension of benefits, indicating perhaps difficulty in achieving stability. Most petitioners appear in the record only once, but the lack of recurrence does not necessarily mean they were successful in achieving material stability by means of the grant of indulgence. Thus, in order to determine status, we are left to carefully pick through what the grants themselves offer. Socio-economic status is most easily discerned in two ways: the clear mention of status, as in the case of John Whitby of Hartlepool, who claimed poverty because of the loss of ships to piracy but who was keen to establish his status as a burgess or leading citizen of a prominent urban center. Another method for the tentative determination of status is the mention of property in the grants, but this circumstance was normally only mentioned for those individuals suffering impoverishment from damage or loss to property or goods, whether through fire, flood or theft.

Only thirty-one grants clearly mention the occupation of the beneficiary, thus giving us some indication of socio-economic status. Nineteen grants referred to the beneficiaries as hermits, clerks or secular priests, a disproportionate representation in the

record, considering this group only accounted for about ten percent of the population.¹²⁵ Nine grants mention urban occupations or industries (ship owner,¹²⁶ tailor,¹²⁷ textile preparation,¹²⁸ shop owner,¹²⁹ fellmonger,¹³⁰ chapman¹³¹); three refer to former service to the king and/or a noble house.¹³² For the rest who lost property in some catastrophic manner and sought assistance in rebuilding, it is difficult to discern whether they owned the destroyed property or not. Only three give indication that they perhaps were not the owners of the property: Robert Symonson, for example, sought an indulgence to assist in rebuilding when his house burned down, not only because he lacked the means to rebuild and to support his family at the same time, but because he was also “obliged” to rebuild.¹³³

The gender of petitioners indicates wide variation: 113 individual men petitioned their bishop for assistance. Of the 113 men, 21 made specific mention of their marital status and dependents, perhaps as a way of emphasizing the personal ramifications of their poverty. Over half of the men (69 of 113) who sought episcopal assistance were impoverished by losses incurred by fire, flood or theft. Thirteen petitions listed debt as the primary cause of their material poverty, whereas seventeen offered no cause, usually due more to the haphazard mode of record-keeping than to the petitions themselves.

Twelve individual women petitioned bishops for assistance. Most of the women who petitioned were single or widowed. There may be many reasons for this: it could be

¹²⁵ *Reg. Shrewsbury*, 70; *Reg. Langham*, 192; *Reg. Langley*, 1:23-24, 4:150; *Ely Episcopal Records*, 398-406.

¹²⁶ *Reg. Langley*, 1:198

¹²⁷ *Reg. Langley*, 4:163.

¹²⁸ *Reg. Langley*, 1:164, *Ely Episcopal Records*, 401, 404.

¹²⁹ *Reg. Langley*, 4:119-20, *Ely Episcopal Records*, 401.

¹³⁰ *Reg. Stafford*, 125.

¹³¹ *Reg. Wykeham*, 526, *Ely Episcopal Records*, 399.

¹³² *Ely Episcopal Records*, 406.

¹³³ *Reg. Langley*, 1:175.

that many impoverished women relied on their husbands to obtain material assistance, and therefore do not appear in the record; or that widowed or single women of middling or lower status had more obstacles to obtaining access to their bishop; or that many had access to alternate forms of family relief, such as remarriage, in the case of widows.¹³⁴ Most of the women who appear in the record were impoverished by debt inherited upon the death of their spouse. Twenty-one married couples jointly petitioned bishops for an indulgence, but no single cause of poverty seemed to predominate in their requests for assistance.

Primary Causes: Loss from Fire, Flood and Theft

An analysis of indulgences according to the primary cause of impoverishment reveals considerable variation. By far, the largest group of petitioners (58 of 146 petitions) was men suffering loss from fire or flood. The second largest group was petitioners, the origin of whose poverty was unidentified in the record (24 of 146 petitions). Following close behind, however, were those suffering from poverty induced by life-cycle or disability (18) and debt (22). Analysis of petitions by primary cause allows for deeper consideration of the personal, social and economic circumstances of individuals at the onset of their financial distress.

In over half of the grants (82 of 146), poverty or the threat of poverty was precipitated by a single calamitous event: fire, flood, or theft. Among the thousands of indulgences offered by bishops from c.1250-1500, we find a number of instances in

¹³⁴ Sheila Sweetinburgh, among others, has argued that the death of a spouse thrust many widows and their dependents into poverty, and that remarriage was often sought as a way to regain social and economic stability. S. Sweetinburgh, "The Widow's Lot in Small Town Society: Appledore, c. 1400-1470," *Family History: The Journal of the Institute for Heraldic and Genealogical Studies* n.s. 120 (1995): 303-323. See also C. Barron and A. Sutton, eds., *Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500* (London: Hambledon, 1994).

which grants were offered to victims of fire. As Alice Laurenceson's case previously demonstrates, fire was an ever-present danger in the medieval world.¹³⁵ It could take some families years to begin to recover their former socio-economic status after losing everything in a fire; without the modern benefit of property insurance, most had to begin from scratch. Robert Proctour of Moorton (d. Durham) first requested assistance from Bishop Langley in December of 1427, pointing out that a fire had so ruined him that he had no way of supporting his wife and children. Bishop Langley granted an indulgence of forty days, available for one year, to those who would lend a helping hand to Proctour and his family. Yet the difficulty of recovery was such that eighteen months later, Robert Proctour was back before the bishop to beg for a renewal or extension of the grant, having been unable to stabilize his situation financially in the meantime.¹³⁶ Most grants are like that of Proctour's in that they offer little information as to the total value of the losses, which would offer some evidence of the petitioners' status. Other grants offer more: we know that John and Katherine Cooke of Waltham lost buildings, granaries, clothing, furniture, utensils and other goods,¹³⁷ and that James Robson the tailor lost to a fire his house, outbuildings, goods and the clothes of his clients.¹³⁸ Of the approximately seventy grants for impoverishment through losses by fire, nine mention the loss of a house and its contents only, fourteen mention the loss of house, outbuildings and/or

¹³⁵ passim, *Select Cases from the Coroners' Rolls, 1265-1413*, ed. C. Gross. Selden Society, 1936, 1938, 1939, 1957, 1965.

¹³⁶ See above, n. 122.

¹³⁷ *Reg. Langley* 1: 164. "Omnibus et singulis parochianis nostris et aliis quorum etc. qui ad relevamen et subsidium Johannis Cooke et Katerine uxoris sue de villa de Waltham Londoniensis diocesis, quorum edificia grana vestimenta utensilia et quecumque alia bona sua casu fortuito incendii subito emergentis sunt consumpta ita quod nichil eis remanet unde sustentari poterint, nisi eis fidelium elemosinis et auxiliis misericorditer succurratur, grata de bonis etc. ut in forma."

¹³⁸ *Reg. Langley* 4:163. "Grant for one year of indulgence on behalf of James Robson, tailor, of Brauncepath, whose house, buildings, goods and the clothes of other people therein (*diversis pannis et vestibus aliorum quos ipse suceperat ad operandum in eisdem domibus suis existentibus*) have been destroyed by fire. He is obliged to rebuild the house, etc., and is unable to support his wife and many children or to satisfy those persons whose goods were lost." [Editor's translation]

granaries and other property, and the rest refer only to the loss of goods.¹³⁹ Based on such scant information, we can generally conclude that none of them possessed the social and economic benefits and connections of titled nobility, that none of them rose beyond the middling sort of burgess or independent peasant farmer, and that most in fact possessed a marginal security at best in their financial affairs, such that they lacked the means or connections to help them recover from unexpected catastrophe. These grants could have also encompassed even some of the lowest rungs of society, since some professional beggars like Margaret Kind of London had accumulated enough possessions to leave modest bequests—goods that were also susceptible to loss through fire or theft.¹⁴⁰ The thin nature of many recorded entries make them resistant to deep quantitative analysis, allowing only the most general of conclusions.

Like fire, theft could also overturn precarious finances. A handful of individuals found their businesses and/or their personal finances endangered by robbery. John Assheby, by his own account a successful shopkeeper in Darlington (d. Durham), was ruined when thieves broke into his shop under cover of night and stole forty marks' worth of goods.¹⁴¹ The bishop granted forty days' indulgence on his behalf, and made the grant available for one year. Similarly, Agnes Baker of Kirkleatham sought assistance when she was robbed of cloth she was to prepare, and was unable to replace it or support

¹³⁹ For example, the forty days' indulgence given to benefit Giles Cirkwey and his son, "qui per incendium in bonis, rebus et facultatibus suis dampnum irecuparabile, nisi eis per fidelium elemosinas succuratur, sunt perpersi." *Reg. Beauchamp, Boulers, Stanbury*, 89.

¹⁴⁰ B. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 35-36.

¹⁴¹ *Reg. Langley*, n. 1092. "... dominus in manerio suo de Aukland concessit indulgenciam xl dierum omnibus parochianis suis et aliis quorum etc. qui ad subsidium et relevamen Johannis Assheby de Derlynton sue diocesis, cujus bona et diversa mercimonia ad valorem xl marcarum et amplius se extendencia de quadam domo sive shopa subtus le Tolbothe de Derlyngton predicta per dolosas et iniquas latronum insidias de nocte furtive sunt subtracta, pro quibus quidem bonis sive mercimoniis idem Johannes diversis creditoribus suis graviter indebitatus existit, quibus debite satisfacere ac seipsum uxorem et filios ac familiares suos sustentare commode non valebit// nisi sibi Christi fidelium elemosinis benignius succurratur. Et emanarunt littere per unum annum a dato earumdem tantummodo durature."

herself in the meantime.¹⁴² The bishop issued a grant on her behalf, good only for a few months, until Easter. Agnes evidently needed more assistance in replacing the stolen goods, for she was back before the bishop, seeking a renewal of the grant after Easter.¹⁴³ Clerics also suffered the costs of theft, like John Hogg, who was responsible for replacing an antiphonary that had been stolen.¹⁴⁴ In nearly each of the eight cases, the petitioner cited their indebtedness that arose from the loss, and/or their inability to repay previous debts because of the loss of goods. They were in danger of falling into poverty, and in some cases, indebtedness as a result of catastrophic theft allowed for the possibility of imprisonment.

In addition to their shared loss of property, these beneficiaries had in common other characteristics. They were persons of normally sufficient means, possessing goods and chattel, and sometimes real property. In short, they were persons of at least basic means, accustomed to supporting themselves and their families through work. Indeed, in nearly every entry it is made clear that their need arose through no fault of their own, that they were honest people whose indigence was not the result of weak character or laziness, but of misfortune. For instance, in Henry Piper's grant, the clerk was careful to note explicitly that his need was the result of bad luck: his house and all his belongings

¹⁴² See above, n. 120.

¹⁴³ See above, n. 123. This appears to be an extension of the earlier grant.

¹⁴⁴ *Reg. Langley*, 4:38-39. "Obsequium magne pietatis et meriti tociens nos credimus excercere quociens mentes fidelium ad caritative subveniendum pauperibus, illis presertim qui non sua culpa sed per iniquorum et falsorum hominum inopinatas insidias ad subitam deveniunt inopiam, per allectiva indulgenciarum munera propensius excitamus. Cum igitur ut accepimus dilectus nobis in Christo Johannes Hogg clericus parochialis ville de Broghton in Clyveland Eboracensis diocesis nuper per quorumdam infidelium et latronum insidias fallaces et versutas de quodam antiphonare sive portiforio dicte ecclesie pertinente et in custodia sua existente nequiter extitit spoliatus, pro cuius quidem antiphonarius sive portiphori precio ad summam centum solidorum per parochianos dicte ville ad minus estimato dictum Johannem eisdem parochianis satisfacere necessario oportebit, quod tamen facere non valebit quovis modo nisi sibi piis fidelium elemosinis in hac parte benignius succurratur; nos prefati Johannis infortunate miserie in premissis pio compacientes effectum, de dei omnipotentis immensa misericordia etc. qui ad relevamen et subsidium miserie et inopie prefati Johannis in premissis grata de bonis etc. xl dies indulgencie misericorditer etc. per presentes usque ad festum nativitatis sancti Johannis baptiste proximo futurum tantummodo duraturas."

and tools had been consumed in a fire.¹⁴⁵ Even in the short memoranda, clerks sometimes noted the occupation of the beneficiary, establishing that person as an honest worker. Thus, in a cribbed note in Bishop Spofford of Hereford's register, the clerk simply noted that John Pedlynge, a "skinner de Bromesbarewe" suffered loss from a fire.¹⁴⁶

The bishops were at pains to emphasize both the honesty and the sudden poverty of this type of beneficiary. The language with which they described the poverty draws attention to its acute nature: the onset was sudden (*subito, repentini*) and intense in the totality of the destruction. For instance, Bishop Edmund Lacy of Hereford noted that fire had utterly impoverished Thomas Brampton of Ludlow, to the point where he could not care for himself or his parents.¹⁴⁷ Bishop Stafford of Exeter emphasized that the impoverished John Sayer had honorably served in the King's wars before losing his property to fire.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, in several cases of loss of property or livelihood, those who were granted an indulgence were also responsible for providing for dependents such as elderly parents, as in Thomas Brampton's case, or for a wife and children. In these cases, those seeking assistance were male heads of households, obliged to shelter, feed and clothe many dependents. Thus, John Cook, who lost his cows and his livelihood to

¹⁴⁵ *Reg. Langley*, n. 252. "...Henrici Pyper de Aukland nostre diocesis cujus bona et utensilia universa simul cum domo quam inhabitabat nuper casu infortunato per vorax flammaram incendium subito combusta fuerunt ipseque ex hoc ut accepimus ad tantam inopiam est dejectus quod non habet unde se ac uxorem et proles ejus sustentet seu eorum victui necessaria quovis modo adquirat... ."

¹⁴⁶ *Reg. Spofford*, p. 132.

¹⁴⁷ *Reg. Lacy, episcopi Herefordensis*, p. 31. "... unde dictus Thomas Bramptone tante paupertatis dispendio noscitur subjacere quod, nisi a Christi fidelibus per elemosinarum largicionem caritative succurratur eidem, non habebit unde vivat nec adiciet et resurgat... ."

¹⁴⁸ *Reg. Stafford*, p. 325. "John Sayer of Canterbury—indulgence granted for his relief. He had served the Kings of England in the wars, and having lost all his property in a fire, he became impoverished." (*Editor's trans.*)

floods,¹⁴⁹ and James Robson the tailor, who lost his house, buildings and livelihood to a fire,¹⁵⁰ and others made clear to their bishop not only the fact of their poverty, but also that poverty held serious consequences for their dependents.

For the bishops of the late medieval period, poverty induced by misfortune was held as something to be pitied, and thus to be remedied through charity and alms. To be materially poor was never a desirable status for an able-bodied layperson, and it became an increasingly difficult position to find oneself in throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Indeed, given their prior financial standing, it is easy to imagine that these beneficiaries were the *mendicare erubuscentes*, the embarrassed poor, to which the *Summa elegantius* referred.¹⁵¹ In making clear the acuteness and bad fortune of their situation, the bishops established their status as deserving poor in a society that could be harsh toward those able-bodied whose claims upon the charity of others were perceived to be fraudulent.

¹⁴⁹ *Reg. Langley*, 4: 35-36. "...Considerantes igitur pie in domino paupertatem gravem et inopiam dilecti nobis in Christo Johannis Cook de Knedlyngton juxta Hoveden Eboracensis diocesis, cujus ut informamur quamplura animalia frumentum et alia diversa grana aliaque bona et catalla sua ad non modicum pecunie valorem per inundacionem subitaneam diversarum aquarum de Ouse et Trent nuper deperdita fuerunt et amissa, necnon diversa terre et tenementa ipsius Johannis certis creditoribus suis pro quibusdam pecuniarum summis eisdem infra breve tempus resolvendis eidem Johanni pro empcione et provisione animalium granorum ac aliorum catallorum ad sue vite sustentacionem necessariorum de novo faciendis ab eisdem mutuatis sunt impignorata, nec habet unde creditoribus suis pro hujusmodi pecuniarum summis sic mutuatis satisfacere et terras et tenementa sua eis sic impignorata liberare ac sibi et suis recuperare aut unde se uxorem et liberos suos relevare et sustentare poterit quovis modo, nisi sibi Christi fidelium elemosinis in hac parte caritative succurratur; et propterea affectantes Christi fidelium mentes ad misericorditer subveniendum indigencie gravie et inopie prefati Johannis Cook per allectiva indulgenciarum munera quantum cum deo poterimus devocius excitare, de dei igitur omnipotentis immensa misericordia etc. de peccatis suis vere penitentibus etc. qui ad prefati Johannis uxoris et liberorum suorum predictorum relevamen et subsidium in hac parte grata de bonis sibi a deo collatis contulerint etc. xl dies indulgencie etc. per presentes per unum annum a dato earumdem tantummodo duraturas."

¹⁵⁰ *Reg. Langley*, 4: 163. "...diversis pannis et vestibus aliorum quos ipse susceperat ad operandum in eisdem domibus suis existentibus..."

¹⁵¹ *Summa 'elegantius in iure divino'*, c. 54, p. 67. For text, see above n. 96.

Primary Cause: Disability and Life Cycle Poverty

Some of the petitioners to appear in episcopal registers were impoverished victims of life-cycle or disability-induced poverty. Those struck by life-cycle poverty were those whose gender, age or stage in life made them more vulnerable to poverty: widows with young children, unable to leave them to work;¹⁵² children,¹⁵³ and elderly men and women whose age and condition prevent from sustaining themselves adequately.¹⁵⁴ We find widows left to support families and repay debts incurred by their deceased husbands: Constance Kendale's husband was deeply indebted, and when she was widowed by his murder, she was made responsible for his debt and for the support of their large family.¹⁵⁵ Alice of Durham was overwhelmed and confused by the financial situation her husband had left her to untangle, and complained about obligations for debts and contracts to which she had never been privy.¹⁵⁶ From the grants of indulgence on their behalf, it is unclear to what status these widows were accustomed. What is clear is that their gender, their lack of social or familial connections to whom they could turn, or their status as mothers of dependent children prevented them from being able to repay the

¹⁵² E. Clark, "Mothers at Risk of Poverty in the Medieval English Countryside," in *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*, ed. J. Henderson and R. Wall (London: Routledge, 1994), 139-159.

¹⁵³ N. Orme, *Medieval Childhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 88-92.

¹⁵⁴ J. T. Rosenthal, "Retirement and the Life Cycle in Fifteenth-Century England," in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. Sheehan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1990), 171-188; E. Clark, "The Quest for Security in Medieval England," in *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe*, ed. M. Sheehan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 1990), 189-200.

¹⁵⁵ *Reg. Langley*, 3:202. "Grant, until Easter next, of indulgence on behalf of Constance, widow of John Kendale of Newbotell in the parish of Hoghton (Durham), who was killed by an enemy. He was oppressed with debt and because of his death left his wife a debtor. She is unable to pay these creditors or support her many children." [Editor's translation]

¹⁵⁶ *Reg. Langley*, 4:64. "...dominus concessit litteras indulgencie omnibus benefactoribus Alicie relicte... civitate sue Dunelm', qui tam propter gravem et diuturnam egritudinem qua detentus erat ac propter alias diversas causas et contractus suos multimodos eidem Alicie ignotos in vita sua ere alieno fuerat pregravatus quod Omnia bona sua suis creditoribus persolvere seu eis satisfacere non poterunt quovis modo, ipsaque Alicia ex causa predicta ad tantam et tam notoriam paupertatem devenit et inopiam quod que quondam reputabatur mulier honesta et satis habundans in bonis, modo sinistrante fortuna et non sua culpa Christi fidelium elemosinas et suffragia petere compellitur cum nihil habeat alias unde vivat... ."

debts their deceased husbands had accumulated. Of the thirty impoverished women who petitioned the bishop for assistance, six were widows, six were unmarried or made no mention of a husband, and the rest were married and sought assistance with their husbands.

Old age and its attendant infirmity or disability could also tip people into indigence. William and Emma Trays of Derlyngton were elderly, broken by age and poor health. According to the bishop's grant, they were so stricken with age that they could not work enough to provide adequately for themselves and were consequently burdened by debt.¹⁵⁷ The parents of Thomas Brampton had evidently planned for old age in the way most in medieval England did, to have their son care for them in their old age. Those plans were destroyed when a fire destroyed their son's property, and they and he were reduced to beggary.¹⁵⁸ Other indigent couples appear as petitioners in the registers, and although the reasons for their poverty were not detailed in the recorded memorandum, it is probable that their poverty arose from old age or disability.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *Reg. Langley*, 4:208. "qui adeo ere alieno sunt oppressi ac ut informamur in tantam paupertatem et inopiam dejecti senioque confracti existent quod no habent nec per labores suos sibi acquirere possunt." A similar case is found in *Reg. Lacy (Hereford)*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁸ *Reg. Lacy (Hereford)*, 31. "Deus noster, amator omnium, seculorum justus iudex, fortis et pociens, qui sepius propter peccata hominum iuste irascitur, quandoque filios adopcioni quos diligit per infirmitates corporales, aliquos ceteris casibus fortuitis caduci huius seculi, ne nos eternaliter condempnet, interdum affligi permittit. Cum utique, sicut accepimus, domus et edificia Thome Bramptone de Lodelowe, nostre diocesis, per fortunam incendii nuper combusta fuerunt cum ceteris bonis suis et conversa funditus in favillas, unde dictus Thomas Bramptone tante paupertatis dispendio noscitur subiacere quod, nisi a Christi fidelibus per elemosinarum largicionem caritative succurratur eidem, non habebit unde vivat nec adiciet et resurgat, nos igitur pietate compuncti mentes fidelium allectivis indulgenciarum muneribus ad subveniendum prefato thome, sic ut premititur paupertate depresso, excitare volentes, de Dei igitur etc., omnibus et singulis parochianis et aliis quorum diocesanis, etc., de peccatis, etc., qui de bonis sibi a Deo collatis grata dicto Thome contulerint subsidia caritatis aut sue huiusmodi inopie qualitercumque devote succurrerint quadraginta dies indulgencie de injuncta eis penitencia misericorditer in Domino relaxamus per presentes post annum a dato presencium nullatenus valituras."

¹⁵⁹ As in the case of Roger and Matilda Fletcher: "Rogerio Fleicher et Matilde, uxori sue, mole tanta paupertatis oppressis quod sese absque Christicolarum largicionibus nequeunt quomodolibet sustentare, xl dies indulgencie per annum tantum durature." *Reg. Lacy (Hereford)*, 43.

And then there were those whose infirmity or disability undermined their ability to support themselves: William Daunt's debilitating illness, a burning infirmity of the eyes, prevented him from being able to work.¹⁶⁰ John Goodfellow was deprived of the use of his hand so that he was unable to continue to work, and Archbishop Langham of Canterbury granted an indulgence of forty days to anyone who assisted him.¹⁶¹ Richard Melsenby had sustained injuries while serving as a man-at-arms on campaign in France, which were aggravated to a debilitating degree when he defended his lord from deadly enemies.¹⁶² The blacksmith, John Frenssh, lost his eyesight and could not support his family;¹⁶³ similarly, Robert de Bradbery had somehow fallen into paralysis and was completely incapable of providing for his family.¹⁶⁴ John Donaldson was crippled in his

¹⁶⁰ *Reg. Langley*, 1:23-24. "... Cum igitur ut accepimus dilectus nobis in Christo Willelmus Daunt clericus per ferventem emigrantie infirmitatem visu oculorum suorum orbatus et aliis infirmitatibus detentus existat adeo quod victum suum acquirere non valeat labore corporali nec habet unde vivat, nisi per Christi fideles caritative subveniatur eidem... "

¹⁶¹ *Reg. Langham*, p. 130. "Item eodem die dominus concessit quadraginta dies indulgentie Johanni Godefelagh de Mannesfeld adiutorio manus sue dextere adeo private quod non potest laborare circa sustentacionem... "

¹⁶² *Reg. Langley*, 4:28-29. "Gratum et acceptum deo obsequium tocies impendere opinamur quociens mentes fidelium ad caritative subeniendum pauperibus per allectiva indulgentiarum munera propensius excitamus. Considerantes namque pie in domino paupertatem gravem et inopiam Ricardi de Melsenby de Hart nostre diocesis, qui ut informamur dum foret in partibus Francie in obsequio metuendissimi domini nostri regis per inimicos nostros capitales ibidem extitit graviter vulneratus, accciam apud Newerk Eboracensis diocesis per quosdam mortales inimicos Thome Goldesbroke magistri [sui] cum se interponeret medium inter ipsum magistrum suum et dictos inimicos suos tam graviter vulneratus et in membris est mutilatus, quod propter debilitatem corporis sui sibi ipsi succurrere per labores corporales verisimiliter de cetero [non] valebit, fecitque dictus Ricardus tantas et tam excessivas expensas circa curacionem dictorum membrorum suorum quod pro eisdem expensis nonnullis creditoribus suis multipliciter est indebitatus, quibus nec debite satisfacere nec aliquid unde vivat sibi acquirere poterit quovis modo absque eo quod sibi a Christ fidelibus misericorditer succurratur; de dei igitur immensa misericordia etc. omnibus etc. qui ad subsidium et relevamen vite et necessariorum prefati Ricardi presencium portitoris aliqua de bonis sibi a deo collatis contulerint seu quovis modo assignaverint subsidia caritatis xl dies etc concedimus per presentes per unum annum a dato earumdem tantummodo duraturas. Datum sub sigillo nostro in manerio nostro de Stokton primo die mensis Octobris anno quo supra proximo."

¹⁶³ *Reg. Langley*, 1:163. "...per subitaneam dei visitacionem visu oculorum suorum privatus existit sic quod victum suum ut consueverat acquirere non potest labore corporali, nec habe unde vivat aut se uxorem et liberos suos quibus multum oneratur sustentare valeat."

¹⁶⁴ *Reg. Langley*, 1:33. "Grant, for one year, of indulgence on behalf of Robert de Bradbery of the parish of Seggefild, a pauper afflicted with paralysis so that he cannot support his wife and family. Aukland, 5 Jan. 1425." [Editor's translation]

left foot and was not able to work or afford the pursuit of medical treatment.¹⁶⁵ All petitioners citing disability were men, and they were responsible for dependents and/or they had no connections on which they could rely to assist them. These were people who thus fell easily under the criteria for involuntary poverty and were deserving of charity.

Primary Cause: Debt

One issue that recurs frequently throughout these grants to the deserving poor is debt. Not only do we find widows scrambling to cover the debts of their deceased husbands, but we also find male householders who could not repay their loans because of catastrophe, such as John Whitby the shipowner or James Robson the tailor. At other times, a change in their circumstance or health made it difficult for them to repay their own debts, as in the case of the above William and Emma Trays, whose physical decline due to age prevented them from earning sufficient money to support themselves and pay their debts, or the man-at-arms, Richard Melsenby, accustomed to making his way in the world by muscle, but whose body had failed him.¹⁶⁶ No doubt debt was a factor that compounded their loss, contributing to their financial insolvency and making stability all the more difficult.

Debt from financial deals gone wrong also appears in the registers. William Brynne of Brayton stood as surety on a loan for a friend, but was left holding the loan when his friend defaulted on his obligations.¹⁶⁷ Others also were imprisoned because

¹⁶⁵ *Reg. Langley*, 1:163. “tantam a diu in sinistro pede suo passus est infirmitatem, pro cuius infirmitatis sue recuperanda sanitate tam excessivas fecit et adhuc facere oportebit expensas quod pro eis satisfacere proprie non suppetunt facultates, ne habet unde vivat nec sibi victum acquirere potest labore corporali.”

¹⁶⁶ *Reg. Langley*, 3:152, 4:23-29. *Reg. Wykeham*, p. 526.

¹⁶⁷ *Reg. Langley*, 5:16. “Ultimo die ejusdem mensis dominus in manerio suo supradicto concessit litteras indulgencie Willelmo de Brynne de parochia de Brayton prope Selby Eboracensis diocesis, qui ut dominus acceperat, cu ipse una cum Richardo Rikall pistore de Ebor’ et Henrico del Wode de Brynne predicta pro

they stood surety for another who defaulted on a loan, as happened to John Thorneton of Benwell¹⁶⁸ and the merchant Robert Bard of York, among others.¹⁶⁹ Others were simply poor and in debt, seemingly part of a working underclass that could not keep ahead of bills or creditors. John Haulghton was a dealer in animal skins who landed in debtors' prison, likely for default on loans he arranged himself, as the record makes no mention of sureties or lack of culpability.¹⁷⁰ Others also landed in prison for unpaid debts, as in the situation of William Hunter, a peddler, and his wife Alice. Although the reasons for their poverty or debt are not made clear, they petitioned and were successful in obtaining assistance from the bishop because of their poverty and indebtedness.¹⁷¹

The bishops' response to indebtedness is interesting. First, in several cases where indebtedness was the root cause of poverty, we find hints that character witnesses were

quodam Henrico Chyldeyong firmario grangie de Trenmore Hall in parochia predicta penes dominum Willelmum Hesenhull militem dominum ejusdem grangie ut fidejussor intervenerat et se obligaverat in xlvii libras, prefatis Henrico del wode confidejussore suo et Henrico Chyldeyong principali debitore se a partibus illis inhumaniter subtrahentibus ac prefato Ricardo Rikall altero confidejussore decedente, solus remansit prefato domino Willelmo pro integra summa predicta debitor obligatus, quam quidem summam licet ipse pro solucione ejusdem sit per partem dicti domini Willelmi graviter persecutus, solvere non poterit quovis modo nisi sibi Christi fidelium elemosinis misericorditer succurratur, ut in forma communi, usque ad festum sancti Johannis baptiste tantummodo duraturas.

¹⁶⁸ *Reg. Langley*, 4:64-5. "Xvii die dicti mensis dominus in manerio suo de // Aukland concessit xl dies indulgencie omnibus parochianis suis et aliis etc. qui ad subsidium et auxilium Johannis Thorneton de Benwell sua diocesis, qui ut informamur non ex aliqua causa seu culpa sue sed ex fidejussione et intervencione pro aliis debitoribus se diversis personis obligando in tantum ipsorum infidelium pro quibus sic fidejussit est debitis oneratus quod non solum omnia bona sua verum eciam pro satisfaccione debitorum hujusmodi Christi fidelium elemosinas petere cogitur et artatur, et quod magis dolendum est idem Johannes sepius ex causis antedictis gravibus carceribus miserabiliter extitit mancipatus. Et emanarunt littere in forma communi per unum annum a dato earundem tantummodo durature, etc."

¹⁶⁹ *Reg. Stafford*, 13. "Bard, Robert, a merchant of York, having become surety for one Robert Sauplers of that city, had been imprisoned for a half year, for default. The Bishop grants an Indulgence to all the faithful who should provide Theobalda, his wife, with funds for his relief" [Editor's translation]. See also *Ely Episcopal Records*, 402. In cases of surety for debt, Glanvill suggested that each surety for a debt would be held liable severally for the entirety of the debt. P. Brand, "Aspects of the Law of Debt, 1189-1307," in *Credit and Debt in Medieval England*, P.R. Schofield and N.J. Mayhew, eds. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2002), 21.

¹⁷⁰ *Reg. Stafford*, 125. The memorandum reads, "Haulghton, John, *fellmonger*, of London, long imprisoned and in great poverty. Indulgence for his relief. 16 July 1411." [Editor's translation]

¹⁷¹ *Reg. Wykeham*, 526. "Indulgence granted to those who should relieve William Hunter of Winchester, "chepman" and Alice his wife, they being poor and in debt" [Editor's note]. For other cases, see *Ely Episcopal Records*, 403, 406.

provided in the petitioning process. One instance in particular gives us some insight into how the impoverished and the indebted may have needed to substantiate their claims to worthy poverty. John Rypon of Staindrop provided the sworn testimony of “*quamplurimum fidedignorum*” to Archbishop Langley, who likely swore that John’s indebtedness and resultant poverty were not due to negligence or fault on his part.¹⁷² It could be the case that petitioners for assistance on the basis of debt were especially sensitive to claims of imprudence or wastefulness and therefore needed to provide a defense of worthy character. It could also be that it was a more general practice for petitioners claiming any sort of poverty to provide witnesses. The record is not clear on this matter. What is clear is that the bishops do not chastise successful petitioners for carelessness or lack of prudence on entering into loan agreements when their financial situations were already so precarious. They do not find moral fault with the petitioner for his or her indebtedness. Rather, we find the bishops observing the oppressive nature of debt to a person in financial distress, as in the case of John Cook. The loans he had taken out to improve his property were now impeding his ability to recover from the flood that had swept his goods and livelihood away.¹⁷³ In John Cook’s grant and in others the bishops made a causal connection between debt and poverty. In many cases, we find people who present themselves as financially self-sufficient prior to a disaster or loss, but fell into debt as a consequence of the loss. John Preston was a burgess and skinner from

¹⁷² *Reg. Langley*, 5:18. “Xxviii die ejusdem mensis dominus in eodem manerio suo concessit litteras indulgencie Johanni de Rypon de Stayndrop sue diocesis qui, ut ex quamplurimum fidedignorum testimonio dominus acceperat, non ex culpa seu negligencia sua sed tam per fidejussionem et obligationem suiipsius pro quibusdam notis et amicis suis diversis eorum creditoribus quam per alia diversa mundi infortunia sibi contingencia de statu prospero et felici ad tantam tamque importabilem inopiam est dejectus quod null a sibi remanent bona de quibus aut summas pecunie in quibus ex causis predictis indebitatus existit solvere aut se uxorem et liberos suos cum quibus multum oneratur, sustentare valeat quovis modo nisi sibi Christi fidelium elemosinis misericorditer succurratur, usque ad festum sancte Trinitatis proximo futurum tantummodo duraturas.”

¹⁷³ *Reg. Langley*, 4:35-6. For full text, see above, n. 137.

Newcastle-on-Tyne, and one of the wealthier persons of influence we find in the registers to benefit from an indulgence. He fell into debt after a ship carrying his merchandise was captured by the Scots. John had been depending on the receipt and sale of the goods to repay his creditors; when the goods never arrived and he was unable to repay, his London creditors had him arrested and imprisoned.¹⁷⁴

The oppressive nature of debt, particularly to individuals and families on the precarious border of sufficiency, is clearly expressed in the grants of indulgence on behalf of people suffering from life-cycle poverty or from poverty brought on by disability or devastating loss. Those with businesses destroyed by fire, flood or acts of God found themselves with the task of rebuilding, and also in need of compensating those customers or business partners whose goods were also destroyed. Agnes the cloth finisher,¹⁷⁵ James Robson the Tailor,¹⁷⁶ John Pedlynge the skinner,¹⁷⁷ and John Taylor¹⁷⁸ found themselves indebted to others as a result of loss. Cottagers and manor tenants also found themselves in debt when their dwellings went up in flames. They may have been sufficient prior to the loss, but the obligations to rebuild or replace the lost housing or buildings tipped them into debt and into want. John Dossee of Redmershill had a typical medieval long-house with housing for the family at one end and a barn at the other, in

¹⁷⁴ *Reg. Langley*, 4:185. "... Cum itaque ut accepimus dilectus filius Johannes Preston burgensis et pelliparius ville Novi Castri super Tynam nostre diocesis certa mercimonia sibi congruencia a diversis mercatoribus London' nuper comparasset et ea per mare versus dictam villam Novi Castri destinasset, navis ipsa in qua reposita erant ipsa mercimonia una cum ipsis mercimoniis per inimicos nostros Scocie super mare hostiliter capta fuit, dictusque Johannes propter mercimonia predicta prefatis mercatoribus suis in tantum est indebitatus ipsorum mercimoniorum captione causante ut preferatur quod nedum omnia bona sua que prius habuit vendere, immo et ipse ac uxor et filii sui in relevamen inopie sue pro satisfactione hujusmodi debiti sui Christi fidelium elemonsinas petere sunt coacti, et quod magis dolendum est idem Johannes qui olim cum se et suis honeste vivere consueverat ex causis antedictis per predictos creditores suos modo ar[r]estatus apud London' diris carceribus et vinculis detinetur."

¹⁷⁵ See above, n. 120, 123.

¹⁷⁶ *Reg. Langley*, 4:163.

¹⁷⁷ *Reg. Spofford*, p. 217.

¹⁷⁸ *Reg. Stanbury*, p. 68.

which he stored corn and other goods for himself and a neighbor. A fire destroyed it all, obliging John to face not only the cost of rebuilding but also the cost of compensating his neighbor.¹⁷⁹ In these cases, indebtedness was multiplied by catastrophe, resulting in imprisonment for some and preventing others from the possibility of a full recovery.

Indulgences and Poverty

From these records a basic profile emerges of the kinds of people who would have petitioned bishops for assistance. The “middling sort” and below—merchants, manor tenants, cloth workers, farmers, peddlers, the aged and disabled—make up the bulk of the grants: people without a superfluity of wealth or access to it through other social or familial connections. For the most part, they appear to be people who are unaccustomed to penury or to asking strangers for financial support. The support of a bishop in the form of an indulgence offered on their behalf could have offered validation of their appeals for help and the worthiness of their situation. Why the need for validation? First, because they were, in essence, begging—asking strangers or near-strangers for financial support—in a period in which attitudes toward begging and poverty had narrowed or become more focused in favor of traditional notions of worthy need, such as the widow and the orphan. Second, many of them appear to have been able-bodied persons of some sufficiency prior to their fall in fortune, persons for whom asking strangers for money could have been embarrassing and difficult. Able-bodied and without readily apparent physical limitation, these people could have been discriminated against in their efforts to raise funds. The ability to offer an indulgence in exchange for material generosity could

¹⁷⁹ *Reg. Langley*, 5:17. There are several memoranda that indicate householders in similar situations to John Dossee: *Reg. Langley*, 4:78, 143, 203; 5:17, 21 .

have offered the petitioner a level of validation and protection from embarrassment or accusations of fraud or indolence.

The number of requests for episcopal assistance through the grant of an indulgence was relatively small, given the presumably higher rate of sudden impoverishment in the general population. For instance, although the incidence of damage by theft was regularly noted in the court rolls and inquests,¹⁸⁰ we find relatively few grants of indulgence addressing the issue. So, too, fire was a rather common cause of damage to property and life,¹⁸¹ and it is surprising to find only seventy or so instances in the surviving records of bishops granting indulgences to individuals impoverished by fire.¹⁸² Likewise, damage to property caused by floods was also not a rare occurrence, yet we find only one grant to John Cook, whose cattle and crops were carried away in 1431 by the burgeoning rivers Ouse and Trent, leaving him unable to support his family, pay his bills or his creditors.¹⁸³ Certainly others suffered similar damage in the wet years of the later Middle Ages, yet curiously, Cook's indulgence was the only one in the registers issued to a victim of flooding. This same observation applies as well to debt, disability, old age, and life-cycle poverty. This discrepancy indicates that indulgences were likely one of several options for meeting the challenges presented by sudden impoverishment.

¹⁸⁰ B. Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 65-96; passim, *Select Cases from the Coroners' Rolls, 1265-1413*.

¹⁸¹ passim, *Select Cases from the Coroners' Rolls, 1265-1413*

¹⁸² Bishop Langley of Durham enregistered the most grants for victims of fire, offering twenty-five different indulgences. Bekynton (Bath and Wells) recorded two; Langham of Canterbury, two; Stafford of Exeter, two; Lacy of Hereford, one; Spofford of Hereford, one; Stanbury of Hereford, two; Rotherham of York, one; Fordham of Ely, twenty; Bouchier of Ely, six; Alcock of Ely, seven; Goodrich and West of Ely, three.

¹⁸³ See above, n. 137.

That said, there are several reasons as to why the number of indulgences for the impoverished in episcopal records do not accurately reflect levels of poverty in the general population. First, as has been noted previously, episcopal records are notoriously uneven and therefore should not be expected to offer an accurate analysis of the total number of indulgences given on behalf of the poor. At best, they offer us a qualitative understanding of who sought indulgences and for what reasons, as well as why bishops offered them and what they hoped to accomplish by doing so. Second, the great proportion of this particular type of indulgence comes from post-plague, fifteenth-century England, a period when the overall rate of poverty dropped dramatically. Fewer requests for assistance could reflect this decrease in poverty. However, as was pointed out earlier, because of increasing work opportunities and wages, this was also a period in which the able-bodied poor were discriminated against in favor of those suffering from visible disability, whether that disability emerged as a result of physical limitations, old age, or dependents.

Indulgences and Solidarity with the Poor

In the previous section, we considered the reasons for which petitioners sought indulgences from their bishop. Yet, in order for an indulgence to be of use to an impoverished individual, others needed to participate in the process. Why, for instance, did bishops grant indulgences to people such as these? How were these grants of indulgence and their beneficiaries received by others? Who would have responded? One of the difficulties in determining the response to indulgences for individuals needing financial assistance are the records themselves: much of the evidence comes from the

granting bishops, rather than from the beneficiaries and those who supported them. It is difficult to establish who exactly would have responded, but it could be assumed that indulgences would not have been necessary to encourage assistance from family, friends and neighbors—those who would have responded first out of natural affinity or solidarity and for whom the inducement of an indulgence would have been superfluous. However, grants of indulgence were likely more useful in encouraging donations from people outside these natural social networks or who lay outside other affinity groups, such as guilds or fraternities, or who lay outside of the petitioner’s town or village.

In an age in which indulgences were easily available and offered for a wide array of activities, from praying for the dead to whispering devotional prayers to donating to causes such as bridge-building or church construction, and when papal grants offered relaxation from penance numbered in years, what sort of attraction could a forty-day indulgence for assisting someone suffering from poverty have? It is a natural question, informed by modern assumptions about market forces and behavioral economics. Many past studies of indulgences have tended to look at them through the lens of modern economic theory, that is, as exchanges taking place within a market, much like any good sold for money. As a form of market exchange, then, the decision to obtain an indulgence should be governed, in theory, by rational choice and concerns about optimization of resources. Indulgences, understood this way, are isolated, impersonal exchanges—a sort of one-time experience for both buyer and seller. A market exchange creates neither obligation nor necessitates reciprocity between buyer and seller, and the relationship is ended when the transaction is completed. It has been the tendency of

earlier scholars¹⁸⁴ to reduce indulgences in this way, treating them simply as an interaction or contract in which money and goods are exchanged.

Indulgences, however, are more complicated than that, defying neoclassical market analysis. In the indulgences for the impoverished—in fact, as for most types of indulgences—price or level of donation was not specified or fixed. Anyone could obtain the indulgence as long as they offered some sort of material help, in cash or in kind.¹⁸⁵ Inasmuch as a transfer of material wealth took place between benefactor and beneficiary, any reciprocal benefit to the benefactor was much delayed until after death. Furthermore, most indulgences worked *ex opere operantis*, requiring the one obtaining the indulgence to possess the proper disposition (contrite and confessed) in order for the indulgence to be effective.

Because of their complexity, indulgences for impoverished individuals discussed above beg for a new way of situating them. Since the 1980s, medievalists have argued that exchanges such as charitable donations should be interpreted in light of the gift exchange theory as proposed by Marcel Mauss. Mauss contended that exchange in pre-modern societies could not be adequately understood in terms of an impersonal market, particularly exchanges that are aimed at fostering or maintaining social relationships.¹⁸⁶ Rather, gift-giving is a more appropriate term for characterizing these types and functions of exchange. Far from being an isolated, unilateral act, gift-giving implied on-going exchange, reciprocity and mutuality, and was used to construct networks of social

¹⁸⁴ For a classic example, R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 136-143.

¹⁸⁵ Swanson offers an interesting study on bead pardons, or indulgences given for saying specific prayers. In these cases, market explanations no longer apply, as no money or material assistance changes hands. R.N. Swanson, “Praying for Pardon: Devotional Indulgences in Late Medieval England” in *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merits: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 215-240.

¹⁸⁶ M. Mauss, “Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l’échange dans les sociétés archaïques” in *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, ed. C. Lévi-Strauss (1950; repr. Paris, 1993), 143-279.

commitments or bonds that transcended the value of the gift itself. For a gift, once received, obligated a return, thus repeating and extending the exchange.¹⁸⁷

Miri Rubin and others have rightly pointed out that charity in the medieval period was shaped by the cultural assumptions, expectations, and practices of a gift economy.¹⁸⁸ Notions of market exchange, utility, and rational choice theory are insufficient to account for charitable bequests given to benefit myriad medieval social and religious causes, such as the foundations of hospitals, monasteries, almshouses, leprosaria, churches, chapels and chantries, to name a few. It is more useful and accurate to interpret charitable donations in light of a gift economy based on reciprocity and mutual obligation, rather than in terms of the market economy, which, during the time period under consideration, was in its infancy and just beginning to take shape.

Like Rubin's charitable bequests, indulgences for the impoverished are perhaps best understood in the context of a society built upon the assumptions and expectations of a gift economy. In the case of indulgences, mutuality and reciprocity were present in the exchange between benefactor and recipient. Mutuality was certainly present, for each party benefitted: the needy person gained assistance, and the donor gained spiritual assistance in the form of an indulgence. Reciprocity, too, was inherent in the exchange, and both immediate and generalized. In exchange for assistance, the benefactor immediately received the opportunity to obtain an indulgence, but also benefitted from the expectation of future, generalized reciprocity created by the donation: that should the

¹⁸⁷ A. Vandeveld, "Towards a Conceptual Map of Gift Practices," in *Gifts and Interests*, ed. A. Vandeveld, *Morality and the Meaning of Life* series 9 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 1-20; J. Godbout, *The World of the Gift* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998).

¹⁸⁸ Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 1-13. For a brief historiography of medieval gift exchange, see A.-J. Bijsterveld, "The Medieval Gift as an Agent of Social Bonding and Political Power: A Comparative Approach" in *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power and Gifts in Context*, ed. E. Cohen and M. de Jong (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 123-156, esp. at 127-137.

benefactor need help in the future, someone would repay his or her present generosity with assistance.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the exchange that took place between benefactor and beneficiary went beyond the gains from trade to include “the satisfactions of regard.”¹⁹⁰ Particularly for beneficiary, the attention and time given to their plight, in addition to material help, could be the materialization of an attitude of approbation, of regard.

Indulgences for those struck by poverty could also extend and reinforce certain types of bonds or relationships within a society. Historians of social relationships in medieval England have usually emphasized vertical/hierarchical dynamics, as in the case of Bainbridge’s exploration of guilds,¹⁹¹ or lateral/collaborative bonds, as in Rosser and Bennett’s studies of local communities,¹⁹² among others. More recently, Terpstra and others have proposed a more complex, multi-layered understanding of social dynamics.¹⁹³ Certain activities reinforce ties within a peer group, and are referred to as “bonding,” while “bridging” dynamics create new ties between two or more discrete groups. An indulgence could act as a bonding agent, encouraging benefaction from affinity groups such a family, friends, parish, guild, or village, but it is more probable that a grant of indulgence would have offered greater impetus for bridging, cutting across traditional social or legal boundaries.

¹⁸⁹ Robert Putnam argues that exchanges such as these generalize the benefits far beyond the original parties, bolstering social trust more generally in a community. Gift-giving or mutual assistance accrues benefit immediately to the recipient, but also can create benefits felt beyond the initial exchange, accruing to the community in general. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19-23.

¹⁹⁰ A. Offer, “Between the Gift and the Market: The Economy of Regard,” *Economic History Review* n.s. 50 (1997), 450-476.

¹⁹¹ V. Bainbridge, *Gilds in the Medieval English Countryside*.

¹⁹² J. Bennett, “Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England” *Past and Present* 134 (1992), 19-41; G. Rosser, “Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations,” *Journal of British Studies* 134 (1994): 430-446.

¹⁹³N. Terpstra, “De-institutionalizing Confraternity Studies: Fraternalism and Social Capital in Cross-Cultural Contexts,” *Early Modern Confraternities in Europe and the Americas*, ed. C. Black and P. Gravestock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 264-283.M. Woolcock and D. Narayan, “Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy,” *World Bank Research Observer* 15 (2000): 225-249.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this type of indulgence was about the attempt to foster solidarity between the impoverished and those possessing material means, particularly in a period that witnessed greater antagonism toward or disregard for those in poverty. The prescriptive literature of sermon, prayerbook and treatise encouraged recognition of mutual need between possessor and dispossessed, while also privileging the traditional position of the widow, the orphan, the old and infirm as the focus of charity. However, the inclusion of men and women who had fallen from sufficiency into insufficiency but who, for whatever reason, lacked sufficient social or political access to material assistance indicates a more nuanced definition of want on the part of bishops, petitioners and benefactors.

Indulgences for the impoverished fulfilled several social functions. They represented one possible strategy for dealing with poverty. In the “mixed economy of care” characteristic of late medieval England, indulgences for the impoverished operated alongside parishes, guilds, fraternities, hospitals and informal networks in effort to mitigate material want. Indulgences also fulfilled other social functions, particularly in creating opportunities for bridging to occur between disparate persons separated by geography or affinity. They could also reinforce existing bonds within a community. They also participated in a gift economy of regard, in which benefactor and beneficiary encountered each other’s mutual need in a transfer that was at once material, spiritual and social.

Chapter Three

The Expectation of Solidarity: Ransom Indulgences in the Hundred Years' War

In July of 1430, a lone sailor by the name of Richard Lamb appeared before Bishop Langley of Durham, needing help. His ship, the English merchant vessel *Le Mary*, was captured at sea by the French, during a renewal of hostilities in the Hundred Years' War.¹⁹⁴ The ship was seized and he and his fellow sailors were taken hostage, later to end up in the cheerless prison of St. Malo's, Brittany. Required to pay steep ransoms, the sailors were unable to raise the large sums necessary to buy their freedom. A deal was eventually reached that allowed some of the sailors to return to England to raise the ransom, while the rest remained behind, imprisoned as pledges. Richard Lamb was one of the sailors sent to raise the ransoms, and he turned to the bishop of Durham for help. The bishop offered his assistance in the form of an indulgence: anyone who helped Richard Lamb redeem his fellow sailors would receive forty days' indulgence. Lamb's request for help was recorded in the folios of Bishop Langley's register, and other ransom indulgences like it are found scattered throughout the English episcopal registers of the fifteenth century. Some occur in reference to the crusades, but most ransom indulgences recorded in the English episcopal registers were granted on behalf of men captured as a result of the Hundred Years' War.

Indulgences and ransoms in the English context have enjoyed greater scholarly attention in the last decade. R.N. Swanson's deeply researched *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* argued for a re-evaluation of the importance

¹⁹⁴ *Reg. Langley*, 3:196.

of indulgences in the religious and economic landscape of medieval England. Swanson dealt with ransom indulgences as part of broader effort on the part of bishops to assist the impoverished, but the breadth of his work meant that he was unable to give ransom indulgences and those who sought them the closer look they merit. More recently, Rémy Ambühl has explored the ransoming of English captives of the Hundred Years' War and offered insight into the variety of options available to captives seeking to raise ransoms. However, indulgences were not mentioned as a possible source of assistance, perhaps because of the study's focus on men of rank and their strategies for securing freedom. A closer reading of ransom indulgences can tell us much about the rank or status of the people who sought them, the conditions of captivity, and cost of freedom. They also disclose the paraenetic aims and social purposes of the granting bishops. In many ways, ransom indulgences were an opportunity for bishops to encourage greater charity and solidarity amongst their parishioners, and to remind medieval Christians of the values and commitments they ought to espouse as a community. They also reveal to us the variety of rhetorical tools that bishops used in different situations to spur Christians to solidarity, charity and action. Ultimately, these indulgences were a vital resource for oppressed persons, a paraenetic tool for bishops, and a mechanism through which Christians could reaffirm shared beliefs about community and neighbor and participate in the shaping of that community.

The practice of ransoming captives was long regarded as a particularly pious work from the earliest moments of the Christian Church's life.¹⁹⁵ The act of redeeming from captivity a fellow Christian was seen as a particularly Christ-like, merciful act and was

¹⁹⁵ Matt. 25: 36, 39, 43; Heb. 13:3 and Heb. 10:34.

lauded and encouraged in the paraenetic and apologetic writings of Clement, Hermas, Ignatius, Tertullian, Augustine and others.¹⁹⁶ The notion of redemption from captivity in early Christian literature possessed the moral imperative, inherited from the Hebrew biblical tradition and continued by New Testament exhortations, to praxis: to minister to or buy the freedom of those in chains, especially those imprisoned for their faith.¹⁹⁷ Writing in times of ecclesial disruption and persecution in which Christians were vulnerable to false imprisonment or harsh sentences *ad bestias*, Christian writers, anxious for the spiritual and physical welfare of captives, urged their audiences to raise funds corporately or privately to provide nourishment, encouragement and freedom to those in bondage.

From the twelfth century onward, particularly in the context of the crusades and reconquista, Christians concerned with the physical captivity of fellow-Christians in Muslim hands continued the early Christian rhetoric of redemption. While worry for their physical welfare was clearly present, the danger of apostasy faced by captives and anxiety for their spiritual welfare formed the heart of papal and episcopal communications aimed at fostering greater attention to the problem of captive Christians.¹⁹⁸ As a means of encouraging broader public participation in redemptions,

¹⁹⁶ 1 Clement, *Letter* 59.4; Hermas, *Mandata* 8.10, Ignatius, *Smyrn*, 6.2; Tertullian, *Apology*, 39.5-6; St. Augustine, *Sermon on Martha and Mary*, 104.

¹⁹⁷ *Didascalia Apostolorum* 19. For discussions of the development of the tradition of ransoming captives in the early Christian Church, see Carolyn Osiek, 'The ransom of captives: evolution of a tradition,' *Harvard Theological Review* 74:4 (Oct. 1981), 365-386; John Byron, *Slavery metaphors in early Judaism and Pauline Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 162 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); J A Harrill, *The manumission of slaves in early Christianity*, Hermeneutische untersuchungen zur theologie 32 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 158-196.

¹⁹⁸ B. Bolton, 'Do you not know? Innocent III's approach to the release of captives,' *La liberazione dei 'captivi' tra Cristianità e Islam*, ed. G. Cipollone, *Collectanea Archivi Vaticani* 46 (Citta del Vaticano: Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 2000), 451-467; G. Cipollone, *Cristianità-Islam: Cattivà e liberazione in nome di Dio. Il tempo di Innocenzo III dopo 'il 1187'* (Rome: Università Gregoriana, 1992).

popes and bishops offered indulgences to those who assisted as much as they were able in what was regarded as one of the seven works of mercy.¹⁹⁹

Yet capture, imprisonment and subsequent ransoms in the medieval period did not occur solely in the context of the Christian-Muslim conflict. Wars between Christian kings and emperors, such as the Hundred Years' War between England and France, resulted in the capture and imprisonment of Christians by Christians. This complicated the rhetoric of ransoming and the application of indulgences to redemptions, for the traditional reasons why one ought to ransom a captive no longer applied: an English bishop could not refer to a French captor as an 'enemy of Christ,' the language often used to describe Muslim captors in the Mediterranean, nor was there the immediate concern for apostasy amongst captives. English episcopal records are remarkable for the detail included in the texts of indulgences offered on behalf of English captives in French hands who had turned to their bishop for assistance in meeting ransom demands for their freedom. They offer insight into the circumstances and experience of captivity during the Hundred Years' War, as well as the financial arrangements and strategies used by prisoners of war to meet ransom demands. They also reveal a shift in rhetoric away from concern for the spiritual welfare of the captive, as was stressed in the case of Christians held by Muslims, and toward an emphasis on the physical suffering and the material poverty of the captive.

Ransom and Captivity in the Hundred Years' War

The taking of captives for ransom as guarantees of submission or alliance had been a well-established practice within the conventions of medieval European warfare.

Captives as hostages for monetary ransom entered into greater practice in the twelfth century and expanded during the Hundred Years' War.²⁰⁰ Ransom offered an attractive and potentially lucrative source of income from captured combatants and non-combatants alike, as a method for mitigating the financial costs attendant to war and for increasing one's profits. Throughout the later Middle Ages, the treatment of captives and the ransoms set for their release were increasingly circumscribed by regulation, and were governed by a complex and changing system of law and custom aimed at the just disbursement of the spoils of war and the restriction of violence. Clerics and kings alike had sought to bring the practice under their control and supervision by means of law. The peace movements of the tenth century found later echoes in the cleric Honoré Bonet's *Tree of Battles*, which upheld the traditional expectation that non-combatants should be spared the direct effects of armed conflict.²⁰¹ He also reiterated the customary expectations of the 'courteous' treatment and ransoming of captives, and that their treatment and ransom should correspond in some way to their rank and status.²⁰² Kings also sought to control the practices surrounding captivity and ransom more directly for reasons of finance or diplomacy, either by requiring that captives of a certain rank be handed over to them, or that they should at least receive a portion of the proceeds of the ransom.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ A. Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 2012, 110-121. Kosto argues that the practice of ransom in exchange for payment emerged in western Europe during the twelfth century as an adaptation of ransoming practices seen in the Levant and in Iberia, and became widespread practice during the Hundred Years' War.

²⁰¹ C. Taylor, *Chivalry and the ideals of knighthood in France during the Hundred Years' War*, Cambridge 2013, 208-230.

²⁰² Honoré Bonet, *The Tree of Battles*, G.W. Coopland, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), Bk. IV, cap. 15, 43, 47, 93-95.

²⁰³ M. Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, 188-191; P. Contamine, "Growth of State Control. The Practices of War, 1300-1800: Ransom and Booty," in *War and Competition Between States*, P. Contamine, ed. (New

In the the latter half of the Hundred Years' War, the practice of ransoming captives increased, and by the fifteenth century, ransoms came to account for the greater part of booty taken in the conflicts.²⁰⁴ In spite of the conventions of war which held that captives were to be treated and ransomed courteously, these standards were not always heeded. There existed no insignificant gap between the king's theoretical claims and his ability to intervene or control the private interests of the men who fought for him.²⁰⁵ Particularly in the case of the French side of the conflict, the king was much less able to control and intervene in the treatment and ransom of English prisoners than his counterpart on the other side of the Channel.²⁰⁶ The relative lack of state oversight created situations which were potentially disastrous for captives, as the captains of war regularly flouted custom in the attempt to recover material losses or solidify wartime gains.

Although spiritual harm and apostasy were not present dangers for captives in an inter-Christian conflict like the Hundred Years' War, bodily distress and financial ruin certainly did threaten. If war was hell for all involved, for those captured and held in enemy territories, the misery extended beyond the battlefield, to one's person and one's purse. Nor were captives the only ones to experience distress; family, friends, business associates, and communities were affected as they assisted captives in raising ransom funds. English episcopal records are remarkable for the detail included in the texts of

York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 167-170; C. Given-Wilson and F. Bériac, "Edward III's Prisoners of War: The Battle of Poitiers and its Context," *EHR* 116 (2001), 809.

²⁰⁴ M. K. Jones, "Ransom Brokerage in the Fifteenth Century" in *Guerre et société en France, en Angleterre et en Bourgogne XIVe-XVe siècle*, ed. P. Contamine, C. Giry-Deloison, and M. Keen (Villeneuve d'Ascq, Fr.: Université Charles de Gaulle Lille III, 1991), 222-3; Contamine, "Growth of State Control," 174.

²⁰⁵ J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War, vol. III: Houses Divided*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 773.

²⁰⁶ Contamine, "Growth of State Control," 175.

indulgences granted on behalf of English captives in French hands who turned to their bishops for assistance. They offer insight into the circumstances and experience of captivity during the Hundred Years' War, as well as the financial arrangements and strategies used by prisoners of war to meet ransom demands.

War afforded the opportunity for great financial gain and prestige, so much so that the promise of profit trumped the great cost and risk that armed conflict hazarded for both combatants and non-combatants alike.²⁰⁷ For those lucky enough to escape death in battle but who had fallen unluckily into captivity, the costs of warfare could be onerous. Until c. 1200, Christian captives held by Muslims in the context of the Crusades faced the unhappy prospect of death or perpetual slavery;²⁰⁸ later, strategies for freedom included apostasy (which afforded immediate liberation), flight, liberation through battle, exchange of prisoners, and ransom.²⁰⁹ Christian captives in Christian hands, however, no longer faced the threat of enslavement or summary execution while in captivity,²¹⁰ nor did they face the same pressure to apostasize. The most common paths to liberation for English captives in French or Scottish hands were through an exchange of captives or

²⁰⁷ P. Contamine, "The growth of state control," 164, 173.

²⁰⁸ Enslavement of non-Muslims was common practice in the Muslim world from the times of the earliest caliphates. See H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 2003), *passim*; N. Matar, 'England and mediterranean captivity, 1577-1704' *Piracy, slavery, and redemption: Barbary captivity narratives from early modern England*, ed. D. Vitkus (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 9-23. Prior to 1000 C.E., enslavement upon capture was a possibility in European warfare, but declined rather swiftly after the turn of the millenium. J. Dunbabin, *Captivity and Imprisonment in Medieval Europe, 1000-1300* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 8.

²⁰⁹ J. Brodman, *Ransoming captives in crusader Spain: the order of Merced on the Christian-Islamic frontier* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 6-7; Cipollone, *Cristianità-Islam: Cattività e liberazione in nome di Dio*, 223.

²¹⁰ It should be noted that there was considerable discrimination in determining who among the defeated would be held captive for ransom. Andrew King points out that in many instances in the battles and skirmishes along the Scottish marches, knights would be held for ransom while common men-at-arms were executed. Captives were an investment, and only those men who had the potential to bring handsome ransoms or strategic advantage were worth the cost of maintaining in captivity. A. King, "According to the custom used in the French and Scottish wars': Prisoners and casualties on the Scottish Marches in the fourteenth century," *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002), 269-271.

through ransom.²¹¹ Although brokering an exchange of captives of like rank and status was possible, ransom was a favourite means of profiting from war for many captors on both sides in the latter years of the French-English conflict.²¹²

As an indulgence offered on behalf of two impoverished English men-at-arms indicates, ransoms set by captors could be ruinous. Bishop Thomas Bekynton of Bath and Wells recounted the plight of David Frenssh and Thomas Walsh, two men-at-arms well-acquainted with French prisons, and granted forty days' indulgence to any who assisted them:

... they have spent long years in the king's wars in the realm of France, the duchy of Normandy and elsewhere, have been taken prisoner many times, have sold their inheritances, possessions and goods to pay excessive and intolerable ransoms for their delivery from captivity, and now at last have been driven out of the said realm and duchy, crossing with white staves in their hands and leaving behind them the few goods that remained to them, so that they are by miserable want and poverty reduced to begging.²¹³

Evidently imprisoned in France more than once while fighting in the 'king's wars', Frenssh and Walsh were bankrupted by the necessity of meeting the ransoms demanded for their freedom. And, as their experience shows, captivity and payment for ransom was burdensome, if not financially devastating. Nor were they alone. Men of higher rank were ransomed, like Sir John Bouchier, captured in Brittany in 1371, who was held for three times the revenues of his estates. It took his wife four years to raise a sufficient sum to gain his release upon promise of full repayment, leaving him bodily free but financially imprisoned by the outstanding debt.²¹⁴

²¹¹ *ibid.*

²¹² M. K. Jones, 'Ransom brokerage in the fifteenth century,' 229-231.

²¹³ *Reg. Bekynton*, 155. Editor's translation.

²¹⁴ M. Jones, "Fortunes et malheurs de guerre. Autour de la rançon du chevalier anglais Jean Bouchier," in *La guerre, la violence et les gens au moyen âge*, ed. P. Contamine and O. Guyotjeannin (Paris: Editions du CTHS, 1996), 189-208.

Although custom suggested that captors set ‘courteous’ ransoms proportionate to the captive’s income so as not leave him and his family destitute, and although they proposed a maximum ransom valued at five or six times the captive’s annual income, very often captors overestimated their prisoner’s worth and required ransoms beyond the prisoner’s means to pay.²¹⁵ The means of assessing a captive’s ransom were highly dubious and variable, as the assessment of a captive’s worth most likely relied on the rank, status and reputation of the captive, which was a highly inaccurate method in a day and age when none of those criteria necessarily corresponded to financial worth. Leland observed that men of rank such as Sir Thomas Kyriell spent years in captivity, and his brother John spent twenty years in France awaiting his ransom, presumably because the ransoms surpassed their private financial resources.²¹⁶ For English captives of slimmer means, such as Frenssh and Walsh, the ransoms set by their captors likely overestimated their resources and far outstripped their immediate ability to pay, which translated into an extended captivity and a reduced likelihood for an easy and quick return home.

Ransoms had a way of inflating, too. Captives were a drain on the resources of the captor, and very often, the cost of maintenance incurred over time by captors was passed on to their captives. In addition, the existence of a market for the sale and purchase of prisoners of war had significant implications for captives: an already excessive ransom could be further inflated through the buying and selling of captives, with the purchaser charging a higher ransom to cover the cost of his investment and to bring a profit.²¹⁷ Whatever the reason for or level of inflation of the prescribed

²¹⁵ Contamine, 222-223.

²¹⁶ John Leland, *Leland’s Itinerary in England and Wales*, L. Toulmin Smith, ed., 5 vols. (London: 1907-1910), IV: 34.

²¹⁷ Jones, ‘Ransom Brokerage,’ 224-5.

‘courteous’ ransom, it is clear that a single excessive ransom, or as in the case of Frenssh and Walsh, the payment of multiple and perhaps disproportionate ransoms, could end in complete bankruptcy, an injustice which Bishop Bekyngton and other bishops expressly lament in their grants.

In a time of war, men-at-arms were not the only ones to suffer captivity. Canonistic texts and law explicitly condemned the capture, the ransom, and the harming of non-combatants, which included groups such as clerics, pilgrims, women and children, the elderly and ailing, and those lawfully engaged in their daily work, such as peasants and artisans.²¹⁸ Yet although the Church plainly forbade the capture and ransoming of these groups, secular law was rather silent on the matter, thus tacitly allowing the practices of the battlefield, such as the seizure and ransom of captives, to spill over into civilian affairs and daily life.²¹⁹ Among English captives held in France, the non-combatant group most often mentioned in episcopal grants of indulgence was that of sailors aboard fishing and merchant vessels.²²⁰ Especially vulnerable to capture at sea by their king’s enemies in times of war, non-combatant English sailors often found themselves imprisoned with stiff ransoms on their heads in the French port of Saint-Malo’s, Brittany. This practice was so common during the Hundred Years’ War that the

²¹⁸ Bonet, *The Tree of Battles*, Bk. 4, cap. 99-100.

²¹⁹ N. Wright, ‘Ransoms of non-combatants during the Hundred Years’ War,’ *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991): 324.

²²⁰ There are twenty-seven instances of persons seized who were not explicitly mentioned as being in the king’s service. Twenty-five were captured at sea, while one seems to have been carried off in a raid by the French into the south of England and another was captured while trading in Aquitaine. *Reg. Langley*, 77-8, 196, 39, 91, 133; *Reg. Bekynton*, 99; *Register of Robert Hallum, Bishop of Salisbury, 1407-1417*, ed. Joyce M. Horn, Canterbury and York Society 72 (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1982), 108; *The Register of Edmund Stafford, 1395-1419; An Index and Abstract of its Contents*, ed. F C Hingeston-Randolph (London: George Bell and Sons, 1886), 38; *The Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420-1455: Registrum Commune*, ed. G R Dunstan, Devon and Cornwall Record Society n.s. 13-18 (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1963-1972), 3: 208-9; *The Register of Thomas de Brantyngham, Bishop of Exeter, 1370-1394*, ed. F C Hingeston-Randolph (London: George Bell & Sons, 1901), 433.

English and the French often negotiated in advance of renewed hostilities the rate of ransoms to be charged for sailors and their ships.²²¹ Even in times of peace, both sides often tacitly allowed piracy of enemy ships, as a point of policy or out of an inability to conserve the truce or to control their captains.²²² The complaint in 1430 of Richard Lamb and his friends, as we saw earlier, notes the financial costs of ransom to ordinary sailors captured in the ongoing hostilities in the text of an indulgence granted on their behalf:

Indulgence on behalf of certain sailors of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The lord bishop granted letters of forty days' indulgence on behalf of Richard Lamb and ten of his fellow sailors from Newcastle-on-Tyne who together were captured at sea by our enemies of Brittany from the ship *Le Mary*, owned by Thomas Papedy and John Aubell of the same city. They were held captive by the same enemies and led into Brittany where three of the said sailors are imprisoned at St. Malowes as pledges for the redemption and ransom of their associates. They cannot be freed from there without a great sum of money to be paid for their redemption or ransom, which they will be unable to pay without the alms and support of the faithful. The grant shall hold good for one year only from the date given.²²³

The experience of Mr. Lamb and his associates reveals not only the additional risk attendant on life at sea in a time of war, but also hints at the arrangements which captives could reach with their captors. Allowing eight of the English sailors to return home, the captors continued to hold three of the men as pledges for the entire group, a fairly common arrangement in the negotiating and payment of ransom.²²⁴ Those who returned home were expected to raise the ransom for themselves and their friends who were left

²²¹ Contamine, 172.

²²² C.J. Ford, "Piracy or Policy: the Crisis in the Channel, 1400-1403," in *Medieval Ships and Warfare*, ed. Susan Rose (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 105-119.

²²³ Author's translation. *Reg. Langley*, 196. Indulgentia pro quibusdam nautis Novi Castri super Tynam. Eisdem die et loco dominus concessit litteras indulgentie xl dierum Ricardo Lambe et aliis decem sociis suis nautis ville Novi Castri super Tynam qui nuper per inimicos nostros Britannie una cum navi Thome Papedy et Johannis Aubell vocata Le Mary ejusdem ville in mari capti et per ipsos inimicos captivi in Britanniam ducti sunt, ibique tres dictorum nautarum plegii pro redempcione et financia sociorum suorum predictorum diris carceribus in villa de Saint Malowes esistunt mancipati, a quibus sine magna pecuniarum summa pro ipsorum redempcione et financia persolvenda nullatenus poterunt liberari, quam quidem summan sine fidelium elemosinis et auxiliis ut dicitur solvere non valebunt, per unum annum a dato earundem tantummodo duraturas etc. ut in forma.

²²⁴ *See above*, n. 200.

behind in prison. Lamb, plainly concerned with the difficult position of his sailing companions left behind at St. Malo's and aware of his responsibility toward them, returned home to cobble together the ransom payment and turned to Bishop Langley to aid him in this endeavor. Other captive pledges were not as fortunate to have associates as conscientious as Lamb. John Person, a pledge and surety for a certain William Mottu, was apparently abandoned in captivity by Mottu, who failed to meet the remainder of the ransom demand. Person was then allowed by his French captors to go home to raise the ransom himself, under pain of re-imprisonment.²²⁵

But it was not only ordinary sailors who bore the risk of capture and the cost of subsequent ransoms; merchants and owners of ships also assumed a great deal of financial risk while operating at sea during times of hostility. For owners of vessels that fell into enemy hands, recovery of the ship, men, and goods involved heavy ransoms.²²⁶ For those whose goods had been seized as booty by the enemy and who could only hope for the return of the vessel and crew at most, the costs grew exorbitant. John Whitby, a

²²⁵ *Reg. Bekynton*, 99. The fully enregistered grant as follows: On a piteous relation by John Person the younger, of Winchester, the bearer, showing that a certain William Mottu (alias Motton) of Southampton, merchant, fell into the hands of French pirates while trading to Aquitaine, and was subsequently sold by them for 100 *l.* to a certain Richard Bradkirk, esquire, vicomte of Baieux, an that, when it came to the knowledge of the petitioner that for lack of this sum as ransom the said William was still being held in captivity, he became surety for the 60 *l.* which still remained unpaid to the said Richard, and made himself the said William's pledge and hostage in the keeping of the same Richard until that sum should be fully paid, for which kindness he has received no reward, but owing to the ingratitude of the said William, who refused to return to captivity or make provision for payment of the 60 *l.*, he is in the power of Richard and has borne for some seven years the tortures of chains and prison and the hard fare of bread and water once a day, and then not to repletion (*saturitatem*), and has moreover now become responsible, owing to the death of William Mottu, for the entire sum of 60*l.* by virtue of his suretyship, and unless this sum be fully paid within the prescribed period he must needs, in accordance with his promise and word of honour to his creditor, re-enter his dreaded prison and undergo pains not unlike those set out above, nay rather even more intolerable, it is feared; the bishop, in order to relieve the petitioner of his wretchedness and want, hereby grants forty days' indulgence to all contrite and confessed persons who shall give, bequeath or assign any of their goods for his assistance; for one year only. 22 July 1448. (Editor's translation).

²²⁶ Wright, 'Ransoms of non-combatants,' n. 11. Wright notes that merchants and their goods were highly sought captives because of their wealth and the potential for great profit from them; however, they were also some of the most litigious captives. Often, they were captured and imprisoned under the pretext of trading with and aiding the enemy.

merchant of Hartlepool, suffered financial ruin when Scottish and French pirates seized several of his ships, together with the crews and merchandise, in the summer of 1430.

[Whitby] was so burdened for so long by heavy expenses for the redemption and ransom of the aforesaid ships, men and goods, on account of which he has already fallen into such poverty that he has no means to redeem the said ship, together with the men and goods contained in them and to satisfy the creditors to whom he is indebted for the aforesaid reasons; nor does he have any means whereby he can sustain himself and his household unless he is helped in part by alms from Christians.²²⁷

In the above grant on Whitby's behalf, Bishop Langley of Durham goes on to note that it is out compassion for his poverty, which befell him through no fault of his own—an important criterion, as we saw in the previous chapter—that the bishop would grant forty days' indulgence to anyone who extended a helping hand to the destitute Whitby. But what is also interesting about this grant is the responsibility Whitby took upon himself to pay the ransoms of the men who worked on his ships. It is not clear to what degree merchants assumed responsibility for ransoming their crews, but the number of sailors and their families turning to the bishop for aid in the episcopal records certainly outstrips the number of merchants claiming poverty because of the cost of redeeming their crews.²²⁸ For merchants like Whitby, buying another's freedom from prison could mean a kind of financial captivity in the form of loan repayments or possibly even default and loss of status: six years later, we find a John Whitby approaching the same bishop not as a wealthy merchant and burgess, but as a common sailor captured by the Bretons while aboard a ship taken at sea while in the king's service.²²⁹

²²⁷ Author's translation. *Reg. Langley*, 3:198. For full text, see above, n. 1.

²²⁸ Approximately twenty-five sailors sought assistance from their bishops to meet ransom demands, while only three merchants, John Whitby of Durham diocese, asked for help from their bishops.

²²⁹ *Reg. Langley*, 4:190-91. Indulgencia. Xvii die mensis Maii [17 May 1436] anno domini supradicto dominus in manerio suo de Aukland concessit litteras indulgencie Johanni de Whitby et Ricardo Mathew de Hertilpole marinariis qui nuper, dum in servicio nostri regis versus Caleys' navigarent, fuerunt per

Although we have no detailed captivity accounts to offer insight into the treatment of captives, personal letters and grants of indulgence on their behalf do offer a glimpse. Since guarding and imprisoning a captive were private arrangements made by individual captors, conditions could range widely.²³⁰ A prison could take the form of a private home, such as the castle prison of Sir John Bouchier, or they could be purpose-built prisons in garrisons, castles or within city walls.²³¹ Even within prisons established for the purpose of criminal incarceration, prisoners were assigned to specific levels within the prison based on their status and the severity of their crime.²³² The lowest levels were often windowless, dank, crowded, and sometimes subterranean, but those of higher rank could be afforded imprisonment on a higher level, in windowed cells. Some captivity indulgences often speak of dungeons, chains, torture and hunger, as in the case of the grant on behalf of the abandoned John Person. Fyssheburn spoke of the prison at St. Malo's as terrible; others described it as a hard and brutal place.²³³

The discomfort of imprisonment was relative, also depending on the captive's status and the circumstances of their capture. Captives of higher rank might be afforded honorable confinement as called for in the chivalric and canonistic texts. Bouchier evidently had servants in attendance in his prison,²³⁴ and the accounts of Lady

Britones et alios dicti domini nostri regis et regni sui inimicos super mare capti et ad gravem redempcionem seu financiam positi, pro qua quidem redempcione seu financia incontinenti persolvenda ipsi diversis creditoribus et amicis suis graviter indebitati et obligati existunt, quibus satisfacere non poterunt quovis modo nisi sibi fidelium elemosinis misericorditer succurratur, usque ad festum natalis domini proximo futurum duraturas.

²³⁰ R. Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years' War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 118-126.

²³¹ *ibid.*, 118.

²³² G. Geltner, *The Medieval Prison: A Social History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1-27; Jean Dunbabin, *Captivity and Imprisonment in Medieval Europe 1000-1300* (Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 114-129.

²³³ *Reg. Stafford*, 38.

²³⁴ Jones, "Fortunes et malheurs de guerre," 193.

Hungerford indicate that she paid considerable sums to those who attended to her son, Robert Lord Moleyns, during his incarceration.²³⁵ Even so, other factors could intervene: the desire for revenge against a wartime enemy, or the sale of captives to secondary captors looking to turn a profit but with fewer means or inclination to provide a prison worthy of a soldier of rank. The English knight Simon Burley complained to the Parlement of Paris of harsh treatment and conditions during his long imprisonment, in spite of his status.²³⁶ However, men-at-arms, sailors, villagers seized by raiding companies, and other captives of lesser means and standing were less well-treated, left enchained in dungeons, on short rations, and without protection from the change of season.²³⁷ Of course, it is certainly plausible that the descriptions of violent treatment may have been inflated in order to induce pity for the captive so as to better raise funds for ransom; however, it should also be noted that descriptions of imprisonment similar to those found in indulgences also were used by English captives in letters sent home or in pleas before king and parliament.²³⁸

The families and friends of captives also suffered greatly from the loss of a husband, a father, or a son. Concern for the physical welfare of their loved one was not the only burden faced by families of captives; very often, they endured great financial strain on account of the loss of the main source of family income.²³⁹ Thomas Fysshburn confided to the bishop of Durham his worries over the stress that the financial burden of

²³⁵ Hicks, "Counting the Costs of War," 15.

²³⁶ P.C. Timbal, et al., *La Guerre de Cent Ans vue à travers les registres du Parlement, 1337-1369* (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1961), 322-29.

²³⁷ Wright, "Ransoms of Non-combatants," 326-328.

²³⁸ Jones, *passim*.

²³⁹ Matar, 5.

captivity would have on his wife and children. The bishop then mentioned the family's plight specifically in the indulgence granted on Fysshburn's behalf.

Piously considering the grave poverty of Thomas Fysshburn of Durham, who, as we are told, was captured by our enemies the Bretons at sea and was held captive in Brittany by them and was held in a terrible prison in the town of St. Malowes, and from which he could not be freed without a great sum of money to be paid for his redemption. He will not be able to pay this sum without the alms and support of the faithful. On account of this, aiming to excite the minds of the faithful, as much as we can, to help the needs of Thomas through the encouraging gifts of indulgences, trusting in the mercy of Almighty God, etc., we grant forty days' indulgence through the present letters to all those who give to the redemption or ransom to be paid of the said Thomas and to the relief and support of his wife and children, for whom he is especially burdened.²⁴⁰

Fysshburn was lucky to be released in order to raise his own ransom. Many times, a family member of a captive still imprisoned approached the bishop. The widow Joan Hedelham of Gatedshed sought help from the bishop of Durham when her son John failed to return on the ship *Le Kateryn*, which had been seized by Scottish pirates and allies of the French.²⁴¹ The brief memorandum of the bishop notes directly that John "cannot be released without payment of ransom," leaving the widow Hedelham to raise the ransom herself. The emotional and financial burden, then, of captivity and ransom affected not only the captive himself, but extended to wives, children, parents, siblings and friends.

²⁴⁰ Author's translation. *Reg. Langley*, 3:77-78. Indulgencia. Universis sancte matris ecclesie filiis ad quos presentes littere pervenerint Thomas etc. salutem in omnium salvatore. Gratum et acceptum deo tociens impenditur obsequium quociens operibus caritatis devocius insistitur per que redemptor humani generis ad misericordiam excitatur. Considerantes igitur pie in domino paupertatem gravem et inopiam Thome Fysshburn de Dunelm' qui ut informamur per inimicos nostros Britannie in mari captus et per ipsos captivus in Britanniam ductus ibique diris carceribus in villa Seintmalowes extitit mancipatus, a quibus sine magna pecuniarum summa pro ipsius redempcione et financia persolvenda nullatinus poterit liberari, quam quidem summam sine fidelium elemosinis et auxiliis ut dicitur solvere non valebit; et propterea affectantes fidelium mentes ad subveniendum ipsius Thome indigencis per allectiva indulgenciarum munera quantum cum deo poterimus excitare, de dei omnipotentis misericordia etc ut in forma, qui ad prefati Thome redempcionem seu finciam ut predicatur persolvendam ac ad relevamen et subsidium uxoris et liberorum suorum, quibus eciam plurimum oneratur, grata de bonis sibi a deo collatis contulerint etc xl dies indulgencie misericorditer in domino concedimus per presentes per unum annum a dato earundem tantummodo duraturas. Datum sub sigillo nostro in manerio nostro de Aukland viiii die mensis Marcii anno domini MCCCCXXVII et nostre consecrationis xxii.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, 4:39.

Strategies toward freedom

As we have seen, finding pledges in order to raise ransom oneself was a strategy available to captives seeking freedom through the payment of ransom. Certainly another option was to go into debt in order to buy one's freedom. Others sought assistance from their parents, wives and relatives to meet ransom demands. Elias Dikson's wife and servant sought an indulgence wherewith to free Elias from a French prison.²⁴² The parents of Hugh and Robert de Braunston, imprisoned at Hareflet for a ransom of twenty-eight marks, appealed to Bishop Bubwith for an indulgence on behalf of their sons.²⁴³ Indulgences offered on the captive's behalf were also, then, an option for captives and their families in the sometimes-desperate search for ransom funds.

One strategy not as apparently available to English Christians held for ransom in Christian prisons was the redemptive orders dedicated to the liberation of captives from Muslim hands. There is now a sizable body of scholarly material written on the

²⁴² *Reg. Langley*, 4:19-20. Thomas etc. universis et singulis abbatibus prioribus archidiaconis officialibus decanis rectoribus vicariis et capellanis quibuscumque curatis et non curatis per nostras civitatem et diocesim ubilibet constitutis etc. Pium fore credimus et humanum cunctis Christianis in summa necessitate constitutis salubriter subvenire, hiis tamen precipue qui pro re publica ac jure regis et regni Anglie se variis periculis efficacius ingerunt et exponunt. Cum igitur ut accepimus Elias Dikson de Chesterfel que dum nuper domino nostro regi in partibus transmarinis ut fidelis ligeus suus juxta posse suum obsequia debita impenderet, ab inimicis domini nostri regis et regni sinistrate fortuna captus et infra castrum vocatum Sayntseloryne diris carceribus fuerit mancipatus, ibique per quamplura tormenta et exactiones diras et penales sibi illatas ad solvendum tantam et tam excessivam ac sibi importabilem finantie et redempcionis summam per inimicos predictos est coactus quod omnia bona sua ad solucionem summe sibi impositae non sufficiunt quovis modo nisi sibi aliunde Christi fidelium elemosinis misericordier succurratur. Unde nos infortunio et indigencie dicti Eile pio compacientes affectu, vobis omnibus et singulis in virtute sancte obediencie mandamus quatinus cum Margareta uxor aut Johannes Russell serviens predicti Elie ad vos aut loca vestra seu ad ecclesias et parochias vestras accesserit pias Christi fidelium elemosinas ex causa predicta petiturus, ipsam ad ipsum favorabiliter admittatis et negocium dicit Elie horis diebus et locis debitis populo effectualiter exponatis. Et quicquid ex elemosinis hujusmodi collectum fuerit prefate Margarete aut Johanni absque diminutione qualibet liberetis seu faciatis integraliter liberari. Et ut vestre ac aliorum fidelium mentes ad tantum pietatis opus propensius excitentur, nos de die [etc]. qui ad liberacionem et relevacionem prefati Elie grata de bonis [etc] xl dies indulgencie quantum cum deo possumus concedimus per presentes per unum annum a dato earumdem continue duraturas. Datum sub sigillo nostro in manerio nostro de Stokton viii die mensis Maii anno domini MCCCCXXXI et nostre consecracionis xxv.

²⁴³ *Reg. Bubwith*, 11.

redemption of prisoners from non-Christian captors, notably in the context of the crusades and the Spanish reconquista. James Brodman's work on the Mercedarian order and Giulio Cipollone's study on the Trinitarians have revealed a great deal about the individual and institutional responses to the problem and concern for Christians in pagan captivity.²⁴⁴ The religious order of the Merced, originally the inspired attempt of a layman, Peter Nolasco (1189-1256), to address the needs of Christians captured by Muslims on the Mediterranean, operated principally in the south of France and in Spain. Similarly, the Trinitarians were an institutionalized response to military setbacks suffered by Christian forces in Jerusalem and in Spain and also undertook to redeem Christian captives in Muslim lands.

These two orders, as well as many other orders that participated in redemptionism on some level, were certainly a significant resource for those captives and their families who scrambled to raise the ransom owed to Muslim captors. The 1272 Mercedarian constitutions seem to indicate that all monies collected were to be directed to "redeeming Christian captives from the power of Saracens and of others who are against our law."²⁴⁵ They were also distinguished by their fourth vow, to be willing to take the place of captives in order to rescue them.²⁴⁶ The Trinitarian Rule stipulated that one third of their income was to be reserved for the redemption of captives who were imprisoned by pagans for the sake of the Christian faith (*reservetur ad redemptionem captivorum qui*

²⁴⁴ Brodman, *Ransoming captives in crusader Spain*; idem, 'The Rhetoric of Ransoming' in *Tolerance and intolerance: social conflict in the age of the Crusades*, M. Gervers and J. Powell, eds. (Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 2001), 41-42; Cipollone, *Cristianità-Islam*; also R. Grimaldi-Hierholtz, *L'Ordre des Trinitaires: histoire et spiritualité* (Paris: XX, 1994).

²⁴⁵ Brodman, *Ransoming Captives*, Appendix A.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 111-113; Grimaldi-Hierholtz, *L'Ordre des Trinitaires*, 49-50.

sunt incarcerati pro fide Christi a paganis).²⁴⁷ The remaining two-thirds were dedicated to the sustenance of the brothers and other works of mercy. However, only the Trinitarians maintained a minimal presence in England, limited to a handful of houses that were relatively poor and more interested in providing basic hospital services to the local poor, infirm and needy than in participating in the redemptionist activities similar to those of the Mediterranean houses.²⁴⁸ Trinitarian proctors did periodically raise funds in England for ransoming activity, but it was clear the money was intended for captives in Muslim lands.²⁴⁹ Thus, while needy English captives could turn to the Trinitarians for alms to meet basic needs, they could not count on them as a source of ransom funds; providing ransoms for Christian captives held by their coreligionists was not part of the mission of the redemptive orders in England.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ The 1198 Rule, approved by Innocent III in the letter *Operante divine dispositionis clementia*, underwent two more revisions in the medieval period, in 1217 and 1267. This arrangement of dedicating one-third to ransoming captives of Muslims was retained through both revisions, as well as in the three seventeenth-century revisions.

²⁴⁸ J. Brodman, *The Trinitarian and Mercedarian orders: a study of religious redemptionism in the thirteenth century*, PhD thesis (University of Virginia, 1974), 238-239. D. Knowles, *The religious orders in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 201, n. 4; D. Knowles and R. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: England and Wales* (London: Longmans, 1971), 205-6. Brodman notes that many of the northern European Trinitarian houses showed little interest in the order's primary mission of redemptionism, focusing rather on the local charitable needs of their region. Brodman argues that this points to a gradual shift away from religious redemptionism for the Trinitarians as a whole, as the order adapted to the changing needs of the populations they served.

²⁴⁹ *Reg. Langley*, 4:195. "Indulgencia pro domo de Walknoll. Thomas etc. dilectis in Christo Filiis archidiaconis nostris et eorum officialibus universis que et singulis abbatibus prioribus et decanis necnon rectoribus vicariis capellanis curatis et non curatis per nostras civitatem et diocesim ubilibet constitutis salutem etc. vobis omnibus et singulis in virtute obediencie firmiter injungendo mandamus quatinus cum fratres seu veri nuncii domni sancti Michaelis de Walknoll infra villam Novi Castri super Tynam ordinis sancte Trinitatis et redempcionis captivorum Terre Sancte nostre diocesis ad vos ecclesias seu capellas vestras accesserint Christi fidelium elemosinas pro ipsa domo et ejus indigenciis petitori et recepturi, ipsos benigne et favorabiliter admittatis ipsorumque negocia et privilegia eo tempore quo divinum servicium vestraque predicacio aut eorum quos in ea parte deputare volueritis nullatenus perturbentur exponatis et publicetis ac ipsos exponere permittatis pacificamque audienciam in ipsorum negociorum et privilegiorum exposicione habet faciatis, et quicquid per vos in hac parte collectum fuerit ipsis fratribus et suis procuratoribus sine diminucione aliquali integraliter liberetis et liberari faciatis. In cujus rei testimonium presentibus pro nostro beneplacito duraturis sigillum nostrum duximus apponendum."

²⁵⁰ Brodman, 'Rhetoric,' 46-47.

Nor was formalized or systematic assistance from king and parliament forthcoming for captives. Organized governmental assistance came only in the reign of Henry VIII with the incorporation of Trinity House, whose mission it was to assist the families of captives in raising ransoms, and most famously for seamen held in Algeria and elsewhere in Muslim North Africa.²⁵¹ Earlier, during the Hundred Years' War, the crown did intervene to some degree in certain situations, particularly on behalf of captives of a certain social or military stature.²⁵² Moreover, the Good Parliament of 1376 petitioned the king to assist in ransoming named soldiers who were unable to pay their captors, but this did not represent an attempt at changing policy.²⁵³ Other individuals petitioned the crown directly for assistance, but this was a strategy of last resort, as the king was not strictly obliged to ransom a soldier whom he had already remunerated.²⁵⁴ Some captives were granted special trading privileges, thus allowing them to raise ransoms; some soldiers reduced to penury by captivity were granted military posts as serjeants-at-arms.²⁵⁵ Unfortunately, those captives without social or military position

²⁵¹ Matar, 24-5. According to Matar, "Trinity House...issued certificates to "collectors" to travel about the country in order to raise money to ransom Britons who were being held captive. These certificates testified to the good conduct of the captives (they had not been pirates) and described their suffering and the plight of their wives and families. . . . The certificates often included a formula warning people that unless they offered money, the captives would remain unransomed and would subsequently "turn Turk" and so be lost to their families and their country." *Prima facie*, this seems not so different from the medieval method of obtaining an episcopal indulgence in order to raise ransom, except that now the redemption of captives was seen to be the task of the state and not the Church in post-reformation England. Of course, with the state assuming the responsibility for redemptions, the spiritual dimension inherent in indulgences was lost.

²⁵² Ambühl discusses petitions to the crown and the social networks upon which captives relied to obtain ransoms, but does not mention episcopal interventions. R. Ambühl, *Prisoners of War*, 203-256; R. Ambühl, "The English Reversal of Fortunes in the 1370s and the Experience of Prisoners of War," in *The Soldier Experience in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. A. Bell and A. Curry (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 191-207; Maurice Keen, "English Military Experience and the Court of Chivalry: The Case of Grey v. Hastings," in *Guerre et société en France, en Angleterre et en Bourgogne XIVe-XVe siècle*, ed. Philippe Contamine and Maurice Keen (Centre d'histoire de la région du Nord et de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest: 1991), 123.

²⁵³ Ambühl, "English Reversal," 193.

²⁵⁴ Ambühl, *Prisoners of War*, 203-228.

²⁵⁵ Jones, 228; Ambühl, "English Reversal," 199-201.

could not depend on access to, or assistance from, the crown, and it is these men, not the high-ranking officers, that most frequently turn up in episcopal registers, pleading for aid.

The Voices of Captives in Ransom Indulgences

Episcopal indulgences, then, were a resource available to English captives and their families, particularly those who found themselves paying the ransoms beyond their means. As the language of the grants themselves seems to indicate, the captives themselves, or friends or family members representing them, petitioned the bishop personally for assistance. Bishop Langley's grant refers to receiving news of John Whitby's plight ('Cum itaque sicut accepimus Johannes Whitby burgensis ville de Hertipole nostre diocesis...'), perhaps from Whitby himself, as no other family members or associates are mentioned in the grant.²⁵⁶ In the case of many other grants, the names of family members or friends petitioning the bishop on behalf of a captive are sometimes stated in the text. Richard Lamb is clearly mentioned as petitioner in the grant made on behalf of himself and his still-captive friends. Joan Hedelham petitioned the bishop of Durham on behalf of her son John;²⁵⁷ Joan Fuller on behalf of her husband William;²⁵⁸ Margaret Dikson on behalf of her husband Ellis;²⁵⁹ among others. If the petitioner was the captive, it was usually made evident in the text of the grant itself, as in the earlier cases of John Whitby²⁶⁰ and John Person, for example. The wide and significant variations in the texts of the grants as recorded in the registers also point to an intimate familiarity on the part of the bishop with the unique and difficult situations of the individuals: these are not

²⁵⁶ *Reg. Langley*, 3:198.

²⁵⁷ *Reg. Langley*, 4:39.

²⁵⁸ *Reg. Bubwith*, 109.

²⁵⁹ *Reg. Langley*, 4:19-20.

²⁶⁰ Above, at notes 1 and 224.

formulaic grants. This suggests that the captives or their representatives presented themselves and their case to the bishop personally.

While most of the petitioners claimed that enemies of national interest had captured and held them for ransom, in many cases it is not clear from the surviving registers precisely how they fell into enemy hands. Six of the petitioners were clearly occupied in military service, ten grants offered no occupation at the time of capture, ten were held either by the Saracens, Welsh, Flemish or Irish,²⁶¹ and four were merchants or sailors aboard merchant vessels. Fourteen petitioners were “captured at sea,” but the registers give no indication as to their combatant or non-combatant status. Many of those taken at sea were taken either into Scotland or were imprisoned in the northern French port cities of Harfleur and St Malo’s. Five grants of indulgences—some for individual petitioners, some for a group of captives—explicitly mention St. Malo’s or Harfleur in the texts of the grants. There is reason to think that some of these particular captives were on merchant ships, as these port cities were notorious for seizing ships, men and goods, and then selling the goods and ransoming the men and ships.²⁶² However, in this case, the distinction between combatant and non-combatant status may be moot, as piracy was a de facto form of military aggression in the Hundred Years’ War.²⁶³ In every occasion, the indulgences offered forty days’ relaxation to anyone who assisted the captives with their ransoms, with no required donation amount specified. In every case, the grants were good for one year, and were occasionally renewed in situations where the petitioner had not yet raised the full ransom, or had fallen into

²⁶¹ *Ely Episcopal Records*, 398, 400, 403-405.

²⁶² *Calendar of Letter-Books Preserved Among the Archives of the Corporation of the City of London, Letter-Book G*, ed. Reginald Sharpe (London: 1905), 33-34.

²⁶³ C.J. Ford, “Piracy or Policy: the Crisis in the Channel, 1400-1403,” 105-119.

captivity again. Robert Brent, a merchant who was caught up in the hostilities and imprisoned, at first in Spain and then evidently sold to other captors on the secondary market, sought an indulgence to pay his debt in December 1412.²⁶⁴ In November 1418, a Robert Brent appears again before the same bishop, this time taken at sea and imprisoned in St. Malo's.²⁶⁵

Only occasionally do men of higher standing appear in the registers. This is possibly because such individuals had access to more sources of assistance with deeper pockets, namely the crown or friends willing to make loans.²⁶⁶ In 1447, Robert Lord Moleyns appealed to the bishops of Exeter and Bath and Wells for assistance in paying off a series of excessive ransoms (*nimis excessiva*) incurred while on crusade against the Turks in the service of the King of Hungary.²⁶⁷ Moleyns was captured at Varna by Ottoman forces in 1444, and freed only upon providing pledges in his stead and the

²⁶⁴ *Reg. Bubwith*, 133. Litera indulgencie. Nicholaus, etc. Gratium obsequium et Deo pium tociens impendere opinamur quociens mentes Christi fidelium ad caritatis et pie devocionis opera allectivis indulgenciarum muneribus propensius excitamus. Cum igitur dilectus nobis in Christo filius Robertus Brent, lator presencium, prout relacione pridie accepimus fidedigna, pro jure defensioneque regis et regni Anglie in partibus exteris guerrarum frequenter infortunia perpessus, ab hostibus captus, diris carcerum vinculis in Ispannia aliisque locis mancipatus, ad redempcionem nimis excessivam, qui verius importabilem, fuerit et sit depressus, necnon adversante sibi fortuna bonis et mercandis suis, pluribus vicibus et diversis, per naufragium aliaque maris sive pelagi discrimina et piratarum spolia peremptis, perditis radicibus et consumptis, ad tantam devenerit inopiam quod nedum suis bonis propriis a Deo collatis, verum eciam ere alieno in quo fuit adtunc et adhuc est oneratus, totaliter denudatus, quod, nisi Christifidelium elemosinis sibi celerius succurratur, perpetue mendicitatis ignominia et inevitabilis egestatis infortunium, creditorumque suorum per incarcerationionis molem debiti xl li. contemplacione non soluti, ipsum oportebit verisimiliter tollerare. De Dei igitur Omnipotentis etc. ut in forma communi.

²⁶⁵ *Reg. Bubwith*, 340-1. The bishop granted 40 days indulgence to all his parishioners, truly confessed and contrite, who shall stretch a helping hand toward the ransom of Robert Brent, lately taken at sea and detained in prison at Seyntmalowes in parts beyond the sea; for one year. [Editor's translation]. It is unclear if Robert Brent endured two separate captivities, or if his inability to meet the 1412 ransom demand had translated into a prolonged captivity, or if there was a second ransomed captive by the same name, living at the same time and seeking assistance from the same bishop.

²⁶⁶ M.A. Hicks, "Counting the Cost of War: The Moleyns Ransom and the Hungerford Landsales 1453-1487," *Southern History*, t. VIII (1986), 11-31.

²⁶⁷ *Reg. Bekynton*, 86. Moleyns was captured again at Castillon in 1453, this time in the service of the English king in his wars against France. Neither he nor his mother, Margaret, sought an indulgence for the Castillon ransom, instead opting to mortgage lands in order to pay the required £6000 ransom. Jones, *Ransom Brokerage*, 224-225; M.A. Hicks, "Counting the Cost of War: The Moleyns Ransom and the Hungerford Landsales 1453-1487," 11-31, which discusses the disastrous consequences of the Moleyns ransoms as a destabilizing factor in the Hungerford fortunes over the long term.

promise of paying off the remainder of the ransom.²⁶⁸ The others to appear in the registers were Greek scholars and nobility who had fled former Byzantine lands after the advance of the Ottomans.²⁶⁹ John Sthaurachii, Demetrius Anderisa, John Pole de Albo Castro, Demetrius Conisius, and Michael Chauriant²⁷⁰ were Greek noblemen who claimed to have been captured and imprisoned at the fall of Constantinople to the Turks. All claimed they were released to raise their ransoms and those of family members still held by the Turks. Sthaurachii appealed to Bishop Langley of Durham for assistance and received a grant of forty days' indulgence in support of his efforts to raise ransoms;²⁷¹ Anderisa received a similar grant from Bishop Rotherham of York.²⁷² John Pole de Albo Castro, also driven out of Constantinople by the Ottoman invasions was granted an

²⁶⁸ *Reg. Lacy*, III: 407. "Dominus concessit xl dies indulgencie prout sequitur in hec verba. Edmudnus [etc] dilectis [etc] archidiaconis nostris Exon', Totton', Barn' et Cornub', singulisque eorum officialibus salutem [etc]. Officium magne pietatis ac Deo placabile obsequium tociens credimus exhibere quociens mentes fidelium ad caritatis et alterius pie devocionis opera allectivis indulgenciarum muneribus propensius excitamus. De Dei igitur [etc., as in Lacy I, 42] confidentes, omnibus [etc] qui in subsidium et relevamen Roberti Molyneus, qui nuper per Turcos et Sarizenos inimicos Dei et infideles Domini nostri Jhesu Christi, in comitiva seu servicii regis Hungarie et principis de Monreye, captivatus et ad summam nimis excessivam positus fuerit, pro qua quidem summa solvenda plegios ibidem dimisit, nec habet unde dictam summam solvere aut suos plegios ibidem detentos redimere valeat, nisi a christifidelibus et Deo devotis elimosinarum largicionibus caritative subveniatur, eidem aliqua de bonis eis a Deo collatis contulerint, legaverint seu quovismodo assignaverint grata caritatis subsidia xl dies indulgencie misericorditer in Domino concedimus per presentes. Presentibus usque ad festum Purificacionis beate Marie Virginis proximum post datum presencium tantummodo duraturis. In cuius rei testimonium sigillum nostrum una cum impressione signeti nostri in dorso eiusdem presentibus apposuimus."

²⁶⁹ J. Harris, *Greek Emigrés in the West, 1400-1520* (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1995); Swanson makes passing reference, Swanson, *Passports to Paradise*, 58.

²⁷⁰ For Conisius and Chauriant, *Ely Episcopal Records*, 410, 413.

²⁷¹ *Reg. Langley*, 330. "Grant, until 4 April next, of 40 days' indulgence to all confessed and contrite persons who shall contribute to the assistance and relief of Sir John Sthaurachii, knight, late a noble of Constantinople, who was present, as the bishop has heard, at the destruction of Constantinople, when his father and one of his brothers were killed, and his mother, brother, two sisters kinsmen and relations were taken into captivity and reduced to slavery by the Turks. He has lost all his possessions and has been driven from his native country, and now craves the charity of the faithful for his own sustenance and the ransom of his mother and sisters." [Editor's translation]

²⁷² *Reg. Rotherham*, 214. "Indulgence of forty days to those who give money to Charles Cibo, knight, and Demetrius Anderisa of Constantinople, late treasurer to the Greek emperor; the latter was captured by the Turks with his wife and sons and imprisoned at Adrianople, but later redeemed at a cost of 1500 ducats. On their outward voyage they were again taken by Turks at Negropont, and ransom was set at 1500 ducats again, the wife and sons remaining as hostages for this amount. Suthwell, 28 Sept. 1486." [Editor's translation]

indulgence to help him ransom his mother and siblings.²⁷³ Adding weight to the Greeks' claim on the charity of others was the recent visit, some five years previous, of the Byzantine emperor's visit to London, in which he made known the effects of the Turkish advance on Greek Christians.²⁷⁴

The men and women who appear in the registers tend to be persons of lesser standing and with fewer connections of means to assist them in their endeavor of purchasing freedom. Of the men captured, most were involved in the war effort in some capacity, either sailing on behalf of the crown or fighting on French soil. Only a handful appear to be merchants or traders caught in up in the fortunes of war.

Constructing Indulgences

In her work on the petitions for pardon presented to the French crown, N.Z. Davis argued that the stories included in the petitions were fictive, and therefore must be handled with a certain amount of critical distance. Fiction, Davis notes, does not mean fraudulent, nor "does it lend falsity to an account; it might well bring verisimilitude or a moral truth,"²⁷⁵ and argues for use of a secondary meaning of the word: to shape, to craft. Seekers of pardon needed to craft their story in such a way that the crown would be persuaded to grant clemency. Essential to the success of a plea was the ability to convince the crown that one's story met set criteria for clemency. The constructed nature of these petitions to the crown need not imply fraud, but rather an awareness of the

²⁷³ *Reg. King*, 83. For more of Albo Castro's career, see Thierry Ganchou, "La *fraterna societas* des Crétois Nikolaos et Géorgios Pôlos (Polo), entre Constantinople et Moncastro : affaires, dévotion et humanisme", *Thesaurismata* 39-40, 2009-2010, p. 111-228.

²⁷⁴ D.M. Nichol, "A Byzantine Emperor in England: Manuel II's Visit to London in 1400-1401," *University of Birmingham Historical Journal* 12 (1969-70): 204-25.

²⁷⁵ Davis, *Fiction in the Archives* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 4. See also B. Hanawalt, "Reading the Lives of the Illiterate: London's Poor," *Speculum* 80:4 (2005), 1067-1086.

multiplicity of hands that might have intervened in the shaping of the story: the petitioner, the lawyer and others involved in the judicial process.

Petitions for indulgence before a bishop were also subject to a similar, but not necessarily identical, process of mediation and shaping. Although episcopal registers offer very little evidence as to the process of petitioning for an indulgence, we can make some educated assumptions based on how similar petitions were handled in better developed chanceries, such as the Vatican.²⁷⁶ The process was initiated by the petitioner, who approached the bishop with a claim or a need. Using the petition of Richard Lamb and his imprisoned shipmates with which the chapter opened, we can observe several characteristics come into focus. First, the voices of the petitioners are filtered through formulary and moral requirements, through questions posed by interrogators, and by distortions or adjustments made by the cleric recording the grant. The roughness and immediacy of the petitioners' vernacular language is smoothed over in the process of translating their stories into official Latin. As has been made evident in the discussion on indulgences for the impoverished, there were certain criteria in place for petitioners claiming indigence or material need. One's poverty needed to be virtuous, obtained through no fault of one's own. Captivity and poverty wrought by the circumstances of war fulfilled the criteria and were clearly articulated in the grants of indulgence produced by the petitions.²⁷⁷ Richard Lamb approached Bishop Langley with a story—of tragedy and suffering, to be sure, but a story nonetheless. The letter of indulgence that resulted from this encounter was shaped in several ways: first, by Richard Lamb's careful

²⁷⁶ Swanson, *Passports to Paradise*, 84-85.

²⁷⁷ Ambühl notes that a different set of criteria was operative in successful petitions for ransom assistance to the crown: loyalty, length of service, courage, and the possibility of useful service to the Crown in the future. Ambühl, *Prisoners of War*, 203-228.

narration of events, and second, through Langley's adaptation of the story to fit the accepted chancery formula for the issue of indulgences. Richard Lamb curated the details of his tragedy in such a way as to emphasize the urgency of his and his friends' situation. Perhaps he noted that their dire situation befell them through no fault of their own in time of war, and pointed out the suffering that awaited if none would help, or perhaps Bishop Langley inferred these essential criteria from his story. Either way, Bishop Langley, for his part, emphasized the urgency and lack of fault, and amplified them with a rhetorical and theological argument: the imperative bonds of charity and solidarity should urge Christians to help the petitioner, Mr. Lamb, and his associates. Furthermore, as an inducement to charity and solidarity with Lamb, Langley offered forty day's remission from enjoined penance.

A close reading of the resulting grants of indulgence reveals at least three persons involved in the process of shaping a petition: the supplicant or the supplicant's representative, the chancery clerk who fitted the story to the appropriate formulas, and the bishop who made the decision to grant, how much to grant and why. Many of the grants in support of the destitute note the innocence and lack of culpability of the petitioners, and argue that it was through no fault of their own that the petitioners fell into such dire financial straits, as in the case of the destitute merchant Whitby.²⁷⁸ The supplicants' stories were included in the grants, perhaps to confirm their worthiness as

²⁷⁸ The notion of 'no-fault' is normally implicit in the circumstances which are detailed in the episcopal grants; however, grants made on behalf of merchants such as Whitby take pains to point out the lack of culpability on their part, perhaps because they were not directly involved in the service of the Crown. These grants also mention the merchants' inability to repay creditors without the assistance of alms; perhaps a tentative connection can be made between the issue of culpability and commercial creditors seeking repayment. For instance, John Whitby's inability to repay stems from ships, men and merchandise seized by Scots and Bretons, *Reg. Langley*, 3:198; John Preston's merchandise was pirated by the Scots, precipitating near-bankruptcy, *Reg. Langley*, 4:185; Robert Brent's ships and merchandise were shipwrecked or pirated while in the king's service, *Reg. Bubwith*, 133.

recipients of assistance, and as a rhetorical means to foster greater piety and thus encourage donation. The descriptions of hardships faced by captives, for instance, likely originated with the petitioners, and probably depicted in some measure the circumstances faced by captives. The treatment of captives varied widely, as discussed above, but there is evidence of attempts at hastening the ransoming process through the application of tortures or malignant neglect, particularly for those of non-combatant status who lacked the protection that status and courtesy could afford.²⁷⁹ It is possible that captors encouraged the imprisoned to describe their difficulties (or to amplify them) in order to speed delivery of payment.²⁸⁰

The Voices of Bishops in Ransom Indulgences

There is a striking amount of verbal immediacy in many of the episcopal grants. Some grants are mere memoranda, scratched into the record book by a hurried scribe,²⁸¹ however, other grants in the registers are fully inscribed, allowing us to hear, as it were, the petitioner through the medium of the bishop. We glimpse the circumstances of captives and their families, we hear the bishop urging, cajoling and exhorting Christians to assist the captive, and we hear the rhetoric employed to persuade the public to contribute to the captive's release, whether from present physical imprisonment or captivity-induced poverty.

²⁷⁹ Wright, "Ransoms of non-combatants," 326-327.

²⁸⁰ Nabil Matar observes that in the context of Muslim-Christian hostility, Muslim captors of Englishmen in the early modern period may have actually encouraged captives to describe their ordeals in letters home, in order to "hasten the ransom process." Matar, 16-17.

²⁸¹ These are tantalizing instances, such as the few fleeting lines dedicated to William Selby, 'who has been impoverished by frequent hostile invasions into England and by payment of his ransom from a foreign land.' However, we learn nothing of the details of Mr. Selby's situation. *Reg. Hallum*, 108.

As an instrument of succor for captives, an indulgence employed language and images aimed at motivating an audience to action. The language and images, that is, the rhetoric, used in indulgences issued on behalf of Christian-held captives of the Hundred Years' War differed from grants for Muslim-held captives of the Crusades, precisely because of the status of the captors and the nature of the conflict. In papal and episcopal indulgences offered on behalf of Christian prisoners of war in Muslim lands, the Muslim captor was described as a moral and physical menace to the captive and to Christianity more broadly. Thirteenth-century papal indulgences granted on behalf of the Mercedarian order's ransoming activities often relied on stiff language, referring to Muslims as 'pagans' and 'enemies of the Christian faith.'²⁸² This, of course, is no great departure from the much-discussed rhetoric about Muslims used in Christian sources from the period. The image of the captive echoes the images seen in early Christian literature on captivity: a Christian beset by the danger of moral discouragement, physical death or apostasy. In some papal documents and elsewhere, one can see emphasized the comparison between Christian captives and Christ suffering at the hands of his persecutors.²⁸³ Like another suffering and persecuted Christ, captives were often described as being 'tortured with innumerable torments.'²⁸⁴ The donor, in responding to the plea of the tortured captive voiced in the indulgence, was also an image of Christ, rather Christ the Redeemer.

By contrast, the language in English episcopal grants offered on behalf of Christians held prisoner in Christian lands used markedly different language and images.

²⁸² Brodman, 'Rhetoric', 47.

²⁸³ *ibid.*, 43; Cipollone, 402-4.

²⁸⁴ Bolton, "Do you not know? Innocent III's approach to the release of captives," 451-467; Innocent III, 'Quia major,' PL iii, col. 818. 'An forte nescitis quod apud illos multa millia Christianorum in servitute ac carcere detinetur, qui tormentis innumeris cruciantur?'

The motivating rhetoric of patriotism figured significantly in episcopal grants, as the activities of the ransomed petitioners was often characterized as service to crown and country. Ransomed men-at-arms were careful to note in their petitions that the misfortune of the debt of ransom befell them while in the king's service in France. Robert Brent's petition marked out clearly that he was acting *pro jure defensioneque regis et regni Anglie in partibus exteris guerrarum frequenter infortunia perpessus, ab hostibus captus, diris carcerum vinculis in Ispannia aliisque locis mancipatus, ad redemptionem nimis excessivam*.²⁸⁵ Ransomed sailors, while not fighting directly on the battlefield, also appealed to national feeling and emphasized that the enemy French or Scottish were their captors and the cause of their misfortune. Suffering at the hands of the enemy was another trope present in some grants, such as in the grant on behalf of Elias Dikson of Chesterfield, who suffered *quamplura tormenta* in a French prison,²⁸⁶ or the aforementioned Thomas Fyssheburn, who suffered terribly at St. Malo's.²⁸⁷ However, elaborations of mortal or moral threats to the captive were generally absent. The captive was not suffering for his faith, but rather for his king, and so bishops tended to emphasize the material poverty of the captive. The descriptions of poverty, however, were quite value-laden, stressing the ignominy of beggary²⁸⁸ and the wretched circumstances that

²⁸⁵ *Reg. Bubwith*, 133.

²⁸⁶ *Reg. Langley*, 4:19-20. 'Pium fore credimus et humanum cunctis Christianis in summa necessitate constitutis salubriter subvenire, hiis tamen precipue qui pro re publica ac jure regis et regni Anglie se variis periculis efficacius ingerunt et exponunt. Cum igitur ut accepimus Elias Dikson de Chesterfel que dum nuper domino nostro regi in partibus transmarinis ut fidelis ligeus suus juxta posse suum obsequia debita impenderet, ab inimicis domini nostri regis et regni sinistrate fortuna captus et infra castrum vocatum Sayntseloryne diris carceribus fuerit mancipatus, ibique per quamplura tormenta et exacciones diras et penales sibi illatas ad solvendum tantam et tam excessivam ac sibi importabilem finantie et redemptionis summam per inimicos predictos est coactus quod omnia bona sua ad solutionem summe sibi impositae non sufficiunt quovis modo nisi sibi aliunde Christi fidelium elemosinis misericordier succurratur.'

²⁸⁷ See above at n. 240.

²⁸⁸ *Reg. Bubwith*, 133. Bubwith speaks of the *mendicitatis ignominia et inevitabilis egestatis infortunium* which threatened Robert Brent in 1412.

would threaten honest men and their families, if fellow Christians did not help them in their time of need. As we saw in the previous chapter, the rhetoric of poverty was intended to act as a motivation to action, in addition to the exhortatory incipits, the nationalistic rhetoric and the incentive of the indulgence itself.

The rhetorical motivation for donors to the English captive in Christian hands, then, was not to prevent physical or spiritual death, but to alleviate material hardship. The donors, like an *alter Christus*, could redeem the poor and suffering. They were exhorted and urged to help by the bishop directly, and indirectly by the language of pity that pervaded the grants. English captives in French prisons like Hareflet or St-Malo's were to be pitied in regard to their physical suffering, to be sure, but most clearly in reference to their honest poverty.

Grants for prisoners of the Hundred Years' war employed a language of community, cohesiveness, and solidarity. However, with a religious and cultural *other* absent, the rhetoric was simplified and the emphasis on solidarity more apparent. Again and again, medieval English bishops in their grants uphold mercy, compassion and charity as attitudes and actions that ought to define Christian community. And, moreover, since texts of the grants likely served as guides for preaching or publicizing the indulgence, this rhetoric of communal solidarity was not simply a pious wish, but was actively promoted and upheld for the audience of every ransom indulgence.

Why an indulgence?

But why an indulgence as a means of alleviating another's suffering or as a strategy toward freedom? For those captives or their representatives seeking episcopal assistance,

a temporary indulgence granted on their behalf legitimized their request for alms from people who may or may not have known them personally. As observed earlier, grants often argued implicitly or explicitly that it was through no fault of their own that the possessors of grants fell upon hard times. Thus, as with the impoverished individuals of the previous chapter, an indulgence could provide a measure of protection for the honour of those unaccustomed to asking for financial assistance from the general public.

The guarantee of the possessor's authenticity could encourage donations as well. As the grants previously mentioned indicate, anyone who 'extended a helping hand' to the captive received up to forty days' indulgence, no matter the amount they were able to give. This offer of a relaxation of penance would, as Bishop Edmund Lacy hoped, "encourage the faithful to works of charity and pious devotion," a concern often explicitly stated in the incipits of grants.²⁸⁹ As reminders of the moral and spiritual benefits available to the one who acts charitably, indulgences could operate as a paraenetic tool, encouraging Christians toward more and greater acts of generosity and mercy for the needy. And it was the captive alone who benefited from the charitable proceeds inspired by the grant; no one else received a percentage from the contributions. For a captive, then, a letter of indulgence not only added weight to his claim on the charity of others, but also motivated them to help him as they could. In this way, indulgences were part of an informal structure of social support for captives and their families.

If indulgences were a means for bishops to excite Christian souls (*excitare mentes fidelium*) to charitable acts, particularly assisting in ransoming, they were also a

²⁸⁹ *Reg. Lacy*, 2: 407-8.

paraenetic means for encouraging the continuous conversion of the men and women who heard the captive's plea for assistance. Indulgences worked *ex opere operantis*, and most indulgences explicitly required that one be contrite and confessed, in addition to performing the action stipulated in the indulgence; in this case, aiding a captive in raising his ransom. Without the charitable act of giving to the captive, one could not receive the grace of these specific indulgences; without contrition, the grants were ineffective. Episcopal grants of indulgence never fixed a specific amount to be given to the captive, but left it to the conscience and will of the donor to decide. It mattered little to the bishops the amount that one could give to a captive; what was important was the willingness to give to those in need according to one's means.²⁹⁰ In this way, the grace of the indulgence was equally accessible to both the poor widow and the man of means, and anyone from any socio-economic background could participate.²⁹¹ From a canonistic and pastoral point of view, the important thing was that all conditions as stipulated in the grant be fulfilled: contrition, confession, and the act of charity that revealed one's commitment to penance and conversion, to God and community.

Bishops also used ransom indulgences to strengthen the habit of solidarity more broadly in their dioceses by encouraging it more particularly between captives and donors. Some grants of indulgences plainly emphasized mercy as operative in the divine economy, pointing out that if the faithful show mercy to their suffering neighbour, God will show mercy to them in this life and the next. Captives were *miserabiles personae*,

²⁹⁰ The biblical account of the widow's mite served as a touchstone to discussions on this issue. Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4.

²⁹¹ As Christopher Harper-Bill notes, concern for exclusivity was characteristic in episcopal grants, with many grants allowing for an act of devotion (i.e. Pater and an Ave) to substitute for donations; thus they '...did not exclude those with no pecuniary resources...' *EEA 21* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

the poor of Christ, and therefore merited the concern and attention of the faithful. To assist the captive was to perform a work of mercy, enjoined upon all Christians everywhere. As Bishop Langley also noted in the grant on behalf of the burdened Thomas Fyssheburn and his family, ‘The more often a pleasing and acceptable prayer is offered to God and followed more devotedly by a work of charity, the more the redeemer of mankind is excited to mercy.’²⁹² This theme of mercy also emerges in a grant of Robert Brent, who appears as a captive at St. Malo’s twice in Nicholas Bubwith’s register, first in 1412, and again in 1418. Bubwith argues simply that mercy pleases God, and that it is ‘fitting to lift [Robert Brent] up’ because of his poverty.²⁹³

Response

But why would indulgences of this kind appeal to a broader public? Why would someone give alms to a captive in exchange for an indulgence? Indulgences of this sort certainly allowed for greater lay participation in the process of ransoming. On the spiritual level, ransoming the captive was one of the corporal works of mercy incumbent upon all Christians,²⁹⁴ yet few could afford to pay the entire ransom of a captive, nor could they be specifically dedicated to the task of ransoming like members of the redemptive orders. Nor could they seriously entertain the promise of offering themselves as ransom, of giving themselves over into captivity on behalf of a captive, as

²⁹² *Reg. Langley*, 3:77-78.

²⁹³ *Reg. Bubwith*, 133. ‘ipsum oportebit verisimiliter tollerare.’

²⁹⁴ Augustine lists the works of mercy in his discussion of charitable almsgiving in his *Enchiridion ad Laurentium*; for Augustine, almsgiving goes beyond monetary donations to corporal and spiritual acts: ‘And so, not only does the one who gives food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the stranger, safety to the refugee, visits to the ill and imprisoned, ransom for the hostage, support to the weak, guidance to the blind, comfort to the sorrowing, remedy to the sick, directions to the lost, advice to the deliberating, and whatever is necessary to the needy, but also the one who gives forgiveness to the sinner gives alms.’ *Enchiridion*, Cap. XIX 72 (p. 88)

Mercedarians vowed to do. Indulgences allowed ordinary lay folk to participate in this obligatory work of mercy, as their circumstances allowed. And, like the bishops, most Christians recognized the spiritual benefit both of the merciful act itself and of the indulgence. As with any act of charity, ransoming captives fulfilled the Christian mandate to serve one's neighbour and was also an occasion of grace.

The benefits were not only of the spiritual kind. Certainly, assisting captives in response to a grant of indulgence allowed for a greater opportunity to positively shape and influence their community life by alleviating the hardship that afflicted both the imprisoned and their families, much in the same way that gifts to modern charitable institutions such as hospitals influence local communities. As with any merciful act, then, both the individual and the community benefit both spiritually and socially.

How were these grants of indulgence and their beneficiaries received by others? Who would have responded? Much of the evidence tends to be one-sided, giving us the stories of the petitioners while information on benefactors remains obscure. For instance, the petitions list only the particulars of the grant and the beneficiary of it, not those who obtained the indulgence by means of a donation to the captive or his representative. Nonetheless, because grants for ransomed captives were personal grants, the scope of fundraising on behalf of most petitioners was probably local and diocesan in extent. The juridical limits imposed by canon law on the granting prelate state that only those who dwelt within the bounds of his diocese could obtain the indulgence. None of the petitioners sought grants from more than one bishop, indicating that their efforts were only ever intended to be local, rather than regional or national. Beyond those legal boundaries, grants of indulgence were likely most useful in encouraging donations from

people within the diocese who were outside the captive's natural social networks or who lay outside other affinity groups, such as guilds or fraternities. Presumably, indulgences would not have been necessary to encourage assistance from family, friends and neighbors—those who perhaps would have responded first out of natural affinity or solidarity and for whom the inducement of an indulgence would have been superfluous. Thus, indulgences could be seen as an avenue of last resort, when assistance from a captive's immediate circle had been exhausted.

Conclusion

Closer examination of indulgences reveals that captives of middling rank most often had recourse to bishops in their efforts to raise ransoms. Lacking the social connections that might gain them access to king or court, these men had to find alternate sources of income to meet the often onerous ransom demands. Granting bishops made clear that the poverty of the captive of war was meritorious and worthy of assistance, and made use of indulgences to encourage the flock of their dioceses to greater solidarity with captives. The concern for solidarity and the formation and strengthening of social bonds is evident in the language of the grants, and indicates that bishops and laypeople alike perceived indulgences as a means to extend the bonds of community to those marginalized through poverty and imprisonment.

The rhetorical language of ransom indulgences offered on behalf of Christians held prisoner by other Christians reveals a sensitivity to the status of the captor and situation of the captive. While bishops utilized the full range of religious imagery to emphasize the danger of apostasy and torture faced by Christians at the hands of Muslim

captors, they very well could not call a French Christian captor an ‘enemy of the Christian faith.’ This sort of language would never do in the case of Christians held by Christians, and we find instead bishops calling attention to the material poverty that threatened the captive with longer incarceration and crippling indigence. Thus, since religious difference could not be used to encourage solidarity for the captive, the rhetoric of physical hardship and material poverty could be a powerful motivator.

Examination of these letters of indulgence has also revealed a number of important ways in which medieval men and women depended on grants of indulgence shape their own lives or the lives of those around them. The more thoroughly recorded grants give voice to those desperate to free relatives or associates held hostage for ransom as a result of war between France and England. In an age when social welfare was largely informal and unorganized, indulgences were one of the various resources available to indebted captives and their families to meet oppressive ransom demands, and we see them resorting to the bishop for help in this regard.

Of course, the function of captivity indulgences was not simply social. The spiritual aspect was significant and multivalent. On one level, indulgences were one way for ordinary lay folk to participate in the redemption of captives, one of the seven corporal works of mercy which every Christian was bound to perform, particularly for other Christians in need. On another level, the spiritual economy of indulgences meant that the generosity of a benefactor to the one in need was met with a spiritual reward. Indulgences, then, were ultimately about welfare, physical or spiritual, for both donor and recipient. In the case of ransom indulgences, indigent captives benefited materially, while donors benefited spiritually.

By looking closely at fifteenth-century ransom indulgences, we discover a new aspect to the history of indulgences. Indulgences were part of the informal social welfare networks that enabled honest men affected by the material and physical costs of war to alleviate their circumstances. The rhetoric of indulgences aimed to encourage solidarity amongst Christians and urged fellow Christians to meet the needs of these men and women in whatever way they could.

Chapter Four

Indulgences, Hospitals and Solidarity

One of the earliest extant indulgences for an English hospital comes from the episcopate of Seffrid II, bishop of Chichester from 1180 to 1204. The beneficiary was the leper hospital of St. Mary Magdalen, which, like most leper institutions, lay outside the gates of the city of Chichester. The grant was likely given during Seffrid's visitation of the hospital, as it follows the bishop's confirmation of the endowments granted to the hospital by his predecessors.

Because [the lepers'] Church is known to be founded to the honor of God and established in the name of blessed Mary Magdalen... we relax fifteen days enjoined penance to all who, truly confessed and contrite, visit their Church on its solemnity and with pious devotion assist from their resources the aforementioned infirm.²⁹⁵

Free-standing hospitals were relatively new in England at the time of Seffrid's inspection. Monasteries had generally been the sole providers of hospital services in England, but after the Norman Conquest in 1066 the countryside quickly became dotted with small and middling institutions established by bishops, individual laymen, guilds and towns who aimed to offer shelter and care to vulnerable populations.²⁹⁶ Seffrid's

²⁹⁵ *The Acta of the Bishops of Chichester 1075-1207*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting, Canterbury & York Society 56 (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1964), 162-163. "Seffridus dei gratia Cicestrensis episcopus [secundus] universis Christi fidelibus per episcopatum Cicestrensem constitutis salutem in Christo. Ea que a predecessoribus nostris maxime ad pauperum sustentationem salubriter esse noscuntur statuta animo nos decet libenti concedere et eorum exemplo alios ad ecclesiarum largitatem studiose invitare. Inde est quod leprosis extra portam civitatis Cicestrensis habitantibus ad eorum victum et vetitum decem solidos ex archidiaconatu de Lewen et deimam hidam de Coleworth qu fuit Brithnot ... etc. Et quia ecclesia ipsorum ad honorem dei in nomine beate Marie Magdalene fundata est dedicata esse dinoscitur, confisi de ejus suffragio cui dimissa sunt peccata multa quoniam dilexit multum, omnibus ad eandem ecclesiam in ejus solemnitate venientibus et de suis facultatibus pia devotione memoratis infirmis subvenientibus vere confessis et penitentibus de penitentia sibi injuncta xv dies relaxamus."

²⁹⁶ S. Watson, "The Origins of the English Hospital," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (2006), 75-94. The concept of non-monastic care for the vulnerable was so new that Seffrid does not use

lepers were one of several vulnerable groups for which hospitals cared in post-Conquest medieval England. Hospitals possessed broader mandates than today's institutions and offered material and spiritual care and security to vulnerable populations ranging from the acutely ill to the leprous, from the unwed, labouring mother to the passing traveler, from the infirm aged to the sick poor and the orphan.

Contrary to modern expectations of hospitals, medieval English hospitals did not exist to cure people of physical illnesses through the professional dispensation of medicine and medical procedures. As the term "hospital" described everything from an almshouse to a leper colony to hostel for travelers or hospice for the aged and dying, it is clear that the scope and standard of care varied according to institution and the populations it served. The medieval use of the term also parts ways from the modern in terms of function: Hospitals, almshouses and *leprosaria* did not aim to provide a cure to the chronically ill or to the leper, but rather aimed to offer the relative comfort of basic hospice care.²⁹⁷

It is worth noting the terms of the grant given on behalf of the Chichester hospital: fifteen days' relaxation of penance to anyone who gave assistance to the lepers and visited their chapel on its patronal feast. Bishop Seffrid clearly intended this indulgence as a way to inspire donations to support the lepers and their care and reduce their isolation. As has been noted with other indulgences, he does not specify the amount or type of donation one must give, thereby opening up participation in subvention to nearly

the word "hospital," but simply refers to them as "the lepers living by the gate of the city." It is clear from his entry that they had their own buildings and endowments accorded them, but he clearly lacks categories into which he can fit them.

²⁹⁷ M. Carlin, "Medieval English Hospitals," in *The Hospital in History*, L. Granshaw and R. Porter, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 32; C. Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 304-305; P. Cullum, "For Pore People Harberles," 36-54.

every socio-economic group. Many English hospitals, leprosaria most especially, were often insufficiently endowed and were burdened with material shortages that were attendant upon chronic underfunding. An indulgence was one of a constellation of mechanisms that hospitals could use to encourage material support of their activities.

Particularly remarkable, though, was Seffrid's requirement that donors must visit the lepers' chapel. To obtain this particular grant of remission, it was not sufficient to materially support the lepers: one must enter their space and encounter them. Seffrid's grant is an example of episcopal expectations for indulgences as an instrument for integrating different segments of society separated by social, economic, or physical thresholds. Scholars such as R.I. Moore have argued that medieval prelates aimed to isolate marginal groups such as lepers, whose physical illness was perceived to be an external manifestation of internal spiritual contagion. Moore took the Third Lateran Council's prescriptions for separation of lepers as evidence of their persecution.²⁹⁸ Yet hospital indulgences such as Seffrid's seem to challenge that thesis by requiring the one seeking the indulgence to cross the boundary that separated the healthy from the diseased, and those with means from those without.

Indulgences had other consequences for hospitals and the communities in which they were situated. The inmates of poorer hospitals and almshouses often resorted to begging as a way to support their care, which some city leaders viewed as a nuisance. An indulgence given to the institution had the potential to inspire a greater number of on-going donations, which in turn could reduce the need for begging, benefitting both the inmates of the hospital and the surrounding community. While certain civil and

²⁹⁸ R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1987), 11.

ecclesiastical measures used hospitals as a way of limiting the spread of contagion and nuisance, particularly in times of crisis,²⁹⁹ other mechanisms such as indulgences simultaneously worked in the opposite direction, and acted to promote solidarity and social cohesion. An indulgence could turn a community's attention and support toward populations at their margins, and encourage interaction between them through donation, support and visitation. The experience of visiting a hospital could ensure that a benefactor understood more deeply the needs of the hospital and its inmates. Visiting also could help ensure that inmates were not objectified or instrumentalized as simply a means for a benefactor to acquire spiritual graces. Thus, an indulgence had the capacity to foster greater integration of hospitals and their vulnerable inmates into the broader social fabric.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which indulgences promoted the work of charitable institutions that cared for another marginal group, the sick, the aged, and the leprous. The first part of this chapter will explore the development of hospitals in England in all their various forms, as well as the level and quality of care provided in them. A grasp of the foundational aims and structures and the challenges associated with the maintenance of this type of charitable institution and the care offered to their inmates will help us to better understand how indulgences worked as a source of income. The

²⁹⁹ C. Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006): 252-301. Rawcliffe notes that efforts at segregation "tended to occur during periods of crisis, when concerns about epidemic disease, disorder and vagrancy were running high," particularly in the fourteenth c., when population pressures, disruption in food systems, and epidemic disease resulted in widespread socio-economic upheavals. For a discussion of leprosy, attitudes toward it and care of it on the continent, see Francois-Olivier Touati, *Maladie et société au Moyen Age: la lèpre, les lépreux et les léproseries dans la province ecclésiastique de Sens jusqu'au milieu du XIVe siècle* (Bruxelles: De Boeck Université, 1998); Catherine Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society. Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little*, ed. S. Farmer and B. Rosenwein, 172-188 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000); Elma Brenner, "Outside the City Walls: Leprosy, Exclusion, and Social Identity in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-c. Rouen," in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, ed. M. Cohen and J. Firnhaber-Baker, 139-155 (Farnham U.K.: Ashgate, 2010); Elma Brenner, "Recent Perspectives on Leprosy in Medieval Western Europe," *History Compass* 8:5 (2010): 388-406.

second half of the chapter focuses on the various social groups served by hospitals, as well as the relationship of the sick to the healthy. It looks at how hospitals used indulgences to build social capital, bridging the gap between the physically and financially independent to the physically and financially dependent.³⁰⁰ In the case of indulgences, I argue that they acted as a mechanism to encourage the development of social and material capital, the growth of solidarity between the hospital, as a representative and caretaker of those made vulnerable by age or infirmity, and the community at large, and to inspire broader participation in the works of mercy. Indulgences were mechanisms for greater solidarity and social integration.

English Hospitals from Conquest to Dissolution

From Conquest to Black Death

Medieval hospitals have presented a conceptual conundrum for generations of historians because of the broad diversity of populations they served, and because of the variation in size and form that defies easy typologies.³⁰¹ Older, larger institutions of monastic, episcopal or royal foundation often served as a general charitable institution,

³⁰⁰ Sociologists who study social networks, such as Robert Putnam, note that bridging occurs when socially heterogeneous groups, separated by socio-economic status, race, gender, age or other categories, are brought together by some social mechanism: for the sake of mutual assistance, or a common cause, goal or interest. Furthermore, Putnam points out that while bridging activities have benefits for the participants, secondary benefits often redound to the community at large, building greater social trust and solidarity, and “generat[ing] broader identities and reciprocity.” Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 22-24.

³⁰¹ Rotha Mary Clay published the first introductory survey on the topic, *The Medieval Hospitals of England* (1909), which remained the standard in the discipline for sixty years, despite its antiquarian tendencies and lack of scholarly apparatus. Knowles and Hadcock’s *Medieval Religious Houses* (1971) updated Clay’s lists of hospitals, but overlooked smaller, non-monastic institutions because of their heavy reliance on the admittedly uneven *Victoria County Histories*. Most recently Orme and Webster have written *The English Hospital, 1070-1570* (1995), an updated survey of medieval English hospitals that takes into account the regional histories that had been written in the previous twenty years. What results is a survey that is sensitive to the dynamism of the hospital form, both regionally and over time.

caring not only for the sick, but also for the poor, the dying, the aged, or the homeless. Smaller hospitals were often founded as specialized institutions, catering to specific groups such as lepers, the indigent elderly, or abandoned children. Some hospitals were large enough to require a resident staff of clergy and nursing sisters; others had none. Furthermore, hospitals were dynamic, adapting to the changing needs of their immediate environment and sensitive to shifting religious and charitable impulses in the spiritual economy.³⁰² Thus, for example, when leprosy disappeared from the countryside, so too did the institutions that served them, sometimes to re-emerge as almshouses for the poor. Nevertheless, in England all of these institutions were referred to as hospitals, despite the wide differences in scope, patients, and type of care available. The seemingly unruly florescence of the medieval hospital was circumscribed primarily by a commonality shared by the inmates: vulnerability resulting in dependence upon others for basic needs.

³⁰² Regional studies that have lent greater complexity and dynamism to the history of English hospitals: M. Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); P.H. Cullum, *Hospitals and Charitable Provision in Medieval Yorkshire, 936-1547* (unpublished DPhil thesis, 1989); C. Rawcliffe, *The Hospitals of Medieval Norwich* (Norwich: Centre for East Anglian Studies, 1995); N. Orme and M. Webster, *English Hospitals*, with chapters focusing on Cornwall and Devon; S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2004), with a focus on Kent; C. Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006). Numerous articles and chapters have also been published in recent years, most notable among a distinguished list: C. Rawcliffe, "The Hospitals of Later Medieval England," *Medical History* 28 (1984): 1-21; M. Rubin, "Development and Change in English Hospitals, 1100-1500," in *The Hospital in History*, L. Granshaw and R. Porter, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1989): 41-59; M. Rubin, "Imagining Hospitals: Considerations on the Cultural Meaning of Institutional Change," in *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State*, J. Barry and C. Jones, eds. (London: Routledge, 1991): 14-25; P.H. Cullum, "'For Pore People Harberles': What was the Function of the Maisondieu?" in *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Late Medieval History*, D. Clayton, R.G. Davies and P. McNiven, eds. (Stroud, UK, 1994): 36-54; C. Rawcliffe, "The Eighth Comfortable Work: Education and the Medieval Hospital," in *The Church and Learning in Later Medieval Society: Essays in Honour of R.B. Dobson: Proceedings of the 1999 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington, Lincolnshire: Shaun Tyas, 2002): 371-398; S. Sweetinburgh, "Royal Patrons and Local Benefactors: the Experience of the Hospitals of St Mary at Ospringe and Dover in the Thirteenth Century," in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400*, E. Jamrozak and J.E. Burton, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006): 111-1129; S. Watson, "The Origins of the English Hospital," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (2006), 75-94; J. Kerr, "Cistercian Hospitality in the Later Middle Ages," in *Monasteries and Society in the British Isles in the Later Middle Ages*, J. Burton and K. Stöber, eds. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008): 25-39; C. Rawcliffe, "Dives Redeemed? The Guild Almshouses of Later Medieval England," in *The Fifteenth Century*, L. Clarke, ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 1-27.

Care of the indigent sick and infirm had traditionally been the task of the bishop and the monastery in Anglo-Saxon England. The arrival of the Normans introduced a novel approach to the care of the sick, one that married monastic reform efforts to the traditional Anglo-Saxon method of assigning alms in the form of land and/or its produce to aged or infirm retainers in the form of tithes or physical provisioning.³⁰³ Lanfranc's reforms aimed to take patients out of the monastery, who were perceived to distract monks from the cycle of prayer and work, and into free-standing buildings while retaining the earlier Anglo-Saxon methods of endowment. Eadmer tells us that Lanfranc established two hospitals according to the new reformed style outside Canterbury, St. John to care for the infirm and St. Nicholas Harbledown to care for the lepers.³⁰⁴ Over time, both of the institutions, as with most, came to care for a *mélange* of needs, allowing entrance to a wider variety of suppliants. This deviance from the founder's original intent was likely in response to demographic and economic shifts, as Lanfranc's hospitals adapted to meet the changing needs and expectations of the communities of which they were a part.³⁰⁵ Nonetheless, Lanfranc's model proved so attractive and popular that four hundred hospitals were established in England in the two hundred years following the Conquest.³⁰⁶

The task of foundation also shifted in the post-Conquest period. Bishops and royalty still founded, and monasteries still provided care, but in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, new groups took up the work of providing for vulnerable people. More

³⁰³ Watson, "Origins," 87-94.

³⁰⁴ M. Rule, ed., *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia* (London: Longman, 1884), 15-16.

³⁰⁵ M. Rubin, "Imagining Medieval Hospitals" in *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State*, J. Barry and C. Jones, eds. (London: Routeledge, 1991), 19-20.

³⁰⁶ D. Knowles and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: England and Wales* (London: Longmans, 1971), 310-410; Watson, *Origins*; Orme, *English Hospital*, 20-23.

aristocratic families, perhaps in imitation of royal founders, endowed new institutions as a way of demonstrating their generosity, as well as their status, while requesting that the beneficiaries of their largesse pray for them. Similarly, urban guilds and leading citizens of the growing boroughs established hospitals with a wide variety of pious, social and civic motives in mind. As Rubin points out, establishing a corporate, public institution such as a hospital was an “act of maturity of the collective urban enterprise”³⁰⁷ that demonstrated civic confidence while realizing a host of personal, pious and social aims. For individual founders, the instauration of a hospital was self-conscious act to confirm both virtue and status while realizing personal aims of commemoration and remembrance and the distribution of spiritual and material wealth. As a communal enterprise, the hospital enabled towns to place physical limits around the begging on which the sick and infirm often relied, and which some regarded as an issue of public order.

The lack of legal restrictions on who could establish a hospital accounts much for the great variation among institutions. Hostiensis noted that “anyone can create a hospital,” and such action did not require the approval of the local bishop.³⁰⁸ Episcopal approval was needed for the establishment of a religious house or a chapel, but many

³⁰⁷ Rubin, “Imagining Hospitals,” 20.

³⁰⁸ Hostiensis, *In decretalium libros Lectura*, ad X.3.36.3 (Venice, 1581): “Hospitale quilibet domo sua potest sine aliqua autoritate facere.” Hostiensis’ commentary on hospitals came in the context of a broader canonistic debate over the bounds of lay initiative within the institutional Church, which in turn was couched in the even broader debate over who had the right to establish corporations. For a summary of the debate on corporations, see V. Bolgar, “The Fiction of Corporate Fiction—From Pope Innocent IV to the Pinto Case,” in *Festschrift für Imre Zajtay/ Mélanges en l’honneur d’Imray Zajtay*, R. Graveson, ed. (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1982), 67-96. Hostiensis’ comment was a response to Pope Eugenius’ decree that bishops had a supervisory capacity over pious works, including hospitals, within their diocese. The canon in question stated, “De xenodochiis et aliis similibus locis per sollicitudinem episcoporum, in quorum diocese existent, ad easdem utilitates, quibus constituta sunt, ordinentur,” and drew more closely the jurisdictional boundaries of accountability for such activities. See A. Freidburg and A. Richter, eds., *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, X.1.14.1 (Lipsiae: Ex officina Bernhardi Tauchnitz, 1922). While Eugenius’ decree aimed to delineate responsibility for pious works such as hospitals, Hostiensis sought to clarify that while bishops possessed the right to oversight or visitation, they did not possess solely the right of foundation, and that this was an arena in which lay initiative could be exercised freely.

hospitals were not originally established as religious houses.³⁰⁹ However, many lay founders often transferred oversight to a monastery, and many of the larger hospitals without monastic oversight later came to adopt the Augustinian or Gilbertine rule to govern the life of the brothers and sisters serving in the hospital or would request the erection of a chapel or burial ground, which brought them under episcopal jurisdiction. Thus, lay founders possessed the freedom to determine the siting, endowment, scope and form of relief provided in their foundation. These foundational choices were often in response to the perceived needs of their particular locale (such as the incidence of leprosy in their region, or proximity to a pilgrimage route or site), the contemporary discourse about how and which of those needs should be met, and the capacity of the founders to realize their goals.³¹⁰

The establishment and patronage of a hospital was a decidedly deliberate and public act. The motivations for founding a hospital were as tangled and complex as the founders themselves. Concern for their place in the regional and social economy, desire for public commemoration of a loved one, attention to their participation in the spiritual economy, or mindfulness of the gospel mandates to care for the poor that were omnipresent in medieval iconography and preaching: any, all or some of these motivations could be operative in the decision to create a hospital.³¹¹ Endowing a hospital could be expensive, and required the reallocation of funds and lands to support the venture. Very often it meant an expensive and lengthy legal process, especially after

³⁰⁹ Watson, "Origins," 75-94.

³¹⁰ Rubin, "Imagining Hospitals," 24. Rubin observes, "Hospitals existed between need, the disposition to acknowledge need and the perceived responsibility to alleviate need; their history is sensitive to the interplay of these forces."

³¹¹ S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England: Gift-giving and the Spiritual Economy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 35-47.

mortmain legislation took effect in 1279 and 1290, thus making alienation of property for the establishment of an endowment more difficult and costly.³¹² Endowments could also include exemptions from taxes or the privileges related to markets and tolls. Securing these from the crown took time, money, and attention as well.

In this period, hospitals that catered to travelers and pilgrims, including those from England, were also established in places across Europe, serving the needs of poor and infirm pilgrims on their way to Rome or Compostela or other points in between. These foreign hospitals provided assistance to hundreds of passing pilgrims, but also cared for sick and dying pilgrims³¹³ who sought succour or healing *ad sanctam* from the saints and holy places. For many pilgrims, however, such travels proved too difficult, and they passed beyond all suffering, dying in one of the hospitals along the way, and leaving the hospitals with the task of proper burial and commemoration.³¹⁴ Because these institutions cared for pilgrims from across Europe, they also sought assistance from bishops and laity across Europe. The hospital of Santo Spirito in Saxia, which lay just beyond St. Peter's Basilica, had been associated with English pilgrims and visitors to Rome since the ninth century,³¹⁵ as was the hospital of St. Thomas, which catered specifically to English visitors³¹⁶ who came on business with the Curia, or who flooded

³¹² The Statutes of Mortmain under Edward I (1239-1307) aimed at stabilising royal finances by prohibiting the alienation or transfer of properties to the Church. The gift or sale of land generated valuable feudal taxes for the royal exchequer in the form of taxes on at the death of the possessor and the transfer of the land as inheritance, but when land passed to a corporation like the Church, which never died or obtained majority age, the opportunities for this type of taxation on the land dried up. M. Hicks, "Chantries, Obits and Almshouses" discusses the political and legal intricacies involved alienating properties under mortmain for the endowment of charitable institutions.

³¹³ Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England*, 24-26.

³¹⁴ Rawcliffe, "The Seventh Comfortable Work," 22.

³¹⁵ G. Drossbach, *Christliche caritas als Rechtsinstitut: Hospital und Orden von Santo Spirito in Sassia, 1198-1398* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005).

³¹⁶ Archbishop Chichele singled out the hospital of St. Thomas in Rome because of its specific foundational mission to care for poor Englishmen. "Cum itaque dictum hospitale sancti Thome martiris in urbe Romana fundatum in quo nostre nationis Anglie viri nonnulli paupers, debiles, infirmi et alii indigentes non

the streets along the stations of Rome in jubilee years. Other foreign hospitals to appear frequently in the English episcopal registers are the hospitals of St. Thomas in Vienne, France, and the hospital of Roncesvalles³¹⁷ near Pamplona on the road to Compostela, among others. Because of the services they rendered to pilgrims, especially the poor and sick, English bishops saw fit to support the activities of these hospitals by means of indulgences.

The rapid growth in post-Conquest hospital foundation reached its peak in the years before the upheavals of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.³¹⁸ In these years, disease brought on by famine, followed by plague, took away many of the weak, infirm and aged. The consequent economic dearth translated into falling land values, which undermined the precarious finances of many hospitals. Affected most adversely were the smaller, rural hospitals and those whose endowments and income came primarily from land rents. At roughly the same time, leprosy was disappearing from the countryside, and most lazar houses either vanished or shifted their focus to different vulnerable populations.

From the Black Death to the Dissolution

The form and scope of care thus shifted in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in response to the changing demographic, economic, social and cultural landscape.

modicum relevantur...” *Reg. Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1414-1443*, E.F. Jacobs, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943): vol IV, 256-7.

³¹⁷ *Reg. Langham*, 193.

³¹⁸ Watson, “Origins,” 76. Sweetinburgh, using Orme and Webster and Knowles and Hadcock’s categorization and numbers, estimates the total number of medieval hospitals established at 310 leper houses (although Rawcliffe estimates no less than 320), roughly 300 non-leper houses, and 225 almshouses. S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital*, 22, n. 18; C. Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 106. See also Max Satchell, “The Emergence of Leper-houses in Medieval England,” unpublished DPhil, Oxford University, 1998.

Almshouses, sometimes called ‘bedehouses’ or ‘maisonsdieu,’ became the most popular type of foundation. Well-to-do local merchants and local religious and merchant guilds became the predominant founders of these new institutions. The size and relative impermanence of the institutions reflected the more modest means of these local lay founders. Rather than establishing massive, well-endowed institutions staffed by clergy, brothers and sisters with an established liturgical life, the founders of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries preferred the smaller size and specialized form of the almshouse, which concentrated its more limited resources on the chronic infirm and aged. Not only was the type of relief more focused, but so too was the size of the house, often established with only twelve or thirteen inmates in mind. For guilds, almshouses were part of the array of mutual aid and charitable and spiritual benefits offered to the brotherhood,³¹⁹ and to this end, entrance to the almshouse was often restricted to members and their families.³²⁰ In keeping with the guild emphasis on mutuality and reciprocity, the inmates of the house would pray for the founders and deceased members in exchange for a modicum of security.

³¹⁹ C. Rawcliffe, “Dives Redeemed? The Guild Almshouses of Later Medieval England,” in *The Fifteenth Century*, L. Clarke, ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2008), 1-27.

³²⁰ Rubin sees the focus on caring for one’s own as evidence of growing exclusivity or “sectionalism” in relief and part of the larger trend of discrimination in giving. Rubin, “Imagining,” 23. Rexroth accepts this argument, and argues further that merchant class’ control of entrance and insistence on good moral conduct was evidence of the wealthy exercising undue power over the poor. Rexroth does not examine the effect of immoral or disruptive behavior on the maintenance of a stable common life inside the hospital. F. Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 223-265. Both Rexroth and Rubin tended to rely on legislation and the foundational documents of prominent hospitals in order to get at attitudes toward poverty and relief. Cullum, however, finds a trove of material in the testamentary evidence of the same period that challenges overly simple ideas about discrimination in charitable relief. In the latter half of the fourteenth century, the establishment of small-scale maisonsdieu surged in York, driven by a large number of citizens of modest means establishing them in their wills, and leaving no instructions to discriminate, beyond providing for *pauperes* or *pauperes impotentes*. This indicates that the types of discrimination Rubin and Rexroth describe could be limited by status or location or both. P. Cullum, “For Pore People Harberles,” 36-54, esp. at 38 and 43-45.

While some urban houses were endowed more securely and were envisioned to be a permanent part of guild and urban life, other foundations seemed to have never been intended as permanent institution, and were instead part of an individual's testamentary bequests.³²¹ These arrangements were intentionally ephemeral, often circumventing the need for a foundational deed and alienation of property that were required to endow a larger, more permanent facility, as many founders of modest means lacked the resources for a large-scale endowment in perpetuity, but not the desire to assist the poor however they may.³²² These almshouses could range from a room in a house reserved for the poor to an entire house set aside for a specified number of poor. At the other end of the socio-economic scale, the leading magnates of England also participated in this type of foundation, often building elaborately constructed almshouses to house aged retainers, such as God's House at Ewelme, founded by the politically prominent de la Pole family.³²³

Perhaps out of recognition that one foundation with limited funds could not address all needs adequately, many founders attempted to target their giving more narrowly, directing the hospital to care for specific groups. Many of the hospitals dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene, held at the time to be the sister of Lazarus, directed their relief to leper populations. St. Mary's Bethlehem gradually came to care primarily

³²¹ P.H. Cullum, "For Pore People Harberles," 36-51; P.H. Cullum and P.J.P Goldberg, "Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: 'To the Praise of God and the Use of the Poor,'" *Northern History* 29 (1993), 24-39.

³²² Cullum argues that these small-scale, limited efforts "did not indicate failure, but ingenious efforts to assist the poor with limited resources. Moreover, they existed in a context in which it was not expected that any one individual or group could make an adequate and comprehensive provision for the poor. Each individual made their contribution in the expectation that there would be others able and willing to take up the burden. "For Pore People Harbeles," 38.

³²³ M. Hicks, "Chantry, Obits and Almshouses: The Hungerford Foundations 1325-1478" in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, C. Barron and C. Harper-Bill, eds. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1985), 123-142. See also J. Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme: Life, Devotion and Architecture at a Fifteenth Century Almshouse* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

for the mentally ill.³²⁴ Still others, such as St. Mary within Cripplegate (London) and the Papey (London) catered to the blind and lame.³²⁵ After the Black Death, most new foundations were targeted to the chronically ill and infirm. An example of one founder's attempt at narrowing the size and scope of his charitable foundation is John Milbourne, a wealthy merchant and member of the Drapers' Company in late fifteenth century London. He paid for the construction of "proper almes houses 14 in number, builded of Bricke and timber," and endowed this foundation with property to finance its ongoing expenses.³²⁶ W.K. Jordan estimates that Milbourne's houses and the lands on which they sat cost the merchant £400, and the endowment another £600.³²⁷ However, despite Milbourne's attempt at erecting a self-sustaining institution, inflation drove costs up and obliged the Drapers Company to make up the short fall.

Scope and Standards: The Care of Bodies and the Cure of Souls

Medieval English hospitals did not aim to cure people of physical illness, and rather operated much like a modern hospice, providing comfort in illness and old age. On the other hand, larger English hospitals might offer basic nursing care, although few had regular access to a medical doctor or surgeon until the sixteenth century.³²⁸ The services of a university-trained doctor or surgeon were expensive, normally affordable by a few, and beyond the resources of most medieval hospitals.³²⁹ Thus, most hospitals

³²⁴ Orme, 73.

³²⁵ J. Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. C.L. Kingsford, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1908), i, 106, 294.

³²⁶ Stow, *Survey of London*, i, 148. C. Rawcliffe, "Dives Redeemed," 3.

³²⁷ W.K. Jordan, *Charities of London, 1480-1660* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1960), 138.

³²⁸ C. Rawcliffe, "Medicine for the Soul: The Medieval English Hospital and the Quest for Spiritual Health," in *Religion, Health and Suffering*, J. Hinnells and R. Porter, eds. (London: Kegan Paul, 1999): 316.

³²⁹ C. Rawcliffe, "Hospital Nurses and their Work," in *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, R. Britnell, ed (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1998), 52.

were refuges for the poor infirm and sick, offering regular meals, shelter, a warm bed, and care.

Just as “hospital” was a broad notion, so too was “health,” encompassing both the physical and the spiritual, and any treatments of the body were first prepared for with treatments for the soul.³³⁰ The *regimen sanitatis* of the medieval hospital was holistic, aimed at restoring equilibrium within the body and the soul and a balanced integration of the two. Jacques de Vitry and others had noted the close correlations between spiritual vice and bodily illness: the Seven Deadly Sins were not only deadly to the soul, but also to the body.³³¹ Thus, any possible restoration of health required a diagnosis that began with confession and the identification of vicious behaviors that could upset the health of mind and body. Once the soul’s relationship with its Maker had been put in order, the process of bringing order back to the body began through the regimentation of diet, prayer, and regular basic care provided by nursing sisters and women servants.³³²

Complementing the work of the nurses in their attentions to the bodies of patients was the service of the brothers and their attention to souls. The brothers of the hospital provided the spiritual services of confession, counsel and communion, in addition to offering the divine services.³³³ Indeed, many medieval hospitals followed the pattern of an enclosed monastery, with the infirmary hall occupying the nave of the Church, so as to give the patients the ability to attend the round of divine offices and the see the Elevation of the Divine Physician in the form the Host during the mass.

³³⁰ *ibid.*; C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1995): 58.

³³¹ J. Imbert, *Histoire des Hopitaux en France* (Toulouse: Privat, 1982): 48-50.

³³² C. Rawcliffe, “Hospital Nurses and their Work,” 43-64.

³³³ M. Carlin, “Medieval English Hospitals,” 32.

Although the scope and standards of care may have varied from place to place, the attention to and methods for the cure of souls did not. A hospital was not simply a building for the sick and dying, but was understood as a community of persons comprised of patients and staff, founders and patrons, and the living and dead. The hospital brethren in particular were engaged in this duty, saying masses and prayers for the salvation of the souls within the community. Patients also participated in this task, praying for those benefactors who supported their care. Foundational statutes of even the smallest almshouse often requested a set number of *Pater Nosters* and *Aves* daily from the residents, thus placing a high value on the intercession of sick and enfeebled. The intercessory prayers of the poor and suffering were held to be particularly efficacious, as they were enduring their spiritual purgation on earth and would occupy the high seats on the Day of Judgment.³³⁴ Indeed, many founders established the care of the poor infirm before erecting chantries or chapels for ritual prayer for the deceased, indicating a greater emphasis on the institution as a locus of care and the inmates as effective intercessors. Following the deadly years of famine and plague in the fourteenth century, the emphasis seems to have shifted, and donations to hospitals took on a commemorative focus, memorializing founders and patrons, as witnessed in the impressive building programmes undertaken at some hospitals.³³⁵

The work of hospitals extended beyond its walls and the persons associated with it. Many hospitals were obliged by their charters to provide doles of food, clothing or money to the poor that lived outside the hospital precincts. In very visible and concrete

³³⁴ S. Wenzel, ed. and trans., *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 541.

³³⁵ G. Goldin, *Works of Mercy: A Pictorial History of Hospitals* (Ontario: Canada: Boston Mills Press, 1994); C. Rawcliffe, "The Seventh Comfortable Work: Charity and Mortality in the Medieval Hospital," *Medicina & Storia* 3 (2003), 11-35.

ways, the medieval English hospital was a place in which the Seven Works of Mercy, originating in gospel exhortations to care for the sick, the hungry and thirsty, the naked, the captive and the stranger (Matt. 25: 35-40), were most evidently carried out. According to its statutes, St. James Northallerton (Yorks.) was to offer half a loaf and drink each night to thirteen paupers.³³⁶ Bishop Grosseteste's statutes for Kingsthorpe hospital ordered that worn clothing should be distributed for reuse by the poor.³³⁷ Some houses also fulfilled the seventh, visiting the prisoner: St. Giles London often provided pots of ale to condemned prisoners as they passed by the hospital on their way to execution at Tyburn,³³⁸ and St. Leonard's York sent alms (most likely food and drink) to those imprisoned in York castle, in addition to supplying leper houses and distributing alms at the hospital gate.³³⁹ In the years of the Black Death and following, many hospitals placed greater emphasis on the care of the poor and dying and commemoration of the dead, and sought to imitate Tobit, whose work of burying the dead whom none would bury was added to the Matthean list of corporal works, a task which required the acquisition of land for cemeteries.³⁴⁰

Hospitals were unique *loci* of the performance of the works of mercy that formed the heart of medieval Christian theology about love of God and neighbour. A long homiletic tradition warned that heaven was foreclosed to those who failed to attend to the

³³⁶ *The Register, or Rolls, of Walter Gray, Lord Archbishop of York*. Ed. J. Raine, Surtees Society 56 (Durham: Andrews and Co for the society, 1872), 180-1. "Sint et ibi in infirmaria tresdecim infirmi in lectulis, et humaniter sustententur in lectis, cibariis et aliis donec convaluerint vel humanitus contigerit de eisdem. Cum autem contigerit aliquem de praedictis infirmis discedere, alius in loco suo sine mora succedat, si sit qui indigeat vel caritatem petat. Singulis autem noctibus admittantur ad portam Hospitalis triginta pauperes, et ibidem habeant dimidiam panem et potagium. Et si quis ita debilis fuerit et infirmus quod recedere non possit, provideatur ei de hospitio justa portam. Panis autem, tam infirmorum quam pauperum, tanti ponderis sit quod de quarterio frumenti fiant decies viginti panes... "

³³⁷ *VCH Northants*, ii, 155.

³³⁸ Stow, *Survey of London*, ii, 91.

³³⁹ Cullum, *Cremetts*, 29-30.

³⁴⁰ Rawcliffe, "The Seventh Comfortable Work: Charity and Mortality in the Medieval Hospital," *Medicina & Storia* 3 (2003), 11-35.

needy and vulnerable; such was the clear moral of popular cautionary parable Dives and Lazarus. Others extended the argument further, arguing that the healthy and wealthy *needed* the sick and poor in order to attain heaven, adopting Chrysostom's contention that, "if there were no poor, the greater part of your sins would not be remedied; they [the poor] are the healers of your wounds."³⁴¹ The interdependence of the sick and the sane and the vulnerability of both groups underlay Christian mandates to charity. Care for one's neighbor was to be expressed in two particular modes, the corporal and the spiritual. Following the works outlined in Matthew 25 and the example of Tobit mentioned earlier, the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy incumbent upon every Christian were to succor the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked, harbor the stranger, attend to the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. In a balanced symmetry that acknowledged the corporal and spiritual makeup of the person, seven additional works were aimed at healing souls: instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubter, admonishing the sinner, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving injuries, comforting the sorrowful, and praying for the living and the dead.³⁴² Some medieval hospitals could even claim to fulfilling many of the Spiritual Works as well, offering education for poor orphans, often limited to the

³⁴¹ St. John Chrysostom, "Sermon XIV on Timothy," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XIII, P. Schaff, ed. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 455. Chrysostom in particular preached extensively on the relationship between rich and poor, preaching seven consecutive sermons on Dives and Lazarus, ten on repentance and almsgiving, and two on Matthew 25. See St. John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. C. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); John Chrysostom, *On Repentance and Almsgiving*, G. Christos, trans., Fathers of the Church Series 96 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1998); R. Brandle, "This Sweetest Passage: Matthew 25:31-46 and the Assistance to the Poor in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," in *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society*, ed. Susan R. Holman (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008).

³⁴² The origins of the list of corporal works are harder to trace and merit further study. Certainly Aquinas understood them as a traditional in his discussion of them, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, 32, 8.

sacred number twelve,³⁴³ offering admonition and consolation to the sick and dying, and offering obsequies and prayers for the living and dead.

Although hospitals were in a unique position as places in which the Works of Mercy were especially carried out, they were in competition with each other and with other institutions in the spiritual economy. That hospitals were sensitive to this competition is attested to in the registers, particularly by complaints representatives of smaller institutions who felt that larger hospitals, such as St. Thomas Acon (London) and its small army of proctors would place them at a disadvantage and that the nation-wide fundraising campaigns of large hospitals drew attention and donations away from more immediate, local needs. These protests could at times become aggressive and obstructionist, leading the master of St. Thomas to complain directly to John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, that “some persons in the province, both ecclesiastical and lay, have frequently and to the great prejudice of the hospital prevented their messengers and proctors from announcing [their] privileges and indulgences... .” Morton responded by reminding “the rebels and objectors” of their obligation to let the proctors announce their indulgences, “on pain of penalties for contempt.”³⁴⁴ This skirmish of words reveals sensitivity on the part of hospitals, parishes and other religious institutions to the spiritual economy and the finite number of donors. It was clearly felt that some institutions, particularly the larger hospitals, had an unfair advantage in the spiritual marketplace, one that might influence smaller hospitals’ opportunities for benefaction in negative ways.

The concern for benefaction indicates the financial pressure that hospitals felt in their search for material support of the range of the services they aspired to provide.

³⁴³ C. Rawcliffe, “The Eighth Comfortable Work: Education and the Medieval English Hospital,” 371-398.

³⁴⁴ *Reg. Morton*, 5-7.

Provision of food, shelter, and care was a costly business, and medieval hospitals aimed to provide these without burden to the patient. However, need often outstripped the resources and ability of institutions to meet them. For hospitals in major urban centers or along popular pilgrimages that catered to large numbers of malnourished itinerants, impoverished dying, and destitute and sick pilgrims, the pressure on their financial resources was often tremendous.

Challenges to Charity

Challenging economic realities often undermined grand intentions. Milbourne the Draper's almshouse demonstrates the precarious financial situation of most hospitals, even one for which the founder took careful pains to ensure its long-term viability. Particularly after the economic decline of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, many hospitals were constrained by financial difficulties. By the sixteenth century, many of the large, ancient hospitals saw their annual budgets drastically reduced: in 1287, St. Leonard's, York, netted £1, 263 annually but by 1535 received only £310.³⁴⁵ St. Paul's, Norwich saw its revenues fall by two-thirds after 1363, possessing only £24 with which to meet its obligations in 1533.³⁴⁶ The level of endowment and the way in which the endowment was constructed was a significant factor in the long-term sustainability of a hospital, the kinds of services it could offer, and the range of people it could assist. Ancient hospitals established prior to or in the decades following the

³⁴⁵ P.H. Cullum, "Hospitals and Charitable Provision in Medieval Yorkshire" (University of York, PhD thesis, 1990), 136-7.

³⁴⁶ C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 65.

Conquest were often dependent on income due from land rents and the sale of animals or crops, and were sensitive to the boom-and-bust cycles of the land market, as well as to poor crops or murrain. Over time, despite the relative care their founders might have put into funding a hospital, the endowments became insufficient to meet the needs of the staff and patients.³⁴⁷ In some cases, under-endowment was intentional, particularly in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and especially among the urban merchant class. Many of the guild and fraternal almshouses were established by wealthier members, with the understanding that the guild or fraternity would have to meet the continuous costs of providing doles, clothing, food, maintenance and other expenses.³⁴⁸ Thus, fraternal support became a part of the strategy toward long-term sustainability.

A hospital could become mired in financial difficulty for other reasons, too. Aristocratic institutions could suffer from benign neglect or the changing charitable impulses and fortunes of later generations. Lord Botreaux's almshouse at Bath did not endure even one generation after his death, as his daughter, Lady Margaret Hungerford, disendowed it, and transferred the endowment to a charitable project of her own preference: another almshouse and a chantry, closer to home, at Heytesbury in Wiltshire.³⁴⁹ Institutions under royal patronage suffered from too much attention in the form of over-exploitation. The crown could appoint a pluralist or absentee master, leaving finances in disarray. More frequently, however, the crown used hospitals to

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 65-102. Rawcliffe describes the various measures that the hospital of St. Giles, Norwich, adopted to remain solvent after the initial endowments became insufficient in the years before the Dissolution.

³⁴⁸ C. Rawcliffe, "Dives Redeemed? The Guild Almshouses of Later Medieval England," 3-4.

³⁴⁹ Hicks, "Chuntries, Obits and Almshouses," 132. Lady Hungerford may have undertaken this consolidation of pious expenses as part of her effort to raise funds to pay the ransoms of her son, Robert Moleyns, Lord Hungerford. M.A. Hicks, "Counting the Cost of War: the Moleyns Ransom and the Hungerford Landsales, 1453-87," *Southern History* 8 (1986): 11-35.

house infirm or aged retainers, or sapped the hospital's income by assigning a portion of its revenue or assets to the support of friends loyal to the court.³⁵⁰

Some endowments were so badly compromised that the houses could offer little more than a roof over one's head and a bed to sleep in. Hospitals and almshouses in difficulty turned to a variety of strategies in order to remain open. In struggling institutions, inmates and their families could be charged for their care. Inmates of other houses might turn to begging as a means to support themselves in hospital. Some institutions, rather than requiring their inmates to turn to begging, turned to the sale of corrodies, the future guarantee of a bed or provision of food in old age or infirmity in exchange for a lump sum payment. An annuity of sorts, the sale of corrodies were a gamble for hospital administrators in that they could lose money in the long term if the corrodian lived a long time or required much care. Indeed, hospitals were often burdened by royal or patron demands for hospitality and provision of corrodies for family or retainers.³⁵¹ Moreover, the practice of selling corrodies could be a source of scandal to many potential donors, who felt that the acceptance of paying pensioners displaced those with fewer resources and greater need. There was also the perception that the sale of services was used to line the pockets of corrupt hospital officials.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of Hospitals*, 45. For the experience of a hospital under royal patronage, see P.H. Cullum, *Cremetts and Corrodies: Care of the Poor and Sick at St. Leonard's Hospital, York, in the Middle Ages*, Borthwick Paper 79 (York, 1991).

³⁵¹ Patricia Cullum has done pioneering work on the study of corrodies and their effects on hospital finances. P.H. Cullum, *Cremetts and Corrodies: Care of the Poor and Sick at St. Leonard's Hospital, York, in the Middle Ages*, Borthwick Paper 79 (York, 1991). See also, S. Sweetinburgh, "Royal Patrons and Local Benefactors: the Experience of the Hospitals of St. Mary at Ospringe and Dover in the Thirteenth Century," in *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400: Interaction, Negotiation, and Power*, E. Jamroziak and J. Burton, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 127.

³⁵² Cullum, *Cremetts and Corrodies*, 27-28; C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital*, 65-102.

In the long run, financial distress and the scandal of selling services could damage the reputation of the hospital and its ability to attract new donors.³⁵³ A hospital was not simply a mechanism for healing bodies; it held a significant place in the spiritual economy of an area. The poor, the sick and suffering were believed to be especially beloved of God and thus could offer powerful intercessory prayer on behalf of donors.³⁵⁴ Thus, a reputation for preferring paying inmates over the sick poor who were unable to pay harmed a hospital's role in the spiritual economy. Moreover, the rumor of corruption, perceived or real, could cause many potential donors to take their resources elsewhere out of fear that their donation and their trust would be mishandled.

The development of additional sources of income thus became paramount for many houses of relief, especially in the period following the Black Death. A financially stressed hospital might seek a royal grant of protection to beg and then engage a collector to raise funds according to the terms of the grant.³⁵⁵ Some erected donation boxes at their gates or inside their chapels for pilgrims or passersby to drop in a gift. Others established confraternities that offered spiritual benefits in return for donations.³⁵⁶ Still others promised elaborate commemoration rites and prayers in return for benefaction. Many large and middling hospitals approached their bishop for a grant of indulgence on their behalf, as a way to encourage giving from old and new sources.

Indulgences, Hospitals, and Solidarity

³⁵³ P.H. Cullum, *Cremets and Corrodies: Care of the Poor and Sick at St. Leonard's Hospital, York, in the Middle Ages*, Borthwick Paper 79 (York, 1991).

³⁵⁴ S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of Hospitals*, 11-13.

³⁵⁵ Orme, *The English Hospital*, 98-99.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 97.

Sources

Indulgences were given to benefit every type of hospital. The sources, however, are limited. Evidence of grants can be found in bishops' registers, often (but not always) written down to note when a specific hospital approached a bishop for assistance. Episcopal visitations of hospitals under their jurisdiction were also moments when a bishop might make note of other indulgences given to the institution, along with confirming the foundation's constitution and endowment arrangements, as well as offering a modicum of quality control. Occasionally, but not always, bishops would reconfirm and enregister these earlier grants, which were sometimes given before the advent of sophisticated episcopal record-keeping. Hospitals often kept records of grants given, and their muniments can also provide evidence of indulgences granted, but these did not often survive time and poor archival habits.³⁵⁷ And, as Swanson has pointed out, scribal habits changed over time, with more attention paid to full enregistration of hospital grants in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, shifting toward more ephemeral memoranda, if they were recorded at all.³⁵⁸

Different types of hospitals were more likely to be recorded in the registers. Foreign hospitals, such as Santo Spirito in Saxia (Rome), St. Thomas Martyr (Rome), Roncesvalles, St. Anthony of Vienne, and others make regular appearances in episcopal records. Their grants and privileges were more likely to be fully recorded, along with any validating documentation they provided, most likely out of a concern for fraudulent

³⁵⁷ N. Orme, "Indulgences in the Diocese of Exeter, 1100-1536," *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire* 120 (1988), 18.

³⁵⁸ Swanson, *Passports*, 81.

claims.³⁵⁹ The registers are littered with rescripts of papal grants for these large institutions, episcopal licenses authorizing their pardoners to collect in a diocese,³⁶⁰ as well as writs proclaiming restrictions on their activities and writs instructing resistant clergy to allow them to preach.³⁶¹ Occasionally English bishops offered their support through the grant of an indulgence, but it seems that it was more customary that bishops simply granted licenses to hospital representatives to operate within their jurisdiction without joining an indulgence of their own to the papal spiritual benefits the quaestors publicized.³⁶² These large continental institutions had veritable armies of pardoners or quaestors who worked as salaried agents or as farmers raising funds to export back to the motherhouse. Entries in the register of Archbishop Chichele (1363-1443) indicate that a hospital such as St. Thomas in Rome employed no fewer than sixteen quaestors in their English fund-raising operations.³⁶³ The size and persistence of these operations led to accusations of corruption against quaestors such as these.³⁶⁴ It is because of the notoriety of this particular group of hospitals and their agents that extra measures of accountability were taken in the episcopal process, leaving more evidence of their activity in the record than other smaller institutions. Also appearing with regularity in the sources were the large, national institutions, particularly those in London and in Canterbury, who

³⁵⁹ Swanson, *Passports*, 196.

³⁶⁰ For example, *Reg. Kirkby* 71:143, "Commendation to all deans and parochial clergy of the proctors of the hospital of St-Antoine-de-Viennois, who are to be allowed to collect alms for its work and poor and infirm inmates and declare its indulgence to parishioners; any goods, pigs and other animals collected are to be delivered to the bearer without deduction. Any earlier inhibition made by the bishop in synod or chapters does not apply. This stands until 29 Sept. 1343.

³⁶² Swanson notes that it is "striking" that English bishops so often declined to offer indulgences of their own to foreign hospitals. He suggests that this state of affairs is apparent only, due largely to losses in the record. He cites the case of the fundraising campaign for St. Thomas the Martyr, Rome, in 1398: while the registers indicate that no bishops offered an indulgence for the campaign, an entry in Bishop Stafford of Exeter's register lists many episcopal grants, to which he joined his own forty-day indulgence. *Reg. Stafford*, 308.

³⁶³ *Reg. Chichele*, 4:256-259.

³⁶⁴ Swanson, *Passports*, 195-96, 200-1.

conducted sophisticated fundraising campaigns that reached from Carlisle to Exeter. The larger the campaign, the greater the opportunity for fraud,³⁶⁵ and so many bishops were careful to record in greater detail the permissions and restrictions given to the proctors of these large English hospitals. Finally, small, local institutions also appear in the registers seeking the boon of an indulgence, but with less frequency: often a smaller institution appears only once or twice before falling from the record.

These repositories have limitations: bishops' registers are often incomplete, because of loss or a lack of scribal sophistication and uniformity; visitation records are likewise often incomplete and inconsistent; hospital records themselves experienced loss, and often their grants lack proper confirmation. Even so, bishops' registers remain the best and most complete source for the study of indulgences given to hospitals. English episcopal records reveal grants given to English hospitals of every size and type, and include grants by English prelates to large foreign hospitals as well.

	<i>Diocese</i>	<i>Smaller, local</i>	<i>Larger, nat'l</i>	<i>Large, Foreign</i>	<i>Total by diocese</i>
<i>North</i>	<i>Durham</i>	3	1	6	10
	<i>Carlisle</i>	1	1	0	2
	<i>York</i>	13	3	3	19
<i>Midlands</i>	<i>Coventry & Lichfield</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Lincoln</i>	5	1	0	6
	<i>Hereford</i>	6	0	3	9
	<i>Worcester</i>	2	1	0	3
<i>East Anglia</i>	<i>Ely</i>	14	4	5	23
	<i>Norwich</i>	3	0	0	3
<i>S</i>	<i>Exeter</i>	19	3	3	25

³⁶⁵ R. Swanson, "Tales to tug at purse-strings: publicizing indulgences in pre-Reformation England," in *Freedom of Movement in the Middle Ages. The Proceedings of the 2003 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Peregrine Horden, 123-136 (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007).

	<i>Bath & Wells</i>	8	4	5	17
	<i>Salisbury</i>	8	2	4	14
	<i>Winchester</i>	1	1	1	3
	<i>Chichester</i>	1	0	0	1
	<i>Canterbury</i>	7	3	5	15
	<i>Rochester</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>London</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Totals</i>	91	24	35	150

An examination of the hospital indulgences in printed English episcopal records immediately reveals the difficulties in a strictly quantitative approach to the material. The wide variations in total numbers of grants from diocese to diocese are due to many of the issues outlined above: inconsistencies in record-keeping and the survival of those records, particularly in the case of Ely, for which records are not found before 1337 and the remaining fifteenth-century registers have yet to be printed.³⁶⁶ Moreover, Rochester was not constituted as a diocese until the reign of Henry VIII in 1541, rather late for the purposes of this enquiry.³⁶⁷ In the case of registers printed from Coventry and Lichfield diocese, not all of have been printed, and of those that have, none record indulgences to hospitals.

Another consideration is the uneven distribution of hospitals, almshouses and *leprosaria* throughout the medieval English countryside. Some areas, such as the south-eastern coastal areas around Exeter, or along the pilgrim routes to Canterbury, were more thickly populated and thus had higher numbers of hospitals, whereas areas to the north

³⁶⁶ Peter Meadows, Keeper of Ely Diocesan Records, Cambridge University Library, "Ely Diocesan Records," available at <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/deptserv/manuscripts/edr.html>, accessed 5/30/2013.

³⁶⁷ Joyce Horn, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857, volume 3: Canterbury, Rochester and Winchester dioceses* (London: Institute for Historical Research, University of London, 1974), 45-47.

and east were less populated and had fewer hospitals.³⁶⁸ This distribution is reflected in the registers, with higher numbers of indulgences granted to hospitals in southern dioceses and fewer in the north, with the metropolitan see of York as the exception.

Total by Region	
North	31
Midlands	18
East Anglia	26
South	75

While the inconsistencies resist quantitative analysis, nonetheless some general conclusions can be drawn. Indulgences granted to hospitals must have been a fairly commonplace affair, given that many of the grants in the registers were brief notations, rather than fully inscribed ones, as tended to happen for unusual grants. Medieval bishops generally favored hospitals within their diocese or in dioceses where they had previously served, but occasionally granted indulgences to hospitals lying outside diocesan bounds. Much of this probably has to do with the funding strategies of the hospitals themselves, as will be discussed below. The archbishops of York and Canterbury did not confine their grants to their particular dioceses, but exercised their metropolitan jurisdiction by granting to hospitals throughout their provinces.

³⁶⁸ Knowles and Hadcock's maps indicate the distribution of monastic hospitals, but not non-monastic foundations. See *Medieval Religious Houses in England and Wales*. For recent maps indicating the relative distribution of hospitals based on the most current estimations: Rawcliffe, *Leprosy*, 107 and 352, for leprosaria; for Warwickshire, Wiltshire, and Kent, Sweetinburgh, *Role of Hospitals*, 48, 49, 69; for Cornwall and Devon, London, Bristol and Norwich, Webster and Orme, *English Hospitals*, 25, 33, 51, 71, 171 and 173; for Cumbria, W.G. Wiseman, "Medieval hospitals of Cumbria" *Transactions of the Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* 87 (1987), 83-100.

Bishops apparently favored smaller hospitals serving local populations to large English hospitals with nationwide campaigns. Many of the latter hospitals were located in and around London,³⁶⁹ or served pilgrims en route to Canterbury. Those with recurring presence in the registers were also often associated with international orders or with the large foreign pilgrim hospitals. For example, St. Anthony, London, was subject to the hospital of St. Anthony, Vienne; St. Mary Rouncivall, Charing Cross, was subject to the pilgrim hospital at Roncesvalles, Spain; St. Mary Bishopsgate (later Bedlam) was initially under the control of the Order of St. Mary of Bethlehem; St. Thomas Acon, London, was a dependency of the Knights of St. Thomas of Acre.³⁷⁰ St. Thomas on the East Bridge, Canterbury, which served pilgrims to Becket's shrine and was not controlled by foreign institutions, also appeared to have conducted nationwide but less persistent campaigns, in 1299 and in 1336.³⁷¹

Local or regional hospitals surpassed all of these in terms of the number of grants given by English prelates, the registers of which record nearly one hundred separate grants. Some hospitals recur within the registers of the diocese, like S. Mary Magdalene, Exeter, indicating a relatively stable presence in their communities, while others are fleeting, like St. Anne and St. Clement, Leominster, which could indicate less stability and perhaps closure. On the whole, bishops tended to favor hospitals, almshouses and leper houses within their own dioceses. This may be a function of preference on the part of prelates for local institutions of care, or it could be function of the resources of these

³⁶⁹ C. Rawcliffe, *Hospitals of Medieval London*, *passim*.

³⁷⁰ J. Watney, *Account of the Hospital of St. Thomas Acon* (London: Blades, 1906), 1-6.

³⁷¹ *Reg. Sutton*, 172-3; *Reg. Melton*, 152.

smaller institutions, which probably lacked the ability to maintain a large-scale fundraising campaign, and therefore focused their efforts more locally.³⁷²

Given the financial and social situation of most hospitals in post-Conquest England, the first question often asked is “how much revenue did indulgences generate?” Studies that have aimed at solving that question offer limited or impressionistic answers, usually due to the nature of medieval accounting and sometimes due to a too-narrow understanding of the purpose of indulgences.³⁷³ R.N. Swanson’s calculations for hospital income from indulgences was limited to larger institutions, whose accounts were more likely to survive. Thus, he calculated that S. Thomas Acon, a large London-based hospital with an aggressive nation-wide fund-raising apparatus, profited £65 in 1520-21.³⁷⁴ The lack of accounts surviving for smaller institutions renders any comparative conclusions based evidence from larger institutions misleading at best. A more fruitful query is to ask rather, “how did indulgences assist hospitals in their larger goals of drawing attention to the needs of, and provision for, the vulnerable within their care?” Framed in this manner, indulgences on behalf of hospitals can be understood in three particular ways: as a strategy for the development of a wider base of benefaction, as a mechanism for the promotion of greater social solidarity, and as part of the broader mandate to do works of mercy.

³⁷² In some cases, hospitals sought out prelates who were familiar with their work. S. Wulstan, Worcester, sought an indulgence from Archbishop Walter Gray after he was elevated from the see of Worcester to York. Certainly it was within Gray’s prerogative as metropolitan to grant indulgences to S. Wulstan’s, but the prior’s relationship and familiarity undoubtedly aided their cause before the archbishop. *Reg. Gray*, 7. “Indulgence of 10 days to those who give anything to Thomas, the bearer of this, for the help of the brethren of the hospital of St. Wulstan in Worcester, who *suorum valetudine corporum destituti cognoscuntur, et rerum temporalium penuria miserabilibus laborare*. To last for five years.”

³⁷³ Lunt, *Financial Relations between England and the Papacy*; R.N. Swanson, “Indulgences at Norwich Cathedral Priory,” *Historical Research* 76:191 (2003): 18-29; R.N. Swanson, *Passports*, 368-379, 419-468.

³⁷⁴ Swanson, *Passports*, 424.

A Strategy for Benefaction

Most hospitals aimed to appeal to potential local donors. Bishops offered by far the greatest number of indulgences to hospitals or almshouses within their own diocese. Occasionally, hospitals would seek the additional support of bishops outside their diocese, but these were generally larger hospitals under royal patronage, or the larger foreign hospitals mentioned above. Promotion of grants outside of the diocese required additional expenditure in the form of proctors, the medieval analog to modern development officers. However, unlike larger institutions, most hospitals could not afford to hire proctors to raise money outside the diocese. Only very occasionally would a small or middling institution seek to obtain the benefit of an indulgence from a bishop other than its diocesan. Furthermore, fundraising was probably most successful among people familiar with the smaller hospitals and their charitable activities, that is, people who lived within the boundaries of the diocese. In Cambridge, for instance, much of the benefaction given to St. John's hospital at its foundation came from within a ten-mile radius, and the enthusiastic generosity of donors gave St. John's considerable influence in the local land market.³⁷⁵ For better or worse, geographical proximity bred familiarity with an institution and its activities, as well as the quality of its services, governance and standing.

Indulgences were often part of a package of benefits that hospitals offered potential benefactors in the hopes of establishing a bond of mutual giving. The creation of confraternities allowed the benefactors to share in the prayers, masses, papal and episcopal privileges and other spiritual benefits of the hospital. The confraternity of the

³⁷⁵ Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 184-236; see also Rubin, "Development and Change in English Hospitals, 1100-1500," in *The Hospital in History*, L. Granshaw and R. Porter, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1989): 47-48.

hospital of St. Mary Magdelene at Menhiot, near Liskeard (Exeter), is one such example of how indulgences encouraged the creation of a community of supporters and benefactors. In addition to the episcopal indulgences and papal indulgences offered on behalf of St. Mary's (which totaled 14 years and 400 days), the brothers and sisters of the hospital promised to remember benefactors *in celebratione omnium missarum, horarum, ieiuniorum, vigiliarum, elemosinarum, et ceterorum bonorum que inter miseros fiunt* [...].³⁷⁶ St. Mary's was not unique in its attempts to establish bonds and to cultivate a relationship of mutual benefaction, for this type of confraternity abounded with hospitals³⁷⁷ and religious houses³⁷⁸ throughout late medieval England.

The cultivation of local benefaction often benefitted hospitals in the short- and long-term. The hospital of St. Mary at Ospringe near Dover received most of its benefaction from local residents of the town and surrounding area. Indeed, those who gave to the hospital tended to give more than once, and often gave significant support to the hospital over the course of their lifetimes.³⁷⁹ Nearly 150 local benefactors gave holdings of land within the town and surrounding villages for support of the work of the hospital; one of whom made grants of land a total of six times, and three who gave five times over the course of their lives. More than twenty-five donors gave holdings at least twice.³⁸⁰ So too, was it with the hospitals and almshouses of York in the north of England. Cullum and Goldberg's researches into Yorkshire testamentary evidence have

³⁷⁶ NRO E 163/26/1. For the full printed text, see R.M. Haines, "A Liskeard Confraternity Document," in *Ecclesia Anglicana* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1989), 197-200.

³⁷⁷ R.M. Clay, *Mediaeval Hospitals*, 178-93.

³⁷⁸ R.N. Swanson, "Mendicants and Confraternity in Late Medieval England," in *The Religious Orders in Pre-Reformation England*, ed. James Clark, 121-141 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2002); R.N. Swanson, "Letters of Confraternity and Indulgence in Late Medieval England," *Archives: The Journal of the British Records Association* 25 (2000): 40-57.

³⁷⁹ Sweetinburgh, "Royal patrons and local benefactors," 119-120.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 120.

revealed that most hospitals received, in addition to the larger endowments or end-of-life bequests, a continuous stream of small gifts. Many testators probably gave alms to a variety of beneficiaries throughout their lifetimes, and often included almshouses, *maisonsdieu* and hospitals in their giving.³⁸¹ Local benefactors might bequeath property holdings, but they were also likely to offer on-going subvention of the hospital's activities in more short-term ways, through the donation of money, food, ale, beds, linens, and clothing, among other things.³⁸²

It is difficult to quantify with any specificity the impact an indulgence could have on a hospital's accounts. Part of the difficulty rests with the account books themselves, which often do not make distinctions between gifts initiated by an indulgence and gifts given more generally.³⁸³ Swanson's study of indulgences given to support the fabric of Norwich cathedral notes the problematic nature of medieval accounting: lacunae in the records aside, very often revenue from indulgences was lumped with other devotional gifts.³⁸⁴ In his study of the sacrists' rolls, Swanson notes that even in instances in which revenue from indulgences was separated out from other streams, they were highly variable and unreliable, in part because they were often tied to specific calendrical feasts.³⁸⁵ Some hospital indulgences were similarly limited in their availability to particular feast days, but most were less "of the moment" and available without restriction on when, how much, or who could give in return for the benefit of an

³⁸¹ P.H. Cullum and P.J.P. Goldberg, "Charitable Provision in Late Medieval York: 'To the Praise of God and the Use of the Poor,'" *Northern History* 29 (1993), 32-33.

³⁸² *ibid.*

³⁸³ Rubin's study of the hospital of St. John's Cambridge notes that alms generated by indulgence are unable to be assessed separately from the general income. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 226-227. Swanson makes a similar observation. R.N. Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?* 367.

³⁸⁴ Swanson, "Indulgences at Norwich Cathedral Priory," 18-29.

³⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 25-26.

indulgence. Fewer restrictions could have inspired a strong pattern of ongoing local benefaction.

An indulgence offered on behalf of a hospital was meant to draw attention to the needs of the hospital, inspire donation and broaden support. Most hospital indulgences did require a donation, but the amount or type was always left to the discretion of the donor, thereby allowing those of lesser means to participate in the subvention of the hospital as much as those with greater capacity to give. In this way, the base of a hospital's support could be broadened to include people from every socio-economic class, as the studies of Sweetinburgh, Rubin and Cullum demonstrate.³⁸⁶ However, an indulgence also had the potential to transform an initial gift into a life-long relationship of gift and counter-gift between hospital and benefactor. Indeed, the transformation from a one-time donation into an established lifetime of benefaction could have broadening effects, drawing in entire families and extending across a generation: family members within the same generation could be inspired to give, as was the case of the four sons of John de Braunston at Ospringe, who all supported St. Mary's hospital.³⁸⁷ Family members of succeeding generations could continue their ancestors' legacy of benefaction, as John's sons did, or as the daughters of Thomas Coton did.³⁸⁸ Thus, an indulgence had the potential to broaden and deepen the economic base of a hospital across a generation and through generations of the same family, in addition to attracting new benefaction.

³⁸⁶ Sweetinburgh, "Royal Patrons;" Rubin, *Charity and Community*; Cullum, *Hospitals and charitable provision in Medieval Yorkshire, 936-1547* (unpublished dissertation, 1989).

³⁸⁷ Sweetinburgh, "Royal patrons and local benefactors," 120-121.

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*

The language employed in grants on behalf of hospitals urged generosity, as in a grant by Pope Innocent III, who encouraged medieval Christians to think of benefaction of hospitals as a key to the heavenly gates:

“Because, as the Apostle said, we all will stand before the tribunal of Christ, to receive according to what we have done in the body ... we ought to anticipate the day of final harvest with works of mercy... Since the resources of the hospital are not equal to the sustenance of the people and poor flowing to it, we warn and exhort you in the Lord, and we enjoin you for the remission of your sins, that you share out from your God-given gifts pious alms as a charitable subsidy, so that...through these good deeds and others, you are able to reach eternal joy.”³⁸⁹

Bishops’ grants resonated with like exhortations, using language similar to that of papal grants and embroidering upon it. For example, Bishop Winchelsey of Canterbury encouraged the giving of goods and assistance to the leprosarium of St. Bartholomew at Playden outside Rye, and noted that such good deeds would be multiplied in heaven.³⁹⁰

All of this echoed familiar biblical passages, such as Matthew 7:2 and Luke 12:33,³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ *Corpus iuris canonici* II, X.5.38.14, originating in the canons of Lateran IV, *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, 230-71. “Quoniam, ut ait Apostolus, omnes stabimus ante tribunal Christi, recepturi prout in corpore gessimus...oportet nos diem messionis extremae misericordiae operibus praevenire, ...Cum igitur ad sustentationem fratrum et egenorum ad tale confluentium hospitale propriae non suppetant facultates, universitatem vestram monemus et exhortamur in Domino, atque in remissionem vobis iniungimus peccatorum, quatenus de bonis vobis a Deo collatis pias eleemosynas et gratas eis caritatis subsidia erogetis, ut...per haec bona et per alia...ad eterna possitis gaudia pervenire.” N. Tanner, *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990): i, 263-4.

³⁹⁰ *Reg. Winchelsey*, 249. “...Quum ut ait apostolus omnes stabimus ante tribunal Christi recepturi prout in corpore gessimus sive bonum fuerit sive malum, oportet nos diem messionis extreme misericordiae operibus prevenire ac eternorum intuitu seminare in terris quod reddente domino multiplicato fructu recolligere debeamus in celis. Cum igitur ad sustentationem fratrum et sororum hospitalis sancti Bertholomei de Playdenn’ ac egenorum transeuncium et infirmorum ad illum confluencium, quibus pro modo suarum facultatum se exhibit liberale, proprie non suppetant facultates, nos de omnipotentis dei misericordia gloriose virginis Marie et Omnium Sanctorum meritis confidentes omnibus parochianis nostris et subditis nostre dyocesis de peccatis suis vere penitentibus et confessi, qui de bonis a deo sibi collatis pias elemosinas et grata dicto hospitali subsidia erogaverint per que ejusdem hospitalis inopia subleveter, seu qui ipsius jura et libertates sustinuerint vel cofoverint auxilio consilio vel favore, [seu] ipsius redditus vel possessiones augmentaverint pia mente, triginta dies de injuncta sibi pentitencia usque ad biennium a tempore concessionis presentis numerando misericorditer relaxamus...”

³⁹¹ Matt 7:2: “The measure you measure out will be measured back to you.” Luke 12:33: “Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there also your heart will be.”

linking earthbound generosity with divine generosity. In short, just as we have seen in the previous chapter on indulgences for the financially needy, assisting in the care of physically needy was a favored way to obtain heaven.

There were other benefits in addition to the merit gained through an indulgence. The relationship between hospitals and their donors did not travel in one direction only. Hospital inmates prayed and chaplains offered masses *pro benefactoribus*, no matter the size of the donation, and some hospitals established confraternities to extend spiritual benefits to those who offered a helping hand.³⁹² Hospital inmates thus were not passive recipients of charity, but equal and active participants in an exchange of mutuality. Indulgences were part of this array of possible benefits offered by hospitals to create opportunities for mutual support between donors and the institution and its inmates. The more a donor could be engaged in the spiritual life and benefits of the hospital, perhaps the more likely a donor would be to give throughout their life and remember the hospital at their death. Indeed, donors benefitted in a myriad of ways through their association with a hospital: through the receipt of specified counter-gifts, such as indulgences and prayers for donors and their families, through an increase in social prestige for those giving prominent gifts, and through association with other patrons of note and status, among others.³⁹³

Moreover, the continual development of a constant stream of new donors was needed to replace earlier generations in the support of the hospital's activities, and was significant for the long-term stability of a hospital. As Rubin points out, large hospital endowments tended to decline over the lifetime of the institution. A new institution often

³⁹² Rubin, *Charity and Community*, 185; Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England*, 64-72.

³⁹³ Sweetinburgh, *The Role of Medieval Hospitals*, 37-47.

enjoyed the fame and benefaction that attended the initial foundation, but as time wore on, giving often decreased as the hospital had to compete with other, newer institutions in the local spiritual and charitable landscape and economy.³⁹⁴ Understood in this way, an indulgence was one way of assisting hospitals in their development of these critical relationships with donors new and old, and can be seen as part of an effort to attract and ensure a stable stream of benefaction.

A Mechanism for Solidarity

Indulgences were not simply about money and tight hospital finances, however. Most hospitals occupied an existence at the geographic, social, and economic margins, and an indulgence was one possible tool that could draw the proverbial center to those margins. Geographically, it was most common for hospitals to be sited outside the walls of a town, for a variety of advantageous reasons.³⁹⁵ Land for building and food-producing gardens and fields were more readily available and less expensive than intramural plots. Some hospitals required more land for cemeteries and commemorative chapels, as they refined the focus of their pastoral and medical care on the care of the poor and dying, particularly following the Black Death.³⁹⁶ Many hospitals were sited along principal roads as they entered the city, giving hospitals greater access to travelers and potential donors. However, siting a hospital at the edge of towns could also signal disadvantage, such as the exclusion of specific groups, particularly those with contagious

³⁹⁴ Rubin, "Imagining Hospitals," 21-22; *ibid.*, *Charity and Community*, 217-236.

³⁹⁵ Orme, *The English Hospitals*, 41-48.

³⁹⁶ Rawcliffe, "The Seventh Comfortable Work: Charity and Mortality in the Medieval Hospital," *Medicina & Storia* 3 (2003), 16.

diseases such as leprosy, but also the wandering poor.³⁹⁷ Large population centers such as London attracted large numbers of poor infirm, for whom city leaders constructed a number of hospitals in London's suburbs. A hospital's situation outside the walls often meant that it was free of the town's jurisdiction, but it also meant that it lacked the town's protections, as well.

Indulgences were an important mechanism by which hospitals and townspeople were drawn together and through which social, spiritual and material exchange took place. An indulgence given to a hospital could act as a bridge between a hospital at the geographic margins of a town and the population within the town's walls by drawing people to the hospital. Some bishops offered indulgences to those who simply visited a hospital. Bishop Bekyngton gave forty days' remission to anyone who visited the *Domus Dei* at Henton on the feasts of the Annunciation and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, or went to mass there and said a Hail Mary or prayers for peace for Church, king and country. No donation was required, only one's presence and prayers.³⁹⁸ Other grants, particularly those made by diocesans to benefit local hospitals, stipulated a donation along with visitation: Bishop Oliver Sutton (Lincs.) offered forty days' to anyone who visited the chapel of the almshouse at Northallerton (Yorks.), made an offering of whatever amount, and said prayers for the soul of the hospital's founder.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Orme, 44.

³⁹⁸ *Reg. Bekynton*, 148. "Grant by the bishop of forty days' relaxation from penance to all persons who shall visit the chapel of the *Domus Dei* of Henton, of the Carthusian order, build in honor of the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist, on the feasts of the Annunciation and Nativity of the BVM, or celebrate mass therein, and say the Lord's Prayer with the Angelic Salutation or other prayers for the peace of the Church and the good estate and tranquility of the king and realm of England, including in the grant the said ministers of the said mass and all other persons thereat." [editor's translation].

³⁹⁹ *Reg. Sutton*, 35. "...omnibus parochianis nostris et aliis quorum diocesani hanc nostrum indulgentiam ratam habuerint, de peccatorum suorum maculis vere penitentibus et confessis, qui ad capellam memoratam causa devotionis accesserint, et ad sustentationem dicti hospitalis ac capellanorum aliorumque ibidem de servientium de bonis sibi a deo collatis grata contulerint subsidia caritatis, necnon pro salubri statu domini

<i>Grants for Local Hospitals Recorded in English Bishops' Registers</i>	
Total number recorded	91
Recorded as memoranda only (partial)	66
Fully recorded	25
Fully recorded, requiring visitation	10

Visitation, that is, entering into a hospital's space and encountering its patients, appears as a requirement for acquisition of an indulgence in 40% of fully enregistered grants for local hospitals. Visitation was generally not a requirement for national or international hospitals, simply for the practical reasons of distance and accessibility. Because we lack the original hospital petitions for grants of indulgence, it is difficult to tell whether the visitation stipulation originated with the institution or with the granting bishop. Furthermore, it is likely that more hospital indulgences carried this stipulation, since grants entered as simple memoranda in the registers often lack basic details, such as the amount and duration of the grant, requirements to obtain, etc. For example, a grant to a hospital in Bath, entered as a memorandum in Ralph of Shrewsbury's register, reads only, "Indulgence for those who give alms to the Hospital of the Holy Cross and Blessed Mary Magdalen, Bath,"⁴⁰⁰ whereas a later grant, fully enregistered, offered on behalf of the hospital in Bridgwater, included all the critical information, including visitation.⁴⁰¹

Johannis domineque Alicie uxoris sue dum vixerint, et pro animabus eorum post obitum suum, ac animabus omnium fidelium defunctorum orationem dominicam cum salutatione dicte virginis dixerint mente pia, quadraginta dies de injuncta sibi penitencia misericorditer relaxamus..."

⁴⁰⁰ *Reg. Shrewsbury*, 95.

⁴⁰¹ *Reg. Shrewsbury*, 635.

Nos de Dei misericordia sueque matris gloriose, sanctorum Petri et Andree patronorum omniumque sanctorum meritis et precibus confidentes omnibus parochianis nostris et aliis quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgenciam ratam habuerint et acceptam de peccatis suis vere penitentibus et contritis qui ad hospitale de Bruggewater nostre diocesis in honore Dei beatissime Marie Virginis matris sue ac sancti Johannis Baptiste et sancti Johannis Evangeliste constructum in quo pauperes Christi debiles et infirmi undique confluentes recipiuntur et recreantur honeste causa devocionis accesserint, vel illius hospitalis fabrice seu ad sustentacionem egenorum in eodem existencium dexteram caritatis ostenderint vel manus qualitercumque porrexerint adjutrices aut orationem dominicam cum salutatione Angelica pro benefactoribus dicti hospitalis ac pro animabus quorum corpora in eodem hospitali in Christo quiescunt humata, et pro pace et tranquillitate regis et regni Anglie dixerint mente pia, viginti dies injuncta sibi penitencia misericorditer relaxamus, etc.

In the above cases, visitation was an act essential to the acquisition of an indulgence's benefits. In this way, an indulgence could have the effect of bringing the healthy and relatively wealthy town-dweller into contact with the geographically and socially marginalized sick poor and infirm, and encourage greater solidarity with the inmates of the hospital. And so, at the same time at which there were certain social trends toward exclusion or marginalization of specific groups, an indulgence could work in the opposite direction, encouraging the contact and formation of social bridges between healthy and infirm, comfortable and poor, urban and suburban, in-groups and out-groups, to a point at which these categories could have lost some of their potency. Greater social cohesion and social trust could be effected through the encounter between donor and beneficiary.

While requirements for visitation encouraged a more proximate or physically immediate form of solidarity, indulgences that did not require visitation could also encourage solidarity and recognition, primarily by encouraging greater lay participation in the subvention and care of the elderly, infirm or leprous. It has been argued that the

indulgences offered by representatives of the hospitals were a form of sermon, given when the proctors went round to the parishes in the diocese.⁴⁰² These sermons, given by the bishop in the very text of the grant and read by the proctors to the congregation, were meant to excite pity and concern for the inmates of the hospital, to remind listeners that charity was the currency of the divine economy, and to exhort them to generosity. One such example comes from the register of Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, in a grant issued on behalf of the new hospital of St. Thomas, Southwark. The grant begins with reflections on Matthew and continues with a miniature sermon on the mandates of mercy, especially attending to the poor and infirm, and communicates the clear argument that donation to the hospital is a form of participation in the care of the poor as mandated in Matthew.⁴⁰³ Many of the grants tried to be less general and more specific, humanizing

⁴⁰² N. Vincent, ed. *EEA 9: Winchester 1205-1238* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1994), 50.

⁴⁰³ “*Petrus Dei gratia Wyntoniensis episcopus universis Cristi fidelibus per episcopatum Wyntoniensem constitutis salutem in eo qui salus est fidelium. Sicut ait apostolus: Exercitatio corporis que consistit in ieiuniis, vigiliis et aliis carnis macerationibus ad modicum utilis est; pietas vero ad omnia valet promissionem habens vite que nunc est et future. Dominus noster Ihesus Cristus inter opera pietatis sex quasi pre ceteris laudabiliora et magis meritoria nobis enumerat, commendat et docet implenda dicens: Esurivi et dedisti michi manducare, sitiivi et dedisti bibere, hospes fui et collegistis me, nudus et cooperuistis me, infirmus et visitastis me, in carcere et venistis ad me. Executoribus horum pietatis operum benedictionem et celestis regni gloriam repromittit, dicens: Venite benedicti patris mei, percipite regnum quod vobis paratum est ab origine mundi. Negligentibus autem et omittentibus opera misericordie maledictionem intentat et penam ignis eterni, dicens: Ite maledicti in ignem eternum qui preparatus est diabolo et angelis eius. Attendendum est igitur filii karissimi et alius in cordibus vestris reponendum quam necessarium et quam sit meritorium saluti animarum nostrarum pietatis operibus perpetuis indulgere, per que nobis benedictio repromittitur et eterne vite beatitudo comparatur. Ecce apud Suthewerk hospitale vetus ad susceptionem pauperum pridem constructum miserabili quodam incendio totum in cineres et favillas est redactum, et quia locus in quo illud vetus hospitale erat fundatum ad susceptionem et inhabitationem pauperum minus idoneus et minus erat neccesarius tum propter angustiam loci, tum propter aque defectum et alias multas incommoditates, de nostro et prudentum virorum consilio transferetur et transplantatur in locum alium maioris amplitudinis ubi aer purior est et serenior et aquarum uberior affluentia. Cum autem huius novi hospitalis edificium multas et multiplices exigat expensas, nec sine suffragio fidelium fine debito valeat consummari, universitatem vestram rogamus, monemus et exhortamur attentius et in remissionem peccatorum vestrorum vobis iniungimus quatinus secundum facultates vestras de bonis a Deo vobis collatis, in edificium huius novi hospitalis manum misericordie porrigatis et nuntios eiusdem hospitalis ad vos pro necessitatibus pauperum ibidem suscipiendorum et alendorum venientes pie caritatis affectu recipiatis, ut per hec et alia que feceritis pietatis opera, ab ipso qui bonorum omnium retributor est pius et misericors Deus, post huius vite decursum eterne beatitudinis mercedem reportetis. Nos autem de misericordia Dei et meritis gloriose virginis Marie et apostolorum Petri et Pauli et sancti*

the grant by noting the floods of elderly and infirm seeking services at some institutions,⁴⁰⁴ the fragile health of the inmates,⁴⁰⁵ or the suffering of the lepers.⁴⁰⁶ The goal of these sermons was certainly to call forth pity, but also to exhort solidarity in the form of a material gift to the hospital.

The Response:

As with most extant indulgences, we have no way of knowing in any quantitative manner who would have availed themselves of the opportunity to obtain an indulgence like Bishop des Roches'. Nonetheless, as was discussed earlier in the case of indulgences for the indigent, lay people were surrounded by messages that continually reminded them that participation in the care of the physically and materially poor was essential for opening the gates of heaven.⁴⁰⁷ These messages supported and reinforced the fundraising efforts of medieval English hospitals.

These messages were heard not only in churches, but also in the streets, where lay people would have been confronted with ideas about poverty, sin, and what to do about

Thome martiris et sancti Swithuni confidentes, omnibus in Cristo pie credentibus qui predictam domum et pauperes ibidem cohabitantes largitionibus elemosinarum suarum pietatis oculo respexerint, confessis videlicet, corde contritis et vere penitentibus, de iniuncta sibi penitentia viginti dies relaxamus et orationum ac beneficiorum qui fiunt in ecclesia Wyntoniensi et aliis ecclesiis per episcopatum Wyntoniensem constitutis auctore domino participes esse concedimus. Semper in domino valet." *EEA* 9, 50.

⁴⁰⁴ For example, Winchelsey's grant to St Bartholomew, Playden, in which he encouraged the audience "ad sustentacion fratrum et sororum hospitalis sancti Bertholomei de Payndenn' ac egenorum transuncium et infirmorum ad illud confluencium... ." *Reg. Winchelsey*, 249.

⁴⁰⁵ For example, Boulers' grant to St. Bartholomew's, Gloucester, urging the audience "ad subuencionem seu ad sustentacionem et relevamen pauperum debiliu ac senio confractorum degencium... ." *Reg. Beauchamp, Boulers and Stanbury*, 4.

⁴⁰⁶ For example, Romeyn's grant to St. Mary Magdalen, Pontrefract: "Inter cetera caritatis opera pium esse credimus Christi pauperibus subvenire, et hiis maxime qui, cum leper macula sint respersi, propter morbid deformitatem et horrorem cetibus populi non possunt pro colligendis elemosinis immiscere. ..." *Reg. Romeyn*, 14-15

⁴⁰⁷ Lay people found the mandate of mercy expressed to them in a variety of ways. Parish priests expounded on the mandate of mercy from the pulpit and from the confessional, relying on pastoral texts such as the *Lay Folks' Catechism*, *The Book of Vices and Virtues* and John Mirk's *Instructions for Parish Priests*, among others.

them. Mystery plays such as the Mercers' Play on the Last Judgment, acted out in the streets of York, expressed in civic ritual the lay comprehension of the mandates of mercy. In the climactic scene, God divided the good souls who had performed the Seven Corporal Works in this life from the bad souls who had failed in this duty: an admonition to active charity at the very least.

Ye cursed caitiffis, from me ye flee,
In hell to dwell without end,
There ye shall never but sorrow see
And sit by Satanus the fiend.⁴⁰⁸

That it was the Mercers' guild, comprised of some of the wealthiest citizens of York,⁴⁰⁹ who staged a play about wealth and poverty, almsgiving and redemption, reveals much about the expectations of mercy and the obligation of all to offer it. Just as the pre-Christian Jewish texts and the early Christian teachings had envisioned alms given to the

⁴⁰⁸ *English Mystery Plays: A Selection in Modern Spelling*, ed. R. Beadle and P. King (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 279, ll. 360-372. In the same scene, Jesus, imaged as the poor man Lazarus, recapitulated Matthew 25, and reminded the good souls that it was precisely their treatment of him in the disguise of the poor that won them salvation:

When I was hungry, ye me fed;
To slake my thirst your heart was free;
When I was clotheless, ye me clad,
Ye would no sorrow upon me see.
In hard press when I was stead,
Of my pains ye had pity;
Full sick when I was brought in bed,
Kindly ye came to comfort me.

When I was will and weariest
Ye harbored me full heartfully;
Full glad then were ye of your guest,
And plained my poverty piteously.
Belive ye brought me of the best
And made my bed full easily,
Therefore in heaven shall be your rest,
In joy and bliss to be me by."

⁴⁰⁹ K. Crassons, "The Challenges of Social Unity: The Last Judgment Pageant and Guild Relations in York," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37:2 (2007), 307.

poor as the key of heaven,⁴¹⁰ here too the corporal Works of Mercy were especially linked to obtaining heaven. Indeed, if the play is an accurate representation of medieval expectation, those who were careless or who willfully disregarded the poor and vulnerable paid for it with their eternity.

Although the expectation of mercy was articulated in the indulgences themselves and elsewhere, a gap most certainly lay between expectation and reality. The poor still needed care, hospitals still struggled for viability, and the clergy continued to preach the need for charity and mercy. However, just as the support of hospitals by means of an indulgence cannot be quantitatively measured, non-participation in these indulgences also eludes quantification. It is significant, however, that the expectation of participation in the care of the poor and infirm existed at all, as it set the standard for behavior within medieval English society against which all were measured.

Conclusion

In the grant to the Chichester *leprosarium* with which this chapter opened, Bishop Seffrid hoped to achieve three particular aims: to assist the hospital in its task of caring for and maintaining the leprous men and women residing there by inspiring the faithful of his diocese to support their work; to encourage greater solidarity between wealthy and poor, healthy and infirm; and finally, to remind the relatively healthy and wealthy that their own salvation hinged on recognizing their own dependence upon the poor and showing them mercy. Indulgences were sought by hospitals as a means to further their very costly charitable activities, part of a larger strategy to develop and encourage a continuous stream of stable benefaction. This strategy necessitated weaving hospitals into the

⁴¹⁰ G. Anderson, *Sin: A History*, 111-132.

broader social fabric and cultivating greater solidarity from the surrounding communities, and indulgences were one particular way in which those goals might be accomplished.

Chapter Five

The Pursuit of Peace and Solidarity: Indulgences in the Parish Context

Indulgences for medieval parishes are often described as fund-raising tools on the part of parish priests or churchwardens eager to embark on ambitious programmes of competitive church-building.⁴¹¹ Other studies have described them as part of a larger strategy for heaven on the part of those who obtain the indulgence.⁴¹² These interpretations are not mistaken, but they can be misleading if taken as the whole story of parish indulgences. In the first case, indulgences are understood primarily as economic phenomena; in the second, as a personal, spiritual pursuit. However, when the variety of indulgences available in the parish context is examined as a whole, a social dimension emerges as well. Medieval English parishes were communities of notable unity and diversity. Indulgences were offered for parish building efforts, to be sure, but they were also offered for parish dedication festivals, to promote local sites of pilgrimage within the parish, such as chapels, altars or images, to beg prayers for deceased parishioners and to foster the growth and goals of parish fraternities. Indulgences encouraged activities that drew together groups within a parish, and supported events or endeavors that reinforced the bonds of the parish as a whole. Considered from this perspective, indulgences were a mechanism for the promotion of solidarity and unity within and across the variety of groups and interests that made up a parish community in medieval England.

⁴¹¹ R.M.T. Hill, "Fund-Raising in a Fourteenth-Century Province" in *Life and Thought in the Northern Church, c. 1100-1700: Essays in Honour of Claire Cross* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 1999): 31-36; R.N. Swanson, "Fund-Raising for a Medieval Monastery: Indulgences and Great Bricett Priory" *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 40 (2001): 1-7.

⁴¹² Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?*, 224-277.

The first part of this chapter will explore the ways in which indulgences worked to promote solidarity and unity within the parish by first discussing the internal and external forces that exerted centrifugal pressures on it: the structure of the parish institution itself; the diversity of groups within the parish with sometimes competing aims, such as chapel, chantry and fraternity; as well as the competitive and fractious behavior of parishioners themselves. A grasp of these forces can help us to better understand how grants of indulgence could act as mechanisms of social cohesion and solidarity that worked to counteract tendencies toward discord and fragmentation. Thus, the second part of the chapter will examine the various types of indulgences available in the parish setting and looks at the social effects of this religious and penitential practice in the community of the parish.

Parishes in Late Medieval England: Origins and Structure

It was fashionable once upon a time to imagine the medieval English parish as the picture of sleepy, idyllic communal unity.⁴¹³ This tidy image was often proposed in the service of larger arguments about the social and spiritual effects of the Tudor reformations and/or the growth of individualism. Others saw in late medieval parishes the evidence of the first stirrings of incipient reformation.⁴¹⁴ In the past two decades, scholars have found a rich field of study in the medieval parish, not only in order to understand the sources and trajectory of the English reformation,⁴¹⁵ but also for its own

⁴¹³ For example, F.A. Gasquet, *Parish Life in Mediaeval England* (London: Methuen, 1922).

⁴¹⁴ For example, A.G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959); A.G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

⁴¹⁵ Among the more notable studies to appear: J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); C. Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); R. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars:*

sake.⁴¹⁶ The exploration of the activities of parish clergy and the laity, the role of fraternities,⁴¹⁷ the growth and significance of chantries,⁴¹⁸ the aspirations of dependent chapels,⁴¹⁹ and the complex relationships among them all have contributed to a richer reassessment of that multifaceted community called the ‘parish.’

This reconsideration of medieval English parishes in their own right has given rise to a new question of the vitality and unity of these communities.⁴²⁰ Earlier scholars tended to see parishes as fundamentally unstable, pulled apart by competing loyalties to

Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1500 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); and more recently, G.W. Bernard, *The Late Medieval English Church: Vitality and Vulnerability before the Break with Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Bernard summarizes the current status of the reformation question, noting that Duffy’s revisionist study has shifted the center of the debate away from whether the reformation was widely anticipated and welcome (generally, no) toward understanding patterns of vitality and vulnerability prior to, and acceptance and resistance post, reformation. Bernard, *Late Medieval English Church*, ix.

⁴¹⁶ S. Wright, ed., *Parish, Church and People* (London: Hutchinson, 1988) proposed the parish as a community and institution worthy of study in its own right. Since then, especially: B. Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400-1500* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996); K. French, *The People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval English Diocese* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

⁵A well-attended subject in its own right, largely originating in the seminal work of A.G. Rosser, “Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Parish, Church and People*, Susan Wright, ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 29-55; A.G. Rosser, “Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Late Medieval England,” *Journal of British Studies* 33 (1994), 430-446; A.G. Rosser, “Solidarités et changement social. Les fraternités urbaines anglaises à la fin du Moyen Age,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*. 48e année 5 (1993), 1127-1143. More recently, K. Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community in Late Medieval East Anglia* (York: York Medieval Press, 2001), among others.

⁴¹⁸ The earlier work of Wood-Legh, Cook, and Kreider laid the foundation for chantry studies by providing detailed analyses of the legal, administrative and institutional frameworks necessary for their establishment. K. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); G.H. Cook, *Medieval Chantries and Chantry Chapels* (London: Phoenix House, 1963); A. Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). Later work has sought to understand their social and spiritual roles: C. Burgess, “For the increase of divine service: chantries in the parish in late medieval Bristol,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36 (1985), 45-65; idem, “‘Longing to be prayed for’: death and commemoration in an English parish in the later Middle Ages,” in *The Place of the Dead: Death and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, B. Gordon and P. Marshall, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 44-65; S. Roffey, “Constructing a Vision of Salvation: Chantries and the Social Dimension of Religious Experience in the Medieval Parish Church,” *Archaeological Journal* 163 (2007): 122-146, among others.

⁴¹⁹ N. Orme, “The Other Parish Churches: Chapels in Late-Medieval England,” in *The Parish in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of 2002 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. Burgess and E. Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), 78-94; idem, “Church and Chapel in Medieval England,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 6 (1996), 75-102

⁴²⁰ M. Rubin, “Small Groups: Identity and Solidarity in the late Middle Ages” in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. J. Kermode (Wolfboro Falls: Alan Sutton, 1991): 132-150.

status groups, fraternity, chantry, or dependent chapel.⁴²¹ United only by geographical accident, the parish had competition, and thus conflict, built right into it because of the very existence of these sub-parochial communities. In this interpretation, diversity of religious practice and devotion within the parish community is sometimes mistaken for disunity. More recent responses have tempered that view, noting that the freedom to participate in the multiplicity of sub-parochial or even extra-parochial groups or activities need not imply conflict or disunity.⁴²² To claim as much is not to allege that conflict did not exist in medieval parish communities, but rather to point out that the other side of the coin is cooperation. Much of the recent work explores the ways in which parish communal life was characterized by conflict and cooperation, unity and diversity at the same time.

As with any human community, medieval English parishes were prone to all sorts of conflict and manifestations of the Seven Deadly Sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony. Parochial unity could be undermined by concerns about social position, by loyalties to sub-parochial groups such as fraternities or dependent chapels.⁴²³ Late medieval parishes, however, had several mechanisms to encourage the pursuit of peace and solidarity among its members. The law, of course, was the court of last resort in the resolution of conflict, but in day-to-day relations, other mechanisms existed to uphold the ideals of charity and to facilitate it. Sacraments and sacramentals abounded to

⁴²¹ For example, C. Carpenter, "The Religion of the Gentry in Fifteenth-Century England," in *England in the Fifteenth Century*, D. Williams, ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer), 53-74; C. Cross, *Church and People 1450-1660* (London: Collins, 1976); C. Richmond, "Religion and the Fifteenth-Century Gentleman," in the *Church, Patronage and Politics in the Fifteenth Century*, B. Dobson, ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984).

⁴²² Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 2; Rosser, "Communities of Parish and Guild in the Late Middle Ages," 29-55; Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, 179-182.

⁴²³ Miri Rubin has argued that the Corpus Christi guild was exploited by the social elite to exercise greater social control in some English towns. M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 213-287.

act as both reminders and aids in the pursuit of peace and solidarity, chief among them the sacrifice of the Mass,⁴²⁴ the sacrament of penance, and the pax-bread. The regular attendance to these mechanisms wrought what John Bossy termed “the social miracle,” the creating, repairing and renewing of communal bonds.⁴²⁵ Supporting and encouraging this process were indulgences, which incentivized and drew parishioners and others to participation in the rituals of peace-making and solidarity.

Defining the Parish

In order to understand more clearly the role of indulgences in parish communities, it is necessary to describe in greater detail the origins, structures, and sub-groups which made up those communities. The local parish, clearly defined with its rights, obligations, and expectations, was a relatively late creation in medieval England. Prior to the Norman Conquest, minsters or monasteries were responsible for providing pastoral care to the inhabitants of great swathes of the countryside.⁴²⁶ The emergence and systematization of local parishes was gradual and uneven, characterized on the one hand by a lack of ecclesiastical oversight to govern the process and, on the other, freedom and enthusiasm on the part of the new Norman lords in particular to establish churches and chapels on their estates.⁴²⁷ By the end of the twelfth century, the process was complete, with the countryside carved up into a patchwork of approximately 8,500 parochial jurisdictions.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 91-130.

⁴²⁵ J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 57-75.

⁴²⁶ J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); J. Blair and R. Sharpe, *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992).

⁴²⁷ Kūmin, *The Shaping of a Community*, 13-17; R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1989), 227-274; N.J.G. Pounds, *A History of the English Parish* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3-40.

⁴²⁸ Pounds, 3.

Annual Rogationtide rituals reaffirmed these boundaries, and made clear to every man, woman and child to which parish they belonged.⁴²⁹

A parish was, by definition, a geographical territory, an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, a locus of pastoral care, and a community of persons. All of these concerns were located in and symbolized by the parish church itself. Within the parish, competing and complementary expectations fell on both parishioners and priest, and were reflected in the church building itself. The parishioners, obligatory members by virtue of geography, were tasked with the care and upkeep of the nave of the church, the sacred space in which they were to receive instruction and the sacraments from baptism to burial.⁴³⁰

Parishioners were actors in parish life, too, paying (and sometimes withholding) tithes, decorating and lighting the church and raising the funds to do so. They organized ales to raise money for vestments and sacred books and bell towers, they managed stores to pay for lights and tapers before images and the crucifixes,⁴³¹ they took turns serving as churchwardens, and they participated in the episcopal visitations of their parish.⁴³² The priest for his part was obliged to care for the chancel and the altar. In this regard, the parish was also a benefice, with glebe lands and tithes intended to provide the priest with a living and support him in his obligations to the parish. First and foremost, he was to provide the sacraments and “to make God present in the local community every day in

⁴²⁹ R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year, 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 34-36.

⁴³⁰ Statutes of Winchester 1 (1224), c. 11, in *Councils and Synods*, ed. F.M. Powicke and C.R. Cheney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964) 2, 1:128, which states parishioners' obligation generally, “*Parochiani vero compellantur corpus ecclesie reficere secundum quod tenetur.*” J. Goering, “The Changing Face of the Village Parish: The Thirteenth Century,” *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. Ambrose Raffis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 323-333.

⁴³¹ B. Hanawalt, “The Keepers of the Lights: Late Medieval English Parish Gilds,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984): 21-37.

⁴³² W. J. Dohar, “Sheep as Shepherds: Lay Leadership and Pastoral Care in Late Medieval England,” in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages*, Ronald J. Stansbury, ed (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 147-171; E. Mason, “The Role of the English Parishioner, 1100-1500,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976), 17-29.

the sacrifice of the Mass; to bring God's blessings to their children, houses, fields, and flocks in the form of the Latin blessings found in the authoritative books; to intercede for them and their dead in the prayers for the dead in the liturgical hours; and to be prompt in visiting the sick and dying."⁴³³ Over the course of the thirteenth century, the role and duties of the parish priest were more clearly marked out in terms of the priest's education in theology and canon law and in terms of the quality of pastoral care he should offer his flock.⁴³⁴

Although the boundaries of the medieval English parish and the roles of, and the boundaries between, priest and parishioner enjoyed greater definition in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it should not be assumed that parish unity was a necessary corollary of this clarity. The greater definition of parochial roles and responsibilities meant higher expectations, and in law-conscious medieval England, failure to meet expectation often meant resorting to ecclesiastical courts to reaffirm both the law and expectations. Church courts played a vital and valued role in resolving conflicts and settling disputes within the parish, and their records,⁴³⁵ as well as episcopal registers, reveal that the challenges to

⁴³³ J. Goering, "The Thirteenth Century English Parish," in *Educating People of Faith: Exploring the History of Jewish and Christian Communities*, ed. J. Van Engen (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2004), 215.

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*, 209.

⁴³⁵ D. Owen, "Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in England, 1300-1550" *Studies in Church History* 11 (1975): 199-221. Few records survive prior to 1550. N.J. Tringham, "The Parochial Visitation of Tarvin (Cheshire) in 1317," *Northern History* 38:2 (2001): 198-220; *idem*, "A Church Court at Baswich, Stafford, in 1288," *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society* 30 (1989), 23-25; *idem*, "Five Courts at Lichfield in 1326," *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society* 32 (1992): 79-82; S.L. Parker and L.R. Poos, "A Consistory Court from the Diocese of Rochester, 1363-4," *English Historical Review* 106 (1991): 652-65; A.T. Bannister, "Visitation Returns of the Diocese of Hereford in 1397," *English Historical Review* 44 (1929): 279-89; *idem*, "Visitation Returns of the Diocese of Hereford in 1397," *English Historical Review* 45 (1930): 92-101, 444-63; G.G. Coulton, "A Visitation of the Archdeaconry of Totnes in 1342," *English Historical Review* 26 (1911): 108-24; A. Gransden, "Some Late Thirteenth-Century Records of an Ecclesiastical court in the Archdeaconry of Sudbury," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 32 (1959): 62-69; F.S. Pearson, "Records of a Ruridecanal Court of 1300," *Collectanea*, (London: Mitchell, Hughes and Clark for the Worcestershire Record Society, 1912), 69-80; C.E. Woodruff, "Some early Visitation Rolls Preserved at Canterbury," *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 32 (1917), 143-80; *The Register of John Waltham, 1388-1395*, ed. T.C.B.

unity and solidarity within the parish were normal and boiled down to two basic issues: adequate provision of sacraments and pastoral care, and failure of priests and parishioners to honor bonds and obligations in suitable ways. These issues manifested themselves in a number of ways, such as challenges to the geographic integrity of the parish bounds by dependent chapels petitioning for independence; threats (perceived or real) from competing sites of devotion, loyalty and donation within or near the parish, such as chantries, chapels, and fraternities; and parish community members who flouted both law and expectation through greed, parsimony, wrath or other fractious behavior. Other challenges might come from without, such as the economic and social upheavals that followed the Black Death, which could undermine a parish's stability.⁴³⁶

Challenges to Unity from Within the Parish

In his comprehensive study of medieval English parish life, Beat Kümin found chapels, chantries, and fraternities to be the principal sources of religious and social diversity that demonstrated the vitality and adaptability of the parish system to the changing social, religious, and economic circumstances of the age. The presence of these sub-parochial institutions certainly had the possibility of weakening the coherence and unity of an individual parish community, he noted, but in the main, “the parish *system* as such, conceived as a network of (reasonably defined) units of religious life, was never fundamentally challenged.”⁴³⁷ Sub-parochial entities certainly contributed greater

Timmins, *Canterbury and York Society*, 80 (1994), 113-68, 208-12; *Visitation of Churches Belonging to St. Paul's Cathedral in 1297 and 1458*, ed. W. Sparrow Simpson, Camden Society, new ser. 60 (Westminster, 1895).

⁴³⁶ W.J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 149-155.

⁴³⁷ Kümin, 179.

dimension to the religious experience of the parish, but they could also pose certain challenges to the coherence of the parish, allowing for tensions as these institutions overlapped with one another and as they were altered or adapted to meet the changing needs and goals of their members.

Chapels were one example of sub-parochial entities that overlapped with the geographical boundaries of, and commitments to, the parish. The word ‘chapel’ itself was an adaptable word that came to encompass a wide variety of ecclesiastical buildings that existed alongside parish churches. Chapels could be public or private, free-standing or enclosed within another building; they could be richly ornamented or bare; they could be urban and well-attended or remote and rarely visited except for specific days in the year.⁴³⁸ Some were of ancient origin, pre-dating the parochial system itself. Their functions varied, serving as sites of pilgrimage, markers of ancient battle, signs of liminal state in cave, cliffs and river crossings. Others were of later foundation, established by royalty or gentry, urban well-to-do patrons or a group such as a fraternity or other association.⁴³⁹ Whatever their origin, siting, or purpose, chapels were far more numerous than parish churches themselves,⁴⁴⁰ representing a lively freedom of religious practice in late medieval England.

Chapels added flexibility to the parochial system. The uneven manner of the development of the parish system and its later ossification meant that it was slow to adapt to changing demographics and needs, leaving some parishes without adequate pastoral

⁴³⁸ Orme, “Church and Chapel in Medieval England,” 75-102; idem, “The Other Parish Churches: Chapels in Late-Medieval England” in *The Parish in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. C. Burgess and E. Duffy (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006): 78-94.

⁴³⁹ Orme, “Other Parish Churches,” 84-85.

⁴⁴⁰ Orme, “Church and Chapel,” 82. Orme notes that in the county of Devon, 1,300 chapels existed alongside 409 parishes.

care. Some parishes were quite large and geographically diverse, encompassing and drawing together more than one manor or village. Villagers separated from their parish church by distance or some other geographical obstacle worried about access to the priest, particularly in instances of possible or probable death. Infants newly born, the sick, and the dying all needed to be able to avail themselves of blessings, prayers and sacraments. Parishioners fiercely guarded their “rights” to the sacraments, especially at the critical moments of birth and death, and defended those rights in their requests that dependent chapels be founded to ease the burden on both parish priest and his far-flung flock. In the diocese of Exeter alone, bishops granted 1,270 licences for chapels from 1308-1455, which indicates that late medieval parishioners saw chapels as a way to ensure what they considered to be adequate pastoral care, and perhaps as a way of reaffirming local identity.⁴⁴¹

The push for more rights, such as the right of burial at the chapel instead of the parish church, could generate tensions between localized communities within a parish. The parish of Weymouth in the diocese of Salisbury also struggled with church and chapel divisions, when some parishioners began favoring a chapel of ease over their own parish church at Wyke Regis. Bishop Martival issued an indulgence as an incentive to heal the breach and encourage Weymouth’s residents to attend the parish church.⁴⁴² Even

⁴⁴¹ Orme, “The Other Parish Churches,” 79.

⁴⁴² *Reg. Martival*, 364. “Rogerus permissione divina et cetera dilectis in Christo fillis parochianis ecclesie de Wyk’ nostre diocesis salutem, gratiam et benedictionem. Gracia que de concedentis libera benignitate procedit recipientem manifeste reddit ingratum si concessa in dispendium torqueat et suis non contentus finibus se extendat in alterius lesionem. Dudum siquidem ecclesiam parochialem predictam personaliter visitantes repperimus quod quidam vestrum apud Waymuth’ infra dictam parochiam ut cominus excercicio commerciorum indulgeat habitantes, occasione capelle que ibidem de gracia matricis ecclesie est permissa, ab eadem matrice ecclesia, utpote in audiendis divinis officiis ac predicacione verbi dei ex cujus auditu orthodoxe fidei cum bonis operibus hortamenta sequuntur, diebus dominicis et fesvis ac aliis in quibus eidem ecclesie sunt astricti frequenter se subtrahunt importune maternalem reverenciam a cujus uberibus suxerunt, salutaria sacramenta abicientes inprovide tanquam degeneres filii ancillam domine ordine prepostero

if a chapel of ease were granted further rights of baptism or burial, by law the tithes were still directed toward the parish church and its maintenance and expenses, leaving the costs associated with the care of the chapel to the local community. A case in point was the strained relationship between the dependent chapel at Leigh-on-Mendip and the parish church at Mells, in the diocese of Bath and Wells. Citing distance and obstacles imposed by bad seasonal weather that prevented them from carrying their dead to the parish church at Mells, the parishioners at Leigh petitioned the pope for right of burial in 1405. Although their request was granted, tensions still persisted, culminating fifty years later in the refusal of the parishioners of Leigh to take their turn in providing the pax-bread at the parish church in Mells, the very distribution of which was to signify communal peace and charity.⁴⁴³ Leigh-on-Mendip was no solitary example. Papal records also attest to the tenacity with which these rights were sought: earlier requests to the bishops having failed, 110 dependent chapels petitioned the pope between 1360 and 1509 for more rights and greater independence from their parish church.⁴⁴⁴

Nearby pilgrimage chapels and gentry chapels represented a challenge to the unity of the parish community, in that the former could draw away parishioners and donations, and the latter could draw off entire households or manors from parish life.⁴⁴⁵ These types

preferentes in animarum suarum periculum ipsiusque matricis ecclesie lesionem non modicam ac perniciem aliorum. Nolentes autem ut status ipsius ecclesie debitus et antiquus per aliquorum insolentiam seu abusum temerarium subvertatur set pocius, ut errantes in viam possint redire justicie, lumen veritatis ostendi volentes, vos omnes et singulos exhortamur in domino et eciam obsecramus vobis in remissionem pecaminum firmiter injungentes quatinus diebus dominicis et festivis aliisque quibus oportunitas affuerit accedenda ut debitor honor eidem in omnibus observetur ipsam ecclesiam in qua spiritualis almonie membris sibi incorporatis derivantur fluenta et pabula ministrantur cum veneratione debita frequentetis, honoris et jurium parochialium exhibicionem justam ut tenemini inpensuri. Et ut animos vestros futuris successivis temporibus ad salutem animarum propensius allectivis indulgenciarum muneribus excitemus, vobis omnibus et singulis de peccatis suis vere contritis et confessis ad prefatam ecclesiam ut premittitur accedentibus xxx dies indulgencie concedimus per presentes....”

⁴⁴³ French, *People of the Parish*, 25.

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 237, n. 26, citing *CPL* vols. 1-18.

⁴⁴⁵ Carpenter, “The Religion of the Gentry,” 53-74.

of chapels were legion. However, such chapels were often severely restricted in the rights given them in order to avoid diminishing the privileges of the parish church. Gentry families which acquired permission for a chapel were often licenced only for daily services, and were required to attend Sunday liturgies in their parish church. Free-standing pilgrimage chapels might offer the Divine Liturgy on Sundays, depending on the size and importance of the cult, but even so possessed no parochial rights of baptism, confession, burial, marriage, et cetera. But chapels of cult, centered around a saint's body or image, were also housed within parish churches, and drew pilgrim travelers from afar as well as devotees from the neighborhood.⁴⁴⁶ The shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham was one such image shrine that attracted local, national and even international devotion. The Annunciation guild in the parish of Little Walsingham was the local fraternity most closely associated with the shrine, and drew members, along with their attention, time and donations, from other parishes throughout the local area.⁴⁴⁷

The profusion of side altars in the aisles of parish churches indicates that chantries were another source of diversity within the parish community. A chantry or *cantaria* described any service offered by a privately hired chaplain, from praying the office of the dead to offering masses on behalf of the employing individual, family or group, such as a guild. Following the Black Death, chantries grew in popularity as a way to honor the dead and speed them to heaven, and by the end of the fourteenth century, a chantry came to solely signify masses offered for the repose of the souls of the founders and their

⁴⁴⁶ E. Duffy, "The Dynamics of Pilgrimage in Late Medieval England" in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, C. Morris and P. Roberts, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 164-177.

⁴⁴⁷ K. Farnhill, "The Guild of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Priory of St. Mary in Walsingham," in *The Parish in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium*, C. Burgess and E. Duffy, eds. (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006):137-139.

deceased loved ones.⁴⁴⁸ As parish priests were restricted by canon law to the celebration of one mass a day,⁴⁴⁹ chaplains became necessary in order to carry out the growing requests for masses of remembrance. As the Divine Liturgy required an altar, founders of chantries erected them in the side aisles of parish churches, in guildhall chapels, in manor-house chapels, in free-standing chapels specially built for the purpose, and in monasteries and cathedrals. Chantries were lay-managed affairs, with the lay founder or his or her trustees endowing and erecting the chantry and hiring and firing the chaplain. Foundation required no special ecclesiastical approbation, but some types of chantries specified that the bishop should confirm appointees.⁴⁵⁰ Although a chantry was thus essentially a private institution founded for private aims, if founders wished to establish one in a parish church, they first needed to obtain the approval of the parish priest, in order that the relationship between rector and chaplain be delineated and the rights and obligations of each clarified and protected.⁴⁵¹

Chantry priests could be of great help to a parish priest, assisting him in the cure of souls and in meeting the educational needs of the parish,⁴⁵² even so, chantries and their chaplains could have a centrifugal tendency, potentially drawing attention away from the main altar of the parish. French has argued that that private chantries were exclusive by nature, the preserve of the wealthy and their families, and were “off-limits to the rest of the membership.”⁴⁵³ Duffy and Roffey counter this view, contending from the basis of

⁴⁴⁸ Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain*, 1-7.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁵⁰ Many founders also requested that the terms of their foundation and endowment be detail in episcopal registers, usually for the purposes of enforcement of the terms and protection of the endowment. K.L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries*, 11-16.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*, 271-277.

⁴⁵² C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 33; Wood-Legh, 269-270.

⁴⁵³ French, *People of the Parish*, 155.

documentary and archaeological evidence that privately-founded chantries were not necessarily private in function. Far from exclusive, they were open to general attendance and chantry priests were careful to avoid drawing attention away from the main altar.⁴⁵⁴ It seems that most of the conflict originating from chantries came not from their institutional structure or function, but rather from the persons and personalities associated with them. As prone to vice or violence as any man, chantry priests were censured for their failure to meet professional, social or moral expectations, such as the neglect of their duties, as well as instances of adultery and other moral lapses.⁴⁵⁵ For instance, parishioners charged that chantry priest John Pole had abandoned his post for weeks and months at a time; and when he was present, he was not obedient to the vicar and had light fingers with parish goods.⁴⁵⁶ Failed expectations also provoked some of the laity in Kent to complain to Archbishop Warham in 1511 that the chantry priests were not reading the Gospel or offering the early-morning morrow mass (usually offered for laborers), nor did they give out the holy bread on Sunday.⁴⁵⁷

Fraternities also contributed to the social and religious diversity of a parish in ways that could support or challenge the cohesion of the parish as a whole. Also known as ‘guilds,’ or ‘brotherhoods,’ these voluntary associations were based in parishes and possessed wide social diversity.⁴⁵⁸ Men, women, old, young, merchants, laborers, laity and clerics were generally part of guild memberships.⁴⁵⁹ They were a ubiquitous part of

⁴⁵⁴ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 98, 139-141; Roffey, “Constructing a Vision of Salvation,” 136-142.

⁴⁵⁵ Wood-Legh, 298-302.

⁴⁵⁶ Bannister, *Visitation Returns of the Diocese of Hereford*, 282

⁴⁵⁷ *The Kentish Visitation of Archbishop William Warham and his Deputies 1511-1512*, K. L. Wood-Legh, ed., Kent Records 24 (Kent Archaeological Society, 1984), 76-80, 88, 193.

⁴⁵⁸ P. Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le moyen-âge latin*, L’église et l’état au moyen âge 13 (Paris: Vrin 1970), 179.

⁴⁵⁹ B. Hanawalt, “Keepers of the Lights: late medieval English parish guilds,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 14 (1984): 24-26.

medieval English communities, both rural and urban, and their numbers surpassed the number of parishes. Gervase Rosser estimates that there were 30,000 guilds in fifteenth-century England.⁴⁶⁰ A large urban center such as London was home to nearly 200 parish fraternities,⁴⁶¹ and even a town of middling size such as Whittlesey in Cambridgeshire contained ten fraternities.⁴⁶² A single parish could have several fraternities, each with its own membership, devotions and ordinances; for instance, the church of Holy Trinity in Hull held twelve guilds.⁴⁶³

Membership in parish fraternities was open to all who were willing or able to pay the subscription fee. Most rural parish fraternities had such low entry fees that most parishioners, from parish priest to the poor, could afford entrance.⁴⁶⁴ Membership in town fraternities was another matter, where fees could be higher and more exclusionary. Inter-parochial in both membership and aims, some of these urban fraternities or guilds restricted membership according to status or craft association. Even so, some urban parish fraternities intentionally sought to recruit among parishioners of lower socio-economic status. The parish of St. Augustine, Norwich, was home to one such fraternity whose membership was specifically drawn from poorer citizens.⁴⁶⁵

Although some fraternities came to be associated with specific crafts or even town governance, all were first and foremost religious and social in orientation. Some

⁴⁶⁰ Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 431.

⁴⁶¹ C. Barron, "Parish fraternities of medieval London" in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society: Essays in Honour of F.R.H. Du Boulay* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1985), 13. Barron notes that this number excludes trade guilds.

⁴⁶² J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 28ff.

⁴⁶³ P. Heath, "Urban piety in the later Middle Ages," in *The Church, Politics and Patronage*, B. Dobson, ed. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), 222.

⁴⁶⁴ B. Hanawalt and B. McRee, "Guilds of *Homo Prudens* in Late Medieval England," *Continuity and Change* 7 (1992): 167; Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, 154-158; French, *People of the Parish*, 172-173.

⁴⁶⁵ M. Rubin, "Religious Culture in Town and Country: Reflections on a Great Divide," in *Church and City 1000-1500: Essays in Honour of Christopher Brooke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

acquired professional and political concerns, but preserved their original devotional purposes to provide organizational vitality. All guilds shared three defining features: they claimed devotion to a patron saint, based themselves in parish churches, and held an annual meeting and feast.⁴⁶⁶ Most went beyond, offering a range of specified benefits to their members, usually the promise of a decent funeral and burial, as well as intercession. Some urban fraternities, such as Holy Trinity, Norwich, or even the poor men's guild of St. Augustine, Norwich, offered some sort of support in the event of unemployment, illness, or old age to their members.⁴⁶⁷ Among the brethren, fraternal membership created an arena for the extension of social networks and commensality.⁴⁶⁸ In many ways, fraternities offered a supplementary kin network that not only provided aid in times of trouble, but also offered social, economic and political opportunities, as well as dispute resolution mechanisms to prevent the escalation of feud amongst the brethren.⁴⁶⁹

Fraternities also enriched the devotional life of their parish home through the provision of a guild chaplain who, in addition to offering masses on behalf of the deceased brethren, assisted with cure of souls, and through the provision of lights and decoration throughout the parish church and in the guild chapel in particular. The benefits of fraternities also redounded to the community at large: many fraternities were also active beyond the walls of parish church and their own membership. Jesus fraternities and Corpus Christi guilds, so popular after the fourteenth century, were often engaged in

⁴⁶⁶ A. Vauchez, "Conclusion," in *Le mouvement confraternal au moyen âge: France, Italie, Suisse*, Collection de l'école française de Rome 97 (Rome, 1987), 385-405. Vauchez prodded scholars to consider what impelled late medieval people to form such groups, in order to begin to account for their widespread popularity.

⁴⁶⁷ *English Guilds*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, EETS, o.s. 40 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1870), 25-26, 40-41.

⁴⁶⁸ Rosser, "Going to the Fraternity Feast," 432-433. Rosser has argued that the annual feast was more than a meal; it was an opportunity to repair or renew social bonds and to forge new connections, which had broader repercussions for members and the parish in general.

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 430-446; Pounds, *A History of the English Parish*, 275-276.

catechetical education by sponsoring preaching and plays;⁴⁷⁰ others established charitable works such as almshouses, administered poor relief, and even maintained bridges and roads. At the root of the charitable activity, however, lay the primary *raison d'être* of many guilds: intercession, the assurance of a dignified burial and remembrance of all deceased members.

Fraternity statutes set forth lofty ideals for their members, calling for them to live in peace and charity, to be of good conduct, and to regard one another as brother and sister.⁴⁷¹ In practice, however, relationships between members, between fraternities, and between parish and fraternity did not always realize such Edenic aims. Fraternity ordinances reiterated over and over again that the brethren would be punished by fine or expulsion for drunkenness, violence and other misbehaviors, indicating that uncivil behavior was a real concern. Although there is not sufficient evidence for any fundamental, systemic antipathy between parish and guild, there were instances of tension between the two institutions, with a parish occasionally attempting to assert its primacy in the relation to prominent guilds within its precincts. Often, tensions arose over perceived or real violation of expectations about the relationship between parish and fraternity. Parishioners in Spalding complained that fraternity chaplains celebrated their mass in the fraternity chapel at the same time that the parish priest was saying the mass at the main altar, thus drawing attention away from the ritual center of parish life.⁴⁷² The parish at Brinkhill (Lincs.) chastised the aldermen of the fraternity of St. Mary for failing

⁴⁷⁰ E.A. New, "The Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus in Late Medieval England, with Special Reference to the Fraternity in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, c. 1450-1558" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1999); J.A. Gribbin, "Indulgences, Fund-raising and Piety *In Nomine Jesu*: A Letter of Bishop Richard Redman of Exeter," *Devon Notes and Queries* 38 (2000): 195-196; M. Rubin, "Corpus Christi Fraternities and Late Medieval Piety," *Studies in Church History* 23 (1986), 101-102.

⁴⁷¹ For example, the ordinances of the Ss. Fabian and Sebastian, Aldersgate, London, which warn members of expulsion for misbehavior or "wykyed fame." *English Gilds*, 11.

⁴⁷² Farnhill, *Guilds and the Parish Community*, 170-171.

to present their accounts “coram parochianis,” and at times, parishes even took control of guild finances or property because of mismanagement or other types of malfeasance.⁴⁷³

Substructures of chapel, chantry or fraternity aside, the parishioners and priests themselves posed challenges to the peace and solidarity of the parish community. Secular and ecclesiastical court records are a favorite peep-hole through which historians look in on the troubled relationships of the parish, often but these are presented in isolation from the web of relationships of which they were a part in the parish community. Parish visitation records, however, give us the ability to understand how conflict and the failure of the bonds of friendship undermined parish life, and allow us to appreciate the various methods for peace-making and solidarity that facilitated the mending of those bonds. However, these types of records have a tendency to place an inordinate emphasis on conflict and failing relationships, and offer very little information on the ways in which small communities flourished; after all, it is the nature of courts and their records to deal in conflict and its repair.

It is easy to assume that a great and insurmountable social divide separated the educated priest from his less-educated flock, and it is easy to forget that a priest could be also a neighbor, a relative, a friend, an enemy, a tenant, a lessor, a landholder, and a farmer. Prior to his ordination into sacred orders, a priest was “a normal man of a particular kinship, class and parish community,”⁴⁷⁴ but after, was held to new expectations placed on him in his roles as a clerical subordinate and as a provider of

⁴⁷³ Kūmin, *Shaping of a Community*, 157-158.

⁴⁷⁴ D. Thiery, “Plowshares and Sword: Clerical Involvement in Acts of Violence and Peacemaking in Late Medieval England, c. 1400-1536,” *Albion* 36 (2004): 202.

spiritual example, teaching and sacraments.⁴⁷⁵ Woven as they were into the warp and woof of daily life in parish communities, clergymen had the capacity to form strong bonds of friendship and trust, as well as to act as marked sources of conflict because of their unique roles in the community. Thomas Gascoigne gave voice to the hopes many laypeople had for their clergy: that the priest be a peaceable and hospitable man, a man of sound living and example, a man of prayer and of ministry in both preaching and sacraments.⁴⁷⁶ While the majority of priests probably aimed to fulfill these expectations, the court records reveal instances in which parish priests did not meet or openly flouted these expectations. Many of the parishioners' complaints before ecclesiastical visitors touched on the failure of clergy to provide adequate pastoral care, either neglecting or refusing to provide some aspect of the *cura animarum*, whether in sacraments or preaching. In 1405, the residents of Great Faringdon complained bitterly that their vicar endangered their souls by refusing to preach or teach them the basic articles of the

⁴⁷⁵ R.N. Swanson, "Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England," *English Historical Review* 105 (1990): 845-869; M. Armstrong-Partida, "Conflict in the Parish: Antagonistic Relations Between Clerics and Parishioners," in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages*, R. Stansbury, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 173-212; R.N. Swanson, "Profits, Priests, and People," in *The Parish in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 2002 Harlaxton Symposium*, C. Burgess and E. Duffy, eds. (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2006), 146-159; R.N. Swanson, "Standards of Livings: Parochial Revenues in Pre-Reformation England," in *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England*, C. Harper-Bill, ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991): 151-195; J. Shinnors and W. Dohar, eds., *Pastors and the Care of Souls in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998); W. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*, 118-155.

⁴⁷⁶ J.E. Thorold Rogers, ed., *Loci e Libro Veritatum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881), 108-109. Gascoigne was particularly concerned with the effect of absentee clerics and ill-advised appropriation on the quality of pastoral care. He writes that bad clerics "...non praedicant parochianis, nec sacramenta illis ministrant, nec hospitalitatem eis exhibent, nec plura alia necessaria eis spiritualia et temporalia, unde bona et omnes decimae ecclesiae parochiali annexae potius darentur rectori parochianorum quam appropriarentur aliis, et hoc propter plures causas. ... Rectores enim boni pro parochianis orant, et coram eis praesencialiter ministrant, ut efficacius praesentes accendantur in Dei laude et amore. Item, parochianis suis praedicant, et veritates divinas et utiles declarant, et explanant, rectum consilium parochianis conferunt, unde quondam, quando fuerunt plures boni et maturi rectores ecclesiarum, ibi residentes, brigae et dissensiones infra parochiam motae, vel inter parochianos, sopitae errant et finitae per bonum tractatum et consilium talium rectores, unde tunc fuerunt paucae implacitaciones, nec acciones per legistas et juristas, quia paucae errant querelae, quin statim exortae finitae errant sopitae infra parochiam, per bonum laborem et diligenciam præsidentium et rectorum."

Christian faith found in the Creed.⁴⁷⁷ Other complaints turn on the personal failings of the parish priest: greed, licentiousness, drunkenness, and rancor, to name a few. In a more salacious instance of disregard for social and professional norms, the vicar and several chaplains at Tarvin in Cheshire were accused of sexual misconduct, and the vicar himself had fathered three children in the parish.⁴⁷⁸ As Swanson has pointed out, personal moral degeneracy was one thing, but to withhold or neglect the cure of souls was another: sexual misconduct and the like was probably less significant to parishioners, as it merely undermined respect for the priest as a person, but endangering souls was more serious.⁴⁷⁹

That laypeople were also quite capable of similar querelous or violent behavior has been well attested elsewhere.⁴⁸⁰ In the context of a parish community, such activity was at the least disruptive, and at most, destructive of parish peace and solidarity. In the parish of Dormington in the diocese of Hereford, Richard Hugges filched the altar ornaments and refused to return them for parish use, among other crimes, which were a nuisance and an impediment to the celebration of the mass. Aggressive and combative behavior ran in the family, apparently, for the parishioners also complained that his wife was a frequent source of conflict, regularly endangering the peace and stability of the

⁴⁷⁷ T.C.B. Timmins, *The Register of John Chandler, Dean of Salisbury, 1404-17* (Devizes: Wiltshire Record Society, 1984), n. 81.

⁴⁷⁸ Tringham, "The Parochial Visitation of Tarvin (Cheshire) in 1317," 200.

⁴⁷⁹ Swanson, "Problems of the Priesthood," 848.

⁴⁸⁰ For example, B. Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); idem, *The Ties that Bind: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); R. Kaeuper, ed., *Violence in Medieval Society* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000); B. Kūmin, "Parishioners in court: litigation and the local community, 1350-1650," in *Belief and Practice in Reformation England*, ed. S. Wabuda and C. Litzengerger (Aldershot: Ashate, 1998), 20-39; D. Thiery, "Welcome to the parish. Remove your cap and stop assaulting your neighbor," in *Reputation and Representation in Fifteenth-Century Europe*, ed. D. Biggs, S. Michalove, A. Reeves (Leiden: Brill, 2004): 235-265.

neighborhood.⁴⁸¹ Parish visitations offer colourful insight into the ways parishioners violated social and religious norms. Some threatened the peace and practice of the parish by fighting during mass, slandering each other, making outlandish claims of hauntings,⁴⁸² or more routinely, through inappropriate sexual relationships, through failure to attend mass on Sundays and feast-days, or simply through talking too much in church. Secular records find parishioners accused of intimidation, assault, theft, and other violent or rancorous acts that threatened the peace and stability of the community.⁴⁸³

Indulgences and the Pursuit of Peace and Solidarity in Parish Life

Indulgences formed an important part of the complex of mechanisms that existed in parish life for the promotion and maintenance of peace and solidarity. It did so in direct and indirect ways. For an indulgence to be effective, the one hoping to acquire it needed to be contrite and confessed. “De peccatis suis vere penitentibus, confessis et contritis”⁴⁸⁴ was the stock diplomatic phrase in grants of indulgence, meaning that

⁴⁸¹ Bannister, *Visitation Returns for the Diocese of Hereford*, xlv, 282.

⁴⁸² *ibid.*, xlv, 446 and passim.

⁴⁸³ Kūmin, “Parishioners in court,” 20-39. D. Thiery, “Polluting the Sacred: Violence and Religion in English Daily Life, 1400-1553” (unpublished dissertation, University of Toronto, 2003).

⁴⁸⁴ As one example among many, from *Reg. Lacy (Exeter)*, I: 307. In this particular grant Lacy offered an indulgence for attendance at the commemoration of a parish dedication “Edmundus [etc.] dilectis [etc.] domino Thome Dalynghton vicario perpetuo ecclesie parochialis de Columpton nostre diocesis et parochianis eiusdem salutem [etc.] Ex parte vestra nobis fuit humiliter supplicatum ut cum ecclesia prefata extiterat in vigilia sancti Andree dedicata et festum dedicacionis huiusmodi per varia impedimenta dicto tempore eveniencia suum non poterit habere servicium ut deceret, quatinus diem dedicacionis ecclesie predicte in alium diem videlicet et favorabiliter dignemur. Nos igitur vestris iustis petitionibus annuentes, ut dies dedicacionis eiusdem ecclesie cum suis octabis liberius observetur et in eisdem Deo laudabilius serviatur, prefatum diem dedicacionis in diem lune proximum post festum sancti Michaelis predicti in augmentum cultus divini duximus perpetuo commutandum, vobisque vicario et parochianis ut diem dedicacionis ecclesie predicte prefato die lune possitis celebrare, solempnizare et observare licenciam tenore presencium concedimus specialem. Et ut ad premissa facienda mentes fidelium propencius excitemus, de Dei omnipotentis immensa misericordia, et beatissime virginis Marie genetricis eiusdem ac beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli patronorum nostrorum omniumque sanctorum meritis et precibus confidentes, omnibus parochianis nostris, et aliis quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgenciam ratam habuerint pariter et acceptam, de peccatis suis vere penitentibus, confessis et contritis prefato die lune in dicta ecclesia

acquisition of an indulgence was contingent upon the disposition of penitence and contrition. This also meant that the ones hoping to acquire the indulgence needed to have confessed their sins in the sacrament of penance, one of the more potent forums for shaping of social ethic and social discipline.⁴⁸⁵ In a very direct way, then, indulgences actively encouraged the ideals of charity and reconciliation with one's neighbor. Indirectly, indulgences worked for the goals of peace and solidarity by incentivizing participation in rituals and activities that emphasized the repair or strengthening of bonds within the parish community: mass, prayers and devotions, dedication festivals, parish fundraising activities such as ales and hocktide revels, and in devotional and educational activities of parish fraternities.

Indulgences, Confession, and Peacemaking

The canon *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 lay down as a minimum requirement for Christian practice annual confession to one's own parish priest. All the baptized who had reached the age of reason, of whatever sex or status, were to make a good confession yearly. This requirement for the laity placed new burdens on parish priests in their obligations to their flocks. Thus, in the generations following the council, a burgeoning literature of pastoral care included confessors' manuals that were

divinis officiis interessentibus quadraginta dies indulgentie misericorditer in Domino concedimus per presentes.”

⁴⁸⁵ J. Goering, “The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession” in *The History of Medieval Canon Law in the Classical Period, 1140-1234*, ed. W. Hartmann and K. Pennington (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2008), 379-428; A. Murray, “Counselling in Medieval Confession,” in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. Biller and A.J. Minnis, York Studies in Medieval Theology II (York: York Medieval Press, 1998): 63-77; M. Haren, “Confession, Social Ethics and social Discipline in the *Memoriale presbiterorum*” in *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. Biller and A.J. Minnis, York Studies in Medieval Theology II (York: York Medieval Press, 1998): 109-122; idem, “Social Ideas in the Pastoral Literature of Fourteenth-Century England,” in *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion 3 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991): 43-58; idem, *Sin and Society in Fourteenth-Century England: A Study of the Memoriale Presbiterorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), chapters 5-11.

aimed at assisting parish priests in the cure of souls. A wide variety of manuals were available to confessors, from the scholarly *summae confessorum* of John of Freiburg, Thomas Chobham and others, to the more pastorally oriented texts, such as John Mirk's *Instruction for Parish Priests*, Robert of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*, William of Pagula's *Oculus sacerdotis* and its derivative, the *Memoriale presbiterorum*.

In rite of penance, the priest might use the interrogatories *ad status* found in some of the manuals to enable him to understand the circumstances surrounding the particular sins of the penitent. He would inquire as to the penitent's profession, whether he or she was married, and then ask a few questions to determine how well the penitent understood the basics of the Christian faith. The priest might ask a peasant about the particular spiritual hazards of the job: if he took advantage of poorer neighbors, or if he stole land by shifting the boundary markers, or if he was honest in paying his tithes.⁴⁸⁶ A merchant might be asked about price-gouging and fair dealing in trade.⁴⁸⁷ Or, he might inquire of a parishioner according to the traditional deadly sins: "Hath thou backbyted thy neighbor/ For to make hym fare thy worre?" or "Hast thou synged in lechery?"⁴⁸⁸ Whatever manual a priest might use, the elegant couplet of the canonist Raymond of Peñafort encapsulated the types of questions a priest should ask the penitent:

Quis, quid, ubi, per quos, quoties, cur, quomod, quando,
Quilibet observet, animae medicamina dando.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ Haren, *Sin and Society in Fourteenth-Century England*, 148.

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 163-170.

⁴⁸⁸ J. Mirk, *Instruction for Parish Priests*, ed. Edward Peacock, EETS 31 (London: Kegan Paul, 1902), 36, 38. The concern over the social effects of sins of the tongue are also found in Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, 54-57. Brunne also offers an examination of penitents according to the Ten Commandments, and illustrates them with colorful stories of the consequences of breaking specific commandments.

⁴⁸⁹ Haren, "Social Ideas in the Pastoral Literature," 46, citing Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa Confessorum*, iii 29, Rome 1603, 463-4.

Explicit in this probing was the understanding that moral failings and transgressions not only offended God and harmed the penitent's "ghostly health," but it also damaged relationships. Sin was perceived to be social in its effects, in that it very rarely harmed only the penitent.

The priest, as a doctor of souls, must probe wisely in order to apply the appropriate antidote to the spiritual and relational wounds caused by sin. The priest, acting *in persona Christi*, was to consider circumstances and intentions in order to determine the gravity of the issues brought by the penitent, advise him or her on the avoidance their particular transgressions in future, give absolution, and then, assign a fitting penance.⁴⁹⁰ Penance, or satisfaction, were acts voluntarily undertaken by the penitent to set right what had been done wrong. Sins against neighbor required acts of restitution as a way to restore the neighbor and the relationship; sins against the infinite God demanded prayers, fasts, almsgiving, or some other discipline as a gesture symbolizing the penitent's contrition and hope of God's mercy. In the end, the goal of the sacrament of penance was to encourage the development of virtue and to heal the personal and social effects of sin. In this way, the sacrament of penance was a tool for peace-making within the parish community.

Indulgences were very much bound up with penance. Indulgences were originally used by bishops to relax some of the outstanding penance due for sin, usually in exchange for some good work. But indulgences were also tied to penance in that they required the one obtaining it to be truly contrite and confessed, that is, they must have recently confessed their sins and made a sincere promise of amendment in order for the

⁴⁹⁰ For a more detailed explanation of the procedure, see Goering, "The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession," 394-405.

indulgence to be effective. For those seeking an indulgence, the sacrament of penance, with all of its potentialities for peace-making and restitution, was essential. Without it, the indulgence was deemed worthless.

Indulgences in the Parish Setting, in published episcopal registers	Total across dioceses
Parish Dedications & Anniversaries (change of date)	23
Prayers for the Dead	177
Pilgrimage to parish churches	63
Parish Fraternities (participation in or support of)	11
Participation in Prayers and Processions	93
Contribution to parish church fabric	152
Contribution to chapel fabric	73

Indulgences, Dedication Festivals, and Solidarity

That indulgences were exceedingly popular in the later middle ages is well known; that they had a role in furthering peace and solidarity within the parish has not been as well considered. Certainly, a peace-making mechanism—penance—was a crucial component of the indulgence. But indulgences could also foster peace and solidarity within the parish through their connection to various activities that reaffirmed parish identity and strengthened bonds.

Each parish community could locate its origin in the erection and dedication of the parish church. The dedication ceremony was replete with the symbols, actions and language of peace and solidarity, and marked the moment in which a community acquired a spiritual dimension and coherence. Church dedication rites and their

commemorative festivals were occasions that bishops favored with indulgences. Church dedication ceremonies carried such import that they were the largest grant a bishop could make, according to the canons of the Fourth Lateran Council.⁴⁹¹ Thus Bishop Brewer of Exeter offered 300 days of remission to all those present at the dedication the new church of St. Buryan, Cornwall, and thirty days to those who would attend anniversary observances in the future.⁴⁹² The anniversary commemoration of a church's dedication was also a date of importance to the parish community. As an occasion of honor for the patron saint and of remembrance of the ideals of charity and peace upheld in the original ceremony, it too was a day that merited celebration. The twelfth-century *Pontifical of Magdalen College* and the sixteenth-century *Liber Pontificalis* of the Archbishop of York encouraged parishes to mark their dedication anniversaries with festivities,⁴⁹³ and bishops offered indulgences to all who attended as a way of incentivizing participation at the anniversary mass and celebrations. Furthermore, some diocesan synods held dedication feasts and their commemoration to be so significant that they required that the date be posted clearly within the church for all to see.⁴⁹⁴ Many of these schedules would later

⁴⁹¹ Tanner, *Decrees*, 1:264.

⁴⁹² *English Episcopal Acta 11: Exeter 1046-1184*, F. Barlow, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 259. "Willelmus miseratione divina Exoniensis ecclesie minister humilis universis Cristi fidelibus presens autenticum inspecturis et auditoris salutem, gratiam et benedictionem. Noverit devotio vestra quod nos, gratia dei adiuti, dedicavimus presentem ecclesiam sancte Beriane in Cornubia nostre diocesis ad honorem dei et ad titulum gloriose virginis Marie, genetricis domini nostri Iesu Cristi, principaliter, et postmodum ad honorem sancti Andree apostoli et beati Thome martiris ac beati Nicholai confessoris necnon et beate Beriane virginis et omnium sanctorum dei, mense Augusti, videlicet vii^o kalen' Septembris [26 Aug.] anno incarnationis domini m^occ^{mo}xxxviii^o. De misericordia autem dei et beate Marie et sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli auctoritate confisi, concessimus singulis qui eidem dedicationi interfuerint studio pietatis ccc dies indulgentie super hiis de quibus legitime sunt confessi; et etiam illis qui ipsam ecclesiam visitabunt infra octabas dedicationis eiusdem. Statuimus quoque ut ipsa dedicatio futuris temporibus annis singulis in ecclesia ipsa et tota eius parochia die sui anniversarii sui." The remainder of the entry is an insepimus of earlier privileges and grants, including one by King Athelstan.

⁴⁹³ N. Orme, *English Church Dedications with a Survey of Cornwall and Devon* (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1996), 8-9. See *The Pontifical of Magdalen College*, ed. H.A. Wilson, Henry Bradshaw Society 39 (London: Harrison for the Society, 1910), 122; *Liber Pontificalis Chr. Bainbridge*, Archiepiscopi Eboracensis, ed. W.G. Henderson, Surtees Society 81 (Durham: Andrews & Co, 1875), 75.

⁴⁹⁴ Orme, *English Church Dedications*, 6-8.

disappear in the changes brought about by the reformation; Swanson notes that while the dedication day indulgences and their schedules disappeared in the sixteenth-century reforms, the habits of gathering on those days did not.⁴⁹⁵

Fully-inscribed indulgences for the actual day of dedication rarely appear in the registers, as often appears to be the case with certain types of indulgences that bishops frequently granted. Only 23 grants appear in episcopal registers, and these were generally grants given to facilitate the change of date for the celebration of the dedication, that is, the parish festival. From grants of indulgence found in extant episcopal acts, often granted before the advent of adequate record-keeping systems, it can be seen that indulgences were usually granted on the actual day of dedication, as in the case of Bishop Seffrid of Chichester, who granted 100 days to the parish at Southwick on the occasion of its dedication in 1182.⁴⁹⁶

Maximal grants of one hundred days on the day of dedication were the norm.

Forty days at the translation of the dedication were also common, and it was also

⁴⁹⁵ Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?*, 107, 504-505.

⁴⁹⁶ *The Acta of the Bishops of Chichester, 1075-1207*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting, Canterbury and York Society (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1964), 187-88. "Seffridus dei gratia Cicestrensis episcopus secundus omnibus sancte matris ecclesie filiis ad quos littere presentes pervenerint salutem in eo sine quo non est salus. Pie sollicitudinis est scripto memorie commendare que Christi fidelibus ad eterne salutis poterunt cooperari profectum et eterne retributionis augere meritum. Inde est quod vestre significamus universitati nos ad instantiam et petitionem venerabilis fratris nostri R(icardi) Wint(oniensis) episcopi ecclesiam sancte dei genitricis Marie de Suwicha, una cum eodem Ricardo ejusdem loci diocesano episcopo et felicis memorie Aug(ustino) Waterfordensi episcopo, invocata Spiritus Sancti gratia, dedicasse et in honore beatissime virginis Marie consecrasse. Nos itaque predictae ecclesie consecratores episcopi de dei misericordia confisi, ob reverentiam beate virginis et religionem fratrum canonicorum regularium ibidem deo servientium omnibus Christi fidelibus qui predictum locum consecratum infra primum annum dedicationis beneficiis et elemosinis visitaverint de injuncta sibi penitentia centum dies relaxavimus. Totidemque dierum relaxationem indulsimus omnibus hiis qui revoluto anno dedicationis vel deinceps infra viii dies anniversarii predictae dedicationis pefatam ecclesiam visitaverint et in eam beneficia divine pietatis intuitu contulerint. Quam indulgentiam una cum universa dote predictae ecclesie in ejus consecratione collata presenti carta nostra confirmamus et sigilli nostri munimine roboramus sub interminatione anathematis et eterni comminatione incendii inhibentes, ne quis aliqua temeritate predictae ecclesie jura perturbet. Omnibus etiam predictae ecclesie benefactoribus, patronis et defensoribus omnium beneficiorum que fiunt in ecclesia Cicestrensi sive aliis ecclesiis nostre diocesis participes esse concedimus in Jesu Christo imperpetuum."

customary to grant an indulgence at the dedication of new side altars in parish churches. Two grants found in Romeyn's register offer insight into the justification for such generous grants. In his grant on the occasion of the dedication of the parish church at Mansfield (Mamesfeld), he argued that the dedication of churches and altars enables the mystical gifts of heaven to come to that place, which pleases God and works for the salvation of sinners.⁴⁹⁷ A similar argument is made in the next entry: a dedicated church or chapel makes it possible for a place to access mystical gifts, to their benefit and the pleasure of Heaven.⁴⁹⁸ Romeyn's register is significant, as the absence of dating on the grants themselves and the lack of specificity in the many of the preceding and following grants indicate that these particular grants formed part of a scribal formulary which could have been imitated by generations of clerks within the chancery at York and more widely in other episcopal chanceries.⁴⁹⁹ Further evidence of dedication indulgences can sometimes be found in the muniments of larger institutions such as monasteries and cathedrals. For instance, bishop Robert of Bath recalled that attendance at the dedication for Wells cathedral [1142x16 April 1148] was well-rewarded by indulgences: he and four

⁴⁹⁷ *Reg. Romeyn* 123: 3. "Indulgencia pro dedicacione ecclesiarum et altarium. Universis, etc. Ecclesiarum et altarium dedicacio, a Deo primitus stabilita, eo Christi fidelibus magis proficit ad salutem quo in ipsis, Rege celorum per mistica munera complacato, peccatorum remedia facilius impetrantur. Cupientes, igitur, per allectiva indulgenciarum munera mentes fidelium ad caritative devocionis opera, quantum cum Deo possumus, propensius excitare, de Dei Omnipotentis, etc., qui ad ecclesiam parochialem de Mamesfelde, nostre diocesis, causa orandi accesserint, et duo altaria ibidem, quorum unum in honore beatissime Marie et sancte Katerine virginum, et aliud in honore sancti Willelmi confessoris et Beate Margarete virginis dedicavimus, de bonis sibi ad Deo collatis in sustentacione luminarium, ornamentorum, vel alias qualitercumque pie honoraverit, x dies de injuncta, etc. Dat., etc."

⁴⁹⁸ *Reg. Romeyn* 123: 3. "Alia pro hiis qui ecclesie seu capelle de novo constructe aliqua contulerint. Universis, etc. Basilicarum sanctarum constructio eo Christi fidelibus magis proficit ad salutem quo, Rege celorum in eis mysticis muneribus complacato, peccatorum venia facilius impetratur. De Dei, igitur, Omnipotentis, etc., ut infra, qui ad capellam Beate Marie de Staner juxta Seleby causa devocionis accesserint, vel de bonis sibi a Deo collatis ad sustentacionem ejusdem capelle aliqua contulerint subsidia caritatis, xx dies, etc. Dat., etc."

⁴⁹⁹ *Reg. Romeyn*, iv.

bishops in attendance each gave 100 days relaxation of penance to those in attendance on the day of dedication and on its anniversary thereafter.⁵⁰⁰

The rites for the dedication of a church and the consecration of its altar were solemn, highly public affairs. Crowds of faithful from the surrounding came to participate in the unique event, and perhaps hoped to experience the miraculous, as they took part in the creation of a new communal reality.⁵⁰¹ Through the performance of the rites, a specific space was set aside as sacred to God and to the community. The parish church became a locus of God's power in the world, or rather, their particular corner of it. It was a place apart, to be free from violence and bloodshed, rancor and discord. Not unlike ancient Middle Eastern notions of *haram*, the church, the churchyard and the cemetery were conceived of as places of sanctuary, safe from all threats and danger, a place for the worship of God, exchange, and the settlement of disputes.⁵⁰² Bishops highlighted the solemn and potentially transformative nature of the dedication ceremony, wishing to draw people to attend, through the grant of an indulgence. Seffrid, bishop of Chichester, joined an indulgence to that of bishop Richard of Winchester, at the bishop of Winchester's request, for the dedication of the church of St. Mary in 1183, which belonged to the Austin canons of Southwick.⁵⁰³ Because he wished to encourage the

⁵⁰⁰ *English Episcopal Acta 33: Worcester 1062-1185*, M. Cheney, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 66. Cheney notes: "With other bishops, grants of indulgence of 100 day to all who visit the church on the anniversary of its dedication. Mentioned only, in an account of the dedication of the church by bp Robert of Bath assisted by bps Jocelin of Salisbury, Simon of Worcester and Robert of Hereford: 'a quibus omnibus statim facta dedicatione, magnum mirificum et memorandum collatum est donativum, videlicet quod singulis annis in die dedicationis anniversario, ipsis Dei misericordia confisis concedentibus, c. dies de penitentia sua relaxantur penitentibus ipsa die ad eandem ad honorem Dei venientibus.'"

⁵⁰¹ L. Hamilton, *A Sacred City: Consecrating Churches and Reforming Society in Eleventh-century Italy* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010), esp. Ch. 2.

⁵⁰² H. Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, 2004), 25-26.

⁵⁰³ *The Acta of the Bishops of Chichester 1075-1207*, ed. H. Mayr-Harting. Canterbury and York Society (Torquay: Devonshire Press, 1964), 187-188. "... Nos itaque predictae ecclesiae consecratores episcopi de dei misericordia confisi, ob reverentiam beate virginis et religionem fratrum canonicorum regularium ibidem deo servientium omnibus Christi fidelibus qui predictum locum consecratum infra primum annum

faithful to obtain merit for their eternal salvation, and out of devotion to the Blessed Virgin and a desire to encourage the Austin canons, he offered one hundred days relaxation from enjoined penance to those who visited the church within the first year of its dedication or within the octave of its anniversary.

The rites of consecration of the church and its grounds transformed a building from a construction of the natural order into a principle of the eschatological, and it was this event that bishops wished to promote through grants of indulgence. William Durandus proclaimed that the church building is a material signification of the spiritual reality of the community of the faithful.⁵⁰⁴ Citing Ephesians 2:20, Durandus offered an extended meditation on the spiritual and social significance of the church building. Just as stones are mortared together with lime, sand, and water, the people are to be cemented together by charity and the bond of peace through the action of the Holy Spirit and Christ, the cornerstone.⁵⁰⁵ To effect this transformation, a lengthy ceremony including copious aspersion of the walls with holy water in solemn processions thrice around the church, symbolizing baptism; a tracing of the abcedarium in Greek and Latin on the floor of the church to signify Christ as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of time; the blessing of the altar; the burial of relics; the blessings of ornaments and vessels; all the while accompanied by the singing and recitation of ancient prayers, and which led to

dedicationis beneficiis et elemosinis visitaverint de injuncta sibi penitentia centum dies relaxavimus. Totidemque dierum relaxationem indulsumus omnibus his qui revoluto anno dedicationis vel deinceps infra viii dies anniversarii predictae dedicationis prefatam ecclesiam visitaverint et in eam beneficia divine pietatis intuitu contulerint. Quam indulgentiam una cum universa dote predictae ecclesie in ejus consecratione collata praesenti cara nostra confirmamus et sigilli nostri munimine roboramus sub interminatione anatematis et eterni comminatione incendii inhibentes, ne quis aliqua temeritate predictae ecclesie jura perturbet. Omnibus etiam predictae ecclesie benefactoribus, patronis et defensoribus omnium beneficiorum qui fiunt in ecclesia Cicestrensi sive aliis ecclesiis nostre diocesis participes esse concedimus in Jesu Christo imperpetuum.”

⁵⁰⁴ William Durandus, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments*, J.M. Neale and B. Webb, trans. and eds. (Leeds: T.W. Green, 1843), 17-21.

⁵⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 22-23.

the culminating moment of the offering of the first mass on the newly consecrated altar.⁵⁰⁶

The processions and aspersions of the church were effectively an exorcism that claimed the space for Christ and drove out evil. Cleansed and emptied of evil, ancient prayers and hymns such as the *Veni Creator Spiritus* called for the church to be filled with the zeal of charity, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and peace from discord and evil.⁵⁰⁷ Throughout the rite, violence and discord were repeatedly condemned, and peace and charity were upheld as the bond of Christian faithful.⁵⁰⁸ When blessing the threshold and door of the church, the bishop struck the doorposts with his staff, and then, planting it firmly across the threshold, prayed that all who entered would be blessed with abundant peace, sobriety, modesty, and mercy, and that all discord and calamity would be put far away. He asked that the Angel of peace, chastity, charity and truth would protect and defend them.⁵⁰⁹ In these prayers, hymns, and actions, it would have been made clear to all present that in the consecration of the material church, the community was elevated from the mundane to the supernatural plane: together, they were to be an image of the heavenly Jerusalem, which they also evoked when singing the ancient refrain, *Laude Jerusalem*.

⁵⁰⁶ For details of the rite of consecration, I have used M. Andrieu, ed., *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Âge*, v. 3 (Vatican city, 1938-1941), which contains the more or less definitive thirteenth-century pontifical attributed to Durandus; P. Puniel, *Le Romain Pontificale, Histoire et Commentaire II: Consécration et Bénédiction* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1931), 242-300; *Ritus Solemnis pro dedicatione ecclesiae et consecratione sive unius sive plurium altarium*, ed. F. Pustet (Ratisbonae/Regensburg, 1890); and the *Liber Pontificalis of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. R. Barnes (Exeter, 1847). For a brief introduction to the development of the dedication rite, see B. Repsher, *The Rite of Church Dedication in the Early Medieval Era* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998), chap. 1.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ritus Solemnis*, 20.

⁵⁰⁸ D. Thiery, "Polluting the Sacred," 16-24.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ritus Solemnis*, 36.

The apartness of the parish church and its grounds made it a focal point of communal life after its dedication. Not only did people come to church to commune with the holy, they came to commune with one another. The testimony of nine men in a 1379 royal inquest to determine whether John de Walton was of age to enter his inheritance offers a lively example of how parishioners viewed and used the church and its grounds. They were called to testify to John's age based upon their recollections of his baptism:

John de Sotheworth, forty and more, was at the church for a loveday between William Robynson and [tear] of Kirkdale when John was baptized.

John del Twys, forty and more, was at the church to hear mass before going to buy fish at Bootle, and was present at the baptism.

Robert de Eld, forty and more, was at the church to hear news from Ireland of the Earl Edmund of March.

Henry de Penketh, forty and more, was at the church to buy corn from Robert Wilkynson.

Henry de Twys, forty and more, was at the church to hear mass before going to Kirkdale to buy two oxen from Robert Wilkynson of Kirkdale.

William Laghok, forty and more, was at the church to hear mass before going to Litherland to see a corpse and a wreck on the seashore.

John de Hey, forty and more, was at the church to see John del Hethe.

John de Andern, forty and more, was at the church for a cockfight between John de Silkes and Robert del Heth.

John de Bugard, forty and more, was at the church to see a man from Liverpool.⁵¹⁰

Not only was the church the largest and most easily identifiable building in town, thereby making it a landmark and a natural meeting place, but it also was a naturally communal space, a safe and peaceable place to hear mass, hear news, or do business. Thus, by its dedication as hallowed ground, safe and set apart, the parish church became an organizing principle of community identity.

Parishioners took seriously their obligation to commemorate the dedication and consecration of their church. This concern is evident in the numerous requests made by

⁵¹⁰ French, *The People of the Parish*, 1, citing the *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem, 1-6 Henry (1399-1405)*, 18, ed. J.L. Kirby (1987), 226-27.

parishes to transfer the date of the dedication commemoration to a day more suitable for festival. Indulgences associated with requests for translation of dedication dates are fairly common in the registers, and occur most frequently in the registers of the dioceses Exeter and Bath and Wells. Many of these indulgences were entered in the episcopal registers appear in memoranda form, indicating only the pertinent details of the grant: the church, the date, the number of days remitted. A handful of entries are fully enregistered with the complete diplomatic apparatus, giving us a glimpse into the parish dynamic. Thus, the parishioners of South Molton in Devon (d. Exeter) “represented to the bishop [that the church] had been dedicated on the second Sunday in Lent, and consequently that it often happened that the feast of dedication could not have its proper services,” so the bishop “acceded to their request that the feast be transferred to October 10, and granted an indulgence to the parishioners who should frequent the services on the new Feast Day.”⁵¹¹ The grave solemnity and penitential tone of Lent precluded the parish’s ability to hold festivities appropriate for the celebration of a dedication day, so they appealed to the bishop to shift the date to a liturgical season more suitable to festivals. Most of the grants for translations cited logistical difficulties with the traditional date, such as the church at Kingston (d. Bath and Wells), which cited proximity to another great feast, Candlemas,⁵¹² while the parishioners of Sparshot (d. Salisbury) sought a date outside the

⁵¹¹ *Reg. Stafford*, 333 (Editor’s translation).

⁵¹² *Reg. Bekynton*, 149. “Notification to Thomas Longe and John Mille, wardens and keepers of the goods of the church of Kyngston, and all present and future parishioners thereof, that—on their petition showing that the festival of the dedication of their church has from of old been celebrated on the eve of the Purification of the BVM, but that they wish to have it changed to the first Sunday in October, in order that it may be observed with more solemnity and devotion than was possible at the former date—the bishop hereby changes the said festival day accordingly, with the consent of the dean and chapter of Wells, who are impropiators of the church for the use of the vicars choral of Wells cathedral; and in order to excite parishioners to observe the said festival with greater devotion, grants 40 days’ indulgence to all contrite and confessed persons who shall attend divine service in the said church and piously say the Lord’s Prayer and

harried harvest season.⁵¹³ Churches like South Molton and Kingston often kept record of their indulgences and many would have advertised to parishioners and visitors the dedication day feast and any grants of indulgences attached to it, either through brasses or by including the text on a schedule affixed to a heavy wooden tablet or painted on the church walls.⁵¹⁴

Sometimes the translation of the dedication day caused division within the parish, with parishioners dividing into factions over the change. Some retained their loyalty to the traditional festival date and balked at the translation. The parish church at see had traditionally observed its dedication day on the Feast of St. Andrew, but sought licence in 1435 to change the date to the Monday after Michaelmas, which was evidently thought to be a time more amenable to the great celebration of parish peace and unity.⁵¹⁵ By 1450, the parish appealed for licence to change it back to the old date, citing division and confusion amongst the parishioners, with some observing the traditional date, some the new, and others throwing up their hands and observing both.⁵¹⁶ Bishop Edmund Lacy, who had granted both licences, also offered forty days' indulgence to those who attended the dedication day mass, as a way to facilitate and ease the transition and to encourage

the Angelic Salutation on the first occasion on which the festival of dedication shall be celebrated on the first Sunday in October. " (Editor's summary).

⁵¹³ *Reg. Hallum*, 139. "Licence to the vicar and parishioners of Sparshot, at their petition, to change the day of the church's dedication from the morrow of St. Tecla [24 Sept], on which date for certain reasons it has not hitherto been celebrated with due solemnity, to the Sunday after the feast of St. Martin [11 Nov]. 40 days to all who hear divine offices in the church on that day." [Editor's summary]

⁵¹⁴ Krochalis, "Magna Tabula: The Glastonbury Tablets, Part One," 93-100; Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?*, 162.

⁵¹⁵ See above, n. 484.

⁵¹⁶ *ibid.*, v. 62, p. 80. "...Et ut ad premissa exequenda mentes fidelium propencius excitamus, de Dei omnipotentis misericordia et beatissime virginis Marie genetricis eiusdem ac beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli patronorum nostrorum omniumque sanctorum meritis et precibus confidentes, omnibus parochianis nostris et aliis [etc] prefato festo in vigilia predicta divinis officiis interessentibus quadraginta dies indulgentie tenore presencium elargimur."

attendance to the very celebrations that were to mark and reaffirm parish identity, unity, and peace.

Dedication ceremonies and anniversaries were specific moments in the liturgical year in which a parish remembered and reaffirmed the unity of the parish as a whole. Diversity certainly existed within that unity, and sometimes threatened it, but dedication anniversaries were meant to serve as opportunities to set aside rancorous division and emphasize the common bond of the parish. Certainly other festivals in the liturgical year drew parishioners together and were opportunities for solidarity and neighborly charity, but the dedication feast in particular was oriented toward recalling the establishment of their unique parish community and the aspirations of charity, peace and solidarity that were articulated in that establishment. Indulgences served as an incentive to partake in these peace-making ceremonies and celebrations; if one was not moved by the warmth of brotherly love to attend, perhaps the incentive of indulgence could draw one to these potentially transformative rituals.

Solidarity with the Saints: Indulgences, Pilgrimage and Prayers for the Dead

Indulgences in the parish context were not simply about creating and strengthening bonds amongst parishioners. The late medieval notions of the Mystical Body and the Communion of Saints extended the possibilities of friendship, patronage, mutuality and solidarity beyond the borders of time and space to encompass those who had died and entered purgatory or crossed into heaven. Kinship and friendship amongst parishioners need not be ended by the death of the body, but could continue on long after because of the belief in the immortality of the soul. Indeed, many of the founders of chantries and

the members of fraternities expected that the friendship and mutual obligation to pray for and assist one another would endure in perpetuity. Indulgences fostered these expansive notions by encouraging late medieval Christians to visit the shrines to the holy dead, the saints, and to pray for the less-than-holy, who depended on their prayers and solidarity to speed them through purgatory to the hope of heaven.

Indulgences, of course, were predicated on belief in the mystery of the Communion of Saints. Christians believed that it was possible to help and be helped by the dead from the earliest centuries of the Christian church, and that through the dead, their own path to Heaven would be more secure, and their life remaining on earth eased. Following the ancient tradition of the Jews, Christians sought out the bodies of the holy dead in order to benefit from the spiritual power of the saint.⁵¹⁷ As with a living person on earth, pilgrims visited the bodies of the saints in order to establish or enhance a personal relationship with them, one that would entail mutual obligation. Brown has characterized this relationship as a patron-client bond, with the pilgrim promising prayers, devotion, and amendment of life in exchange for assistance with earthly difficulties. The bodies of saints became apertures through which Heaven was opened to Earth, and through which spiritual blessing flowed.⁵¹⁸ Likewise, relics and images of saints became objects of veneration and devotion for late antique and medieval Christians.⁵¹⁹ Richard Cooper of Carlisle wished to visit the holy places and holy bodies of saints in the Levant and elsewhere, and even made a vow to do so. Lacking the means

⁵¹⁷ P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3; J. Wilkinson, "Jewish Holy Places and the Origins of Christian Pilgrimage," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. R. Ousterhout (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 41-53.

⁵¹⁸ P. Brown, *Cult of Saints*, 3-5.

⁵¹⁹ B. Fricke, "Fallen Idols to Risen Saints: Western Attitudes toward the Worship of Images and the 'cultura veterum deorum,'" in *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, ed. A. McClanahan and J. Johnson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 67-95; F. Lewis, "Rewarding Devotion: Indulgences and the Promotion of Images," in *Studies in Church History* 28 (1992), 178-194.

to carry out this vow, he approached Gilbert Welton, bishop of Carlisle, to petition for an indulgence to be offered on his behalf as a way of raising funds to complete his vow. Welton evidently found it appropriate and good to offer an indulgence on behalf of the impoverished Richard Cooper, and offered thirty days' indulgence to anyone who assisted him in the fulfillment of his vow.⁵²⁰

Jacobus de Voragine outlined the reasons for undertaking a pilgrimage in the *Golden Legend*. First, he set forth the six reasons of William of Auxerre, who argued that honoring the saints is honoring God and his power in his saints; the saints are “help in our weakness;” they “increase our sense of security;” they offer example for us to follow; we honor them “to allow a fair exchange. The saints make festival in heaven over us, for their is joy before the angels of God and holy souls over one sinner doing penance, and so we should make a fair return by celebrating their feasts on earth;” and finally, “to assure our own honor, because when we honor the saints, we are taking care of our own interests and procuring our own honor.”⁵²¹ De Voragine supplemented these reasons with more from John Damascene, Augustine, and John Chrysostom, who essentially argued that, as friends of God, the saints were temples of Jesus in this life, and continue to be fountains of the divine life after their death. Jacobus de Voragine’s explicit defense of the veneration of saints, and of pilgrimage implicitly, was not relegated to the shelves of theologians or the elite, for his *Golden Legend*, originally

⁵²⁰ *Reg. Welton*, 94. The memorandum notes: “Letters granting an indulgence of 30 days remission for supporting Richard Coupar of Carlisle, a pauper, so that he may visit the Holy Land and other places to fulfill his vow.” [Editor’s summary]

⁵²¹ “All Saints,” in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. W. Granger Ryan, vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 273-274. For the text in circulation in fifteenth-century England see, “The Feast of All Hallows,” in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, VI (William Caxton, 1483; repr. Temple Classics, 1931), p. 45-50.

compiled in 1275, was widely read and the most popular book in print from 1470 to 1530.⁵²²

For medieval English parishioners, the options for pilgrimage were myriad. Penitential pilgrims seeking the grace of papal absolution sought Rome,⁵²³ other adventurous faithful, like Margery Kempe, embarked on long-distance pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Compostela, and elsewhere, temporarily dissolving the home-bonds of kith and kin to seek the holy.⁵²⁴ Yet the most popular form of pilgrimage was the most prosaic. Some English parishioners might go to major shrines of native saints like Canterbury or Durham⁵²⁵ once or twice in their lifetimes. Others might travel to places like Reading abbey to venerate the relics of St. James⁵²⁶ or to Glastonbury because of its

⁵²² Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 169-170.

⁵²³ As in the case of John Brown: "Littera directa...ad Curiam Romanam... Thomas, etc., to all the faithful in Christ. John Broun of Campedene has humbly confessed his sins to us; and we, having understood these more clearly, have enjoined him to go to the Holy See in order to receive penance there. We therefore beseech you in Christ to show him favour on his journey and preserve him from hindrance or injury, and we grant 20 days' indulgence to all who do him service. This letter is valid for one year." [Editor's translation]. *Reg. Cobham*, 49.

⁵²⁴ The practice of pilgrimage in Europe and England has been thoroughly treated in studies elsewhere, among them, J. Sumption, *Pilgrimage* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975); J. Stopford, *Pilgrimage Explored* (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 1999); D. Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2000); D. Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage, c. 700-1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); N. Chareyon, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages*, ed. W. Wilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On pilgrimage and the concept of liminality, see V. Turner and E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1978); for criticisms of, see J. Eade and M.J. Sallnow, eds., *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁵²⁵ One of the earliest confirmed acta conferring an indulgence for pilgrimage to Cuthbert's shrine comes from the episcopacy of Walter Kirkham (1249-1260), who also confirmed earlier grants of other bishops for the same purpose. "Indulgence of 40 days to all those visiting the shrine of St. Cuthbert for the purposes of devotion and prayer, bringing offerings; confirming forever all other indulgences granted by other bishops to the feretory, and listing the following such indulgences, which he has inspected: Silvester bishop of Carlisle, 40 days; Gilbert bishop of Whithorn, dated 26 October 1248; by the same bishop, to each of five altars at the front of the church consecrated by him 40 days, dated 1253; Thomas bishop of Annadown, 30 days; Clement bishop of Dunblane, 20 days, dated 1 May 1253; Clement bishop of Dunblane, 40 days, at Dunblane, 40 days at the consecration of the high altar, 5 June 1253; Albinus bishop of Brechin, 40 days; Richard bishop of Sodor, Man and the Isles, 40 days; Abel bishop of St. Andres, 40 days, dated 2 June 1254; W. bishop of Norwich, 40 days, dated 8 Sept 1254; Richard bishop of Dunkeld, 40 days, dated 14 December 1254." [Editor's summary]

⁵²⁶ Reading Abbey was in the diocese of Salisbury, but its status as a shrine of St. James meant that it attracted indulgences from prelates throughout England, as in the case of Richard Peche, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, who probably granted this indulgence in honor of the abbey's dedication. *EEA* 16,

associations with Joseph of Arimathea and Arthurian legend, among others.⁵²⁷ Most would make pilgrimages within their own neighborhood, along paths well-known and well-trod.

Local shrines proliferated throughout the later Middle Ages, giving English parishioners foci for their devotion within their own parish and often fostered by a parish devotee. St. Sidwell, a local Devon saint, became one of the favored shrines in the parish at Morebath, and her cult had been lovingly tended and promoted by the parish vicar, Sir Christopher Trychay. He had paid for a statue of St. Sidwell out of his own pocket and presented to the parish shortly after his installation as parish priest; within three years, parishioners began to leave bequests to St. Sidwell's altar, and within ten, hers was the most popular site of devotion in the parish. Soon, little girls from Morebath bore the name and the protection of the local Devon saint.⁵²⁸ The register of Edmund Lacy, bishop of Exeter, records the efforts of many other Exeter parishes like Morebath to promote their churches and chapels as sites of local pilgrimage. St. Katharine Plymouth,⁵²⁹ St. George's Kenwyn,⁵³⁰ St. Thomas Ludgvan,⁵³¹ and St. Michael's

83. "Universis sancte matris ecclesie filiis Ricardus humilis Conventr(ensis) ecclesie minister, salutem. Cristane religionis reverentia eos summo debet venerari studio quos in apostolica sublimitate constitutos redemptoris humilitas nominavit amicis, et divina dispositione iudicandi potestatem constat esse sortitos. Inde est quod devotionem vestram monemus atque exhortatione pia convenimus in Domino quatinus pro salute animarum et venia delictorum ad sollemnitatem beati Iacobi devote concurratis, cuius reliquias Rading' debito amplectuntur venerationis obsequio. Nos vero de Dei misericordia plenius confidentes omnibus qui in prescripta sollemnitate ibidem convenerint aut infra oct(avas) ob honorem Dei et beati apostoli Iacobi prefatum locum religiosa devotione adierint de inflictis sibi penitentia ex confessione sincera viginti dies remittimus et orationum ac beneficiorum Coventrensis ecclesie participes eos efficimus. Valete."

⁵²⁷ Krochalis, "Magna Tabula," 93-183.

⁵²⁸ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 168-169; idem, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Parish* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 73-78.

⁵²⁹ *Reg. Lacy*, 1: 107. "Universis [etc] Edmundus [etc] salutem in Eo per quem fit remissio peccatorum. Pietatis operibus tocians credimus inherere quociens mentes fidelium ad pie devocionis opera per allectiva indulgenciarum munera propensius excitamus. Cupientes ut capella sancte Katerine de Sutton in parochia de Plymmouth nostre diocesis situata dignis frequentetur honoribus et a Christifidelibus iugiter veneretur, de omnipotentis Dei immensa misericordia, et beatissime virginis Marie genetricis eiusdem ac beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli patronorum nostrorum omniumque sanctorum meritis et precibus confidentes,

Braunton⁵³² are just a few Cornish and Devon parishes that sought indulgences specifically for the purposes of pilgrimage. Further to the north, the priest or parishioners of the church in Boyleston (d. Durham) tried to promote the cult of Blessed Margaret by obtaining an indulgence to draw pilgrims to her chapel in their church.⁵³³ In all, at least 63 parishes received indulgences promoting pilgrimage to their church or to an image, altar, or chapel within it; additionally, some indulgences for church fabric or church dedication festivals could have also promoted pilgrimage, as they often required attendance on specific days of the liturgical year.

For most, the cult of saints and pilgrimage was local and localizing in its tendency. The laity sponsored the development of cults within their parish churches that came to be embraced by many parishioners. Guilds introduced or revived devotions, and paid chapels and images of beloved saints which decorated the side aisles of many parish churches. The guild of St. George in the parish church of St. Peter's, Nottingham, obtained an indulgence for those who prayerfully heard the mass of St. George or antiphons of the Virgin, evidently out of a desire to promote devotion to their patron and

omnibus parochianis nostris, et aliis quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgenciam ratam habuerint pariter et acceptam, de peccatis suis vere penitentibus et confessis, qui ad dictam capellam causa devocionis aut peregrinacionis tocians quociens visitaverint quadraginta dies indulgencie misericorditer in Domino concedimus per presentes.” Other indulgences promoting local pilgrimage in Lacy’s register: vol 1: 144, 306, 279, 300; vol. 3: 14, 38, 39, 210.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 60:306. “Dominus concessit quadraginta dies indulgencie sub litteris suis patentibus omnibus devote causa peregrinacionis capellam sancti Georgii infra parochiam Sancti Kenewini in Cornubia situatam visitantibus aut bona contribuentibus ad sustentacionem, construcionem et reparacionem eiusdem, ad libitum durature.”

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 60: 279. “Dominus concessit licenciam ut in capella sancti Thome apostoli infra parochiam Sancti Luswini in Cornubia situata cum indulgencia quadraginta dierum omnibus Christifidelibus dictam capellam causa peregrinacionis visitantibus vel aliqua bona contribuentibus ad sustentacionem dicte capelle, divina valeant per quoscumque presbiteros idoneos celebrari.”

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 60: 300. “Item eodem die dominus concessit xl dies indulgencie sub litteris suis patentibus omnibus devote visitantibus causa peregrinacionis capellam sancti Michaelis infra parochiam de Braunton situatam ad libitum, etc.”

⁵³³ *Reg. Kellawe*, 615. “Memorandum...concessit dominus xl dies veniae, omnibus qui ad capellam Beate Margaretae virginis, de Boyleston, Conventrensis et Lychfeldensis dioecesis causa devotionis, orationis seu peregrinationis, accesserint, vel qui ad fabricam, luminaria, vestimenta, ornamenta, seu ad alia quaecumque dictae capellae necessaria, manus porrexerint adjutrices. ...”

the Blessed Virgin.⁵³⁴ Parishioners also swore by their relics in the legal setting of local courts,⁵³⁵ they included the images of saints in their wills, encouraging the development of cult and similar donations from their neighbors,⁵³⁶ they were sent on pilgrimages to local shrines as public penance for public wrongdoing.⁵³⁷ All of these reinforced ties to the saints and people of the parish. Mistress Baylis of Rolvenden described her veneration of the relics at her parish church as performing a “pilgrimage to the relics.”⁵³⁸ Although she walked no more than a few miles, she thought of her action as pilgrimage, indicating a more flexible notion of journeying to the holy. Parish churches were filled with images and relics of saints that were signposts announcing portals to the supernatural; access to the holy was most often found within or near the parish. When Mistress Bayliss went on pilgrimage, Duffy contends, she was reinforcing her local identity and the ties that bound her to her parish and to her geographical place.⁵³⁹

While it has been argued that indulgences were primarily about fundraising,⁵⁴⁰ it seems evident that financial considerations were not the only reasons bishops gave indulgences for the promotion of pilgrimage. Indulgences often assisted in fostering

⁵³⁴ *Reg. Rotherham*, 193. “Grant of forty days’ indulgence to the brothers and sisters of the gild of St. George, Nottingham, who hear mass in honour of St. George or the antiphons of Our Lady, sung in the parish church of St. Peter, Nottingham, and say the Lord’s Prayer and the Angelic Salutation. 9 Oct. 1481.” [Editor’s translation]. See also below, n. 152 and 153.

⁵³⁵ G.J.C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), ch. 3.

⁵³⁶ Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 73-78.

⁵³⁷ Duffy, “Dynamics of Pilgrimage,” 173-174

⁵³⁸ Duffy, “The Dynamics of Pilgrimage in Late Medieval England,” in *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, ed. C. Morris and P. Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 166.

⁵³⁹ *ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁴⁰ D. Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, 94. Webb has argued that indulgenced pilgrimage was primarily a fund-raising tool used by parishes to boost marginal finances or building programs. The extent to which this can be tested as true is difficult in two respects. Shrine income was not always kept separate from other income streams when it was accounted, so we have no way of knowing how effective they were in raising funds for parishes over time. The other problem lies in the fact that most indulgences that have been preserved come from the records of those who offered them, and not necessarily from those who sought them. We cannot know with any certainty how many people availed themselves of the opportunity of an indulgence, only that the indulgence was offered.

greater devotion to local saints. Bishop Monacute of Worcester sought to increase devotion to native son and saint Thomas Cantilupe by offering forty days' indulgence to those who prayed at his shrine in Worcester cathedral.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, Bishop Wykeham of Winchester promoted the saints and intercessors buried at Winchester Cathedral, and rewarded those came to venerate them or who assisted in maintenance of the cathedral with forty days' relaxation.⁵⁴² Indulgences of this sort are notable in that they require no donation to support the shrine or church; as in the case of Wykeham's grant, donation was an option but was not required in order to obtain the spiritual benefits of the indulgence. The central act required by these indulgences was devotional, and seems to indicate an episcopal desire to promote friendship and devotion with the saints as the motivating reason behind the grant of indulgence. This notion of friendship is manifested in a grant by Thomas Appleby, bishop of Carlisle in the north. He had read the Venerable Bede's story of St. Cuthbert and the bonds of friendship with his disciple Herbert, which were so powerful that they died on the same day, according to Bede's telling. Appleby was sufficiently impressed that he mandated to the vicar of Crosthwaite

⁵⁴¹ *Reg. Montacute*, 198. The bishop wishes to stimulate the minds of the faithful to charitable deeds and other works of devotion. Trusting to the mercy of the omnipotent God, the merits and intercession of the glorious Virgin Mary, of the apostles Peter and Paul, and of the holy confessors Wulstan and Oswald, he grants an indulgence to those of his parishioners and to others whose diocesans ratify it. He grants relaxation of 40 days of enjoined penance provided they are truly contrite for the stain of their sins and confessed, and for the purpose of devotion go to the altar of St. Thomas, sometime archbishop of Canterbury, and that of St. Thomas Cantilupe, formerly bishop of Hereford, in the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, in the Lincoln diocese, and there pray with devout mind. In witness thereof the bishop has appended his seal. [Editor's summary]

⁵⁴² *Reg. Wykeham*, 1:11-13 "...Et ut ad mentes vestre et aliorum fidelium propensius excitentur, de omnipotentis Dei misericordia et gloriose semper virginis Marie genetricis sue, beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli, sanctorumque confessorum Birini, Swithuni, Athelwoldi, et Hedde, patronorum nostrorum, necnon omnium sanctorum meritis et precibus confidentes, omnibus nobis nostre diocesis subjectis et aliis, quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgenciam ratam habuerint et acceptam, de peccatis suis contritis penitentibus et confessis, qui ad dictam ecclesiam nostram cathedralem causa devocionis seu peregrinacionis accesserunt, et ad venerationem reliquiarum seu sustentacionem luminarium dicte ecclesie et ipsius fabricam de bonis sibi a Deo collatis contulerunt seu legaverunt subsidia caritatis vel aliquo alio pietatis titulo manus porrexerunt adjunctices, quadraginta dies de injuncta sibi penitencia misericorditer relaxamus, ratificantes omnes indulgencias a quibuscunque patriarichis, legatis, archiepiscopis, et episcopis catholicis huiusmodi rei gracia rite concessas et nostris temporibus concedendas."

to say a mass at Cuthbert's Farne Island on the anniversary of Cuthbert's death, and to offer an indulgence of forty days to those in attendance at the mass.⁵⁴³ As with the grants above, no donation was required, only devotion.

Belief in the communion of saints also encouraged mutuality between the living and not-quite-sainted dead. By the thirteenth century, conceptions about Purgatory—a middle place of purification lying between Heaven and Earth—reached fuller articulation and imaginative location. As Le Goff has noted, this articulation relied on belief in the immortality of the soul, resurrection, judgment and penance.⁵⁴⁴ It was also predicated on and anchored in the ancient belief of the Communion of Saints, that bond which tied all the faithful, living and dead. The “saints” were not simply the holy ones or the martyrs, but included those who were being sanctified by partaking in the sacraments, thereby partaking in Christ and the forgiveness of sins. The intimacy and unity created by their participation in Christ bound together the living and dead inextricably, such that what was shared among the living was shared with the dead, and vice versa. The idea that solidarity lay between the living and the dead, unbound by time and space, encouraged the fourth-century Roman, Nicetas of Remisiana, to write into his own epitaph a request for prayers from passersby.⁵⁴⁵ This belief urged Frankish noblemen to establish

⁵⁴³ *Reg. Appleby*, 124. “Mandate to the vicar of Crosthwaite. The bishop has read in the book of the Venerable Bede on the history of the English people that Herbert, a priest, was a disciple of St. Cuthbert. He lived as a hermit on an island in Derwentwater, but visited Cuthbert annually to receive his guidance. When Cuthbert happened to come to Carlisle, Herbert went to Cuthbert who told him he expected to die soon. Herbert tearfully begged that Cuthbert would pray that he might die first. After a pause, Cuthbert replied that this prayer was granted. On 13 April following [687], Cuthbert died on Farne Island and Herbert on [his] island. The bishop believes that few know about this miracle, and orders the vicar to go to Herbert's island on the said 13th day and celebrate mass for St. Cuthbert cum nota; with an indulgence for 40 days to those who attend.” Storey notes that this mandate is still carried out at present: a mass is offered on the first Saturday after Easter, continuing Appleby's devotion.

⁵⁴⁴ J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984), 1-14.

⁵⁴⁵ V. Breton, *The Communion of Saints: History, Dogma, Devotion*, trans. R.E. Scantlebury (St Louis: Herder, 1934), 26-32.

commemorative liturgies to speed their souls to heaven,⁵⁴⁶ and caused late medieval Christians to seek post-mortem prayers and commemoration through guilds, chantries, and indulgences.

It has become a commonplace to say that the “birth” of Purgatory in the thirteenth century spurred the growth of later medieval commemorative activity; however the impulse to seek prayers for the dead existed long before the doctrines of Purgatory received their fleshing-out in the later Middle Ages. In the parish context, the belief in the Communion of Saints, articulated in the Creed, ensured that the super-natural bonds of kin- and friendship were not dissolved at death, and the obligation to assist them after death through prayers in fact became more imperative. To this ancient, organic solidarity a juridical act was often attached: an indulgence releasing the one praying from enjoined penance. Indulgences reinforced solidarity with the dead of the parish. Parishioners approached their bishop for an indulgence to offer those who prayed for their souls while living and after death. They sought them not only for themselves, but also for loved ones. Thus Alexander of Cave (Yorkshire) sought prayers for himself and his wife (“pro salubri statu”) while living, and prayers for their souls after death (“postquam ab hac luce migraverint”), as well as for the souls of his parents, buried in the parish church at South Cave. Those who said a Pater Noster and an Angelic Salutation for the family, as well as for all souls and the tranquility of the realm were offered forty days of remission.⁵⁴⁷

The register of Richard Kellawe, bishop of Durham (1311-1316), is an example of the exceptional number of grants issued for prayers for the dead. Using his register as case-study, we find that of the approximately 90 grants of indulgence recorded in his

⁵⁴⁶ M. McLaughlin, *Consorting with the Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁵⁴⁷ *Reg. Kellawe*, 608.

register during his five-year reign, nearly 70 grants recorded indulgences offered for prayers for approximately 130 identifiable people and innumerable children. Many of them were granted in the years of the Great Famine that afflicted many people in the years 1315-1317. But he certainly was not unique in his promotion of the practice. Swanson has estimated that there are over 1,100 grants benefitting the souls of approximately 2,700 named persons in the Lincoln registers, published and unpublished, from 1280 to 1347, during the reigns of bishops Sutton, Dalderby, Burghersh and Bek.⁵⁴⁸ He contends that this number is misleading, as under-reporting of such normal and routine types of devotion was a common scribal oversight. In the years of dearth and plague, it is certain that scribes could not have kept pace with the number of requests. Although some entries offer fuller inscriptions, most were simply jotted down as memoranda, as in the grant of “40 days’ [indulgence] for those praying for the soul of Thomas de Ingowe, and for the souls of all the faithful,” which offers the name of the departed but not the place of his interment.⁵⁴⁹ Throughout the register, there is evidence of overworked scribes struggling to keep up with the requests, as grants were lumped together in hasty entries. In one entry, grants of indulgence for a bridge were entered alongside grants for prayers for the souls of two couples (living) and their children, as well as five deceased persons and the souls of all the departed.⁵⁵⁰ Kellawe’s zeal for

⁵⁴⁸ R.N. Swanson, “Indulgences for Prayers for the Dead in the Diocese of Lincoln in the Early Fourteenth Century,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 52 (2001), 197-199.

⁵⁴⁹ *Reg. Kellawe*, 359.

⁵⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 615. “Memorandum...concessit dominus xl dies indulgentiae, omnibus, qui ad fabricam pontis de Botyton’, qui est ultra Savern’, inter episcopatus Herefordensem et Assavensem, vel ad reparationem ejusdem, de bonis sibi a Deo collatis, grata contulerint subsidia caritatis; et qui pro salubri statu Johannis de Cherleton’, Hawysae uxoris ejus et eorum liberorum; et Petri Corbet et Beatricis uxoris ejus, dum vixerint, et pro animabus eorundem, cum ab hac luce migraverint; pro animabus Johannis, patris, Emmae, matris, dicti Johannis, quorum corpora in ecclesia de Welington’, Coventrensis et Lichfeldensis diocesis quiescunt humata; pro anima Audoeni de la Pole, cujus corpus in ecclesia Fratrum Minorum Salopie, ejusdem diocesis, quiescit humatum; pro anima Griffini de la Pole, cujus corpus in ecclesia Fratrum Minorum apud

promoting the communion of saints led to instances in which he would enfold prayers for the dead into grants for other purposes. In one, he folded prayers for the dead into an indulgence for those contributing to the fabric of the church in South Cave (Yorks.), requiring that in order to obtain the indulgence, one must also pray for four named persons buried in the chapel of the Virgin.⁵⁵¹ Kellawe was not singular in his activity; the registers of Oliver Sutton (bishop of Lincoln, 1280-1299) and Romeyn (archbishop of York, 1286-1296) are also notable for their high proportion of indulgences granted for prayers for the dead.

Those who obtained from the bishop an indulgence for those who prayed on their behalf usually publicized the indulgence on or near their tombs.⁵⁵² Some were etched in brass and affixed to the walls of the church; others were carved into headstones. Upon his death in 1463, John Baret of Bury St. Edmunds left in his will that an indulgence

Northampton', Lincolniensis diocesis, requiescat humatum, et pro anima Agnetis de Upton', cujus corpus in ecclesia Sanctae Ceddae Salopie, dictae Coventrensis et Lychfeldensis, [quiescit humatum], et pro animabus omnium fidelium defunctorum, etc." Four examples of grouped memoranda occur on p. 615-616; this type grouping of grants for unrelated persons is unusual in other registers.

⁵⁵¹ *ibid.*, 608. "...Cupientes per allectiva indulgentiarum munera mentes fidelium ad caritatem [et] devotionis opera, quantum, cum Deo, possumus, propensius excitare, de ipsius omnipotentis Dei misericordia, gloriosae Virginis Marie, matris suae, beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli, necnon sanctissimi Cuthberti, confessoris et episcopi, patroni nostri, omniumque sanctorum, meritis et precibus confidentes, omnibus parochianis nostris, et aliis, quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgentiam ratam habuerint, et acceptam, de peccatis suis vere contritis poenitentibus et confessis, qui ad capellam beatae Mariae Virginis in ecclesia de Suthcave, Eboracensis diocesis, causa devotionis, orationis, seu peregrinationis, accesserint, vel ibidem divinum officium, seu verbum sanctae praedicationis audierint, vel qui ad fabricam, luminaria, vestimenta, ornamenta, seu ad aliqua alia dictae capellae necessaria, manus porrexerint adjutrices, aut, in extremis laborantes, de suis facultatibus aliquid dederint, procuraverint, seu assignaverint, capellae memoratae; et qui pro salubri statu Alexandri de Cave, et Johanna, uxoris ejus, dum iidem Alexander et Johanna vixerint, et pro animabus ipsorum, postquam ab hac luce migraverint, necnon pro animabus Petri de Cave, quondam patris ejudem Alexandri, et Elenae, matris ejudem Alexandri, quorum corpora in ecclesia Omnium Sanctorum de Suthcave requiescunt humata, et pro animabus omnium fidelium etc., ac pro tranquillitate regni, etc., orationem Dominicam, cum salutatione Virginis angelica, quotienscumque dixerint pia mente, xl dies de injuncta sibi poenitentia misericorditer relaxamus.

⁵⁵² W. Axon, "Manchester and Macclesfield Pardon Brasses," *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* 10 (1892), 99-110.

obtained for the sake of his soul should be advertised on his tomb.⁵⁵³ Most of the grants were for forty days' remission, and required standard, basic prayers known by all, usually a Pater Noster and the Angelic Salutation. The remains of these grants are usually only found in the episcopal registers, much of the physical evidence such as brasses and tombs having been destroyed in the Reformation. John Baret's burial monument with its affixed indulgence vanished in the course of the Reformation, despite his careful provision and planning.

In the later Middle Ages, however, it would be possible to walk through one's parish church and cemetery and encounter a proverbial embarrassment of spiritual riches in the form of offers of indulgence and access to the treasury of merit in return for prayers for the faithful departed, often for people and families one knew. Some of the grants appeared to have rhetorical encouragements embedded in them, as added incentive to the viewer to pray for the deceased. Richard Kellawe invoked crowds of angels and holy souls who rejoice at suffrages given for the recently departed,⁵⁵⁴ elsewhere, he reminded viewers that looking upon the tombs of the dead should stir up greater devotion to Christ and desire to pray for the dead,⁵⁵⁵ and that Christ is a generous paymaster for

⁵⁵³ S. Tymms, *Wills and Inventories from the Registers of the Commissary of Bury St. Edmunds*, Camden Society 44 (London, 1850), 119; R.N. Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?*, 107.

⁵⁵⁴ *Reg. Kellawe*, 451. "Universis sanctae matris ecclesiae filiis, etc., Ricardus, etc., salutem. Cum ad incrementum gaudii turbae cedit angelicae, ac vita fungentibus exultationis cumulum afferat, quotiens per devotas orationes fidelium procuratur instantius suffragium resolutis, nos, de summae Trinitatis ineffabili misericordia, gloriosae virginis Marie, apostolorum Petri et Pauli, necnon almi patroni nostri, Cuthberti, meritis et precibus specialiter confidentes, omnibus et singulis parochianis nostris, et aliis, quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgentiam ratam habere voluerint, et acceptam, qui pro anima dominae Aliciae de Egliston, cujus corpus in cemeterio ecclesie Sancti Aydani de Bamburgh, inter aliorum fidelium corpora requiescit, orationem Dominicam, cum salutatione angelica, devote dixerint, et intente, xl dies de injuncta sibi penitentia, pro peccatis suis, vere confessis et contritis misericorditer relaxamus."

⁵⁵⁵ *Reg. Kellawe*, 264. "Universis, etc., Ricardus, permissione divina, etc., salutem. Dum sepulturae locum oculus corporis presentialiter intuetur, specialis memoria defunctorum recentior esse solet, et oculo mentis ad Christum in spiritus fervor directo ipsis intuentibus merita geminantur; dum pro resolutis orando, ecclesiam qua quiescunt ad honorem Dei et sancti ac patroni ejusdem ecclesie, devotione congrua reverentur, et ipsi ecclesiae, suffragantur operibus pietatis. Devotionem igitur Christi fidelium, per crebra

those who are generous with their prayers for the dead.⁵⁵⁶ These particular invocations were probably at one time materialized in the form of monuments in the churches at Bamburgh and St. Albans, as some of Kellawe's grants seem to indicate in their texts, and from the evidence of some memorial brasses that still remain.⁵⁵⁷ In the parish church, indulgenced monuments for the dead acted as perpetual and physical reminders of the solidarity that existed between the living and the dead, as well as a prod to realize that solidarity among the living.

Indulgences and Fraternities in the Parish

Most parish fraternities were, as Cook has argued, essentially "poor men's chantries" because of their focus on funeral rites and intercession, and because the wherewithal to establish an endowed or even temporary chantry was outside the ability of most fraternity

indulgentiarum munera propensius excitatam, ad saluberrima caritatis ac pietatis opera, volentes, ut possumus, ampliare, de Dei omnipotentis misericordia, ac beatissime genitricis Ejus, Marie semper virginis, beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli, sanctissimique Cuthberti confessoris et episcopi patroni nostri, et omnium sanctorum meritis confidentes, omnibus parochianis nostris, et aliis, quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgentiam ratam habuerint, vere contritis et confessis, qui ecclesiam beati Alkmundi, regis et martyris, de Bliburg, Lincolnensis diocesis, peregrinationis causa devotionis visitaverint, et pro anima Walteri, quondam rectoris ejusdem ecclesie, cujus corpus in ipsa ecclesia quiescit humatum, et animabus omnium fidelium defunctorum, etc."

⁵⁵⁶ *Reg. Kellawe*, 192. "Universis sancte matris ecclesiae filiis, praesentes literas inspecturis, Ricardus, permissione divina, Dunolmensis episcopus, salutem sempiternam in Christo. Licet Is, de cujus munere venit ut a suis fidelibus digne sibi et laudabiliter serviatur, de suae pietatis abundantia, merita supplicum excedens ad vota, bene servientibus multo majora retribuatur quam valeant promereri; pontificalis tamen sollicitudinis exposcit officium, ut Christi fideles ad pie promerendum quibusdam allectivis indulgentiarum muneribus excitemus, per quod reddantur divine gratie aptiores; de Dei Omnipotentis misericordia, beatae et gloriosae smpet Virginis Marie et beatorum Petri et Pauli Apostolorum, necnon et sancti Cuthberti, patroni nostri, et omnium sanctorum meritis et precibus confidentes, omnibus parochianis nostris, et aliis, quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgentiam ratam habuerint, de peccatis suis vere contritis et confessis, qui pro salubri statu domini Hugonis de Everesdon' abbatis monasterii Sancti Albani, ordinis Sancti Benedicti, Lincoln' diocesis, dum vixerit, et ipsius anima cum ab hac vita decesserit, et animabus omnium fidelium defunctorum, necnon pro tranquillitate regis et regni Angliae, orationem Dominicam, cum salutatione Virginis gloriosae, dixerint pia mente, xl dies de injuncta sibi poenitentia misericorditer relaxamus."

⁵⁵⁷ Axon, "Manchester and Macclesfield Pardon Brasses," 99-110; Swanson, *Passports to Paradise*, 162; Orme, *English Church Dedications*, 162.

members.⁵⁵⁸ Here again, the belief in the communion of saints was foundational for the organization of fraternities. Solidarity within the membership encompassed both the dead and the living, and the mutual assistance among the living was driven by the belief in the communion of saints, as well as by the mandate of charity. A brotherhood of choice, the fraternity was a natural site of solidarity because of its emphasis on mutuality in this life and the next. But charity and assistance were not exclusive to the brethren; many fraternities engaged in activities were aimed at assisting the broader community, such as those encouraging orthodoxy in religious practice and belief through the sponsorship of liturgies, preaching and plays, or founding hospitals and almshouses. Fraternities sought indulgences from bishops and popes for a variety of reasons: as a way to obtain special spiritual graces for their members, to encourage growth in enrolled membership, and to enhance their prestige vis-à-vis other fraternities, among others. Through the analysis of episcopal and papal indulgences, one can identify a steady support for these lay groups and their initiatives, as an encouragement for their exercise of mutuality and solidarity among members, and to support and foster their activities more broadly.

The desire to promote orthodox belief is evidenced in grants to fraternities that held as part of their mission the encouragement of a particular devotion, or the provision of preaching or some other catechetical endeavor.⁵⁵⁹ Archbishop John Morton granted the typical forty days relaxation to the fraternity of Holy Wisdom at Whittington College, London, noting that the purpose of the guild was ensure that “a solemn public reading or

⁵⁵⁸ Cook, *Medieval Chantries and Chantry Chapels*, 25.

⁵⁵⁹ Giovanna Casagrande makes a similar argument for Italian confraternities, but notes the close link between indulgences, the growth of confraternities and growth of the identity of Italian communes. G. Casagrande, “Confraternities and Indulgences in Italy in the Later Middle Ages,” *Promissory Notes on the Treasury of Merit: Indulgences in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. R.N. Swanson (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 37-63.

lecture may be given freely and publicly in the college, so that sound doctrine and fruitful preaching may be presented to Christ's people."⁵⁶⁰ One did not need to join the fraternity to benefit from the indulgence; Morton encouraged the faithful by means of the indulgence to support the brothers and sisters of the fraternity with alms, so that they could be "co-partners" in their work. Similarly, the efforts of the Corpus Christi guild of York to promote devotion to Eucharist were encouraged by Archbishop Rotherham, who specifically rewarded forty days' indulgence to any who were present when the Host was carried in procession on the feast of Corpus Christi.⁵⁶¹ The Jesus guild of St. Mary, Baldock, was formed to increase devotion to the Holy Name; Pope Pius granted an indulgence of seven years and seven quarantines (from *quaranta*, meaning "forty" days, or the length of Lent) for the support of their endeavors in 1462.⁵⁶² In each of these

⁵⁶⁰ *Reg. Morton*, v. 75, p. 18-19. The grant continues, "The archbishop therefore commends, ratifies, approves and validates the fraternity as far as in him lies, and declares that, so that it may stand forever, apostolic confirmation should be sought and obtained. He exhorts the faithful to the maintenance of this fraternity, that they should be copartners with the brothers and sisters and grant them alms, and he grants to those Christians present and future who lend helping hands forty days indulgence" (the editor's translation).

⁵⁶¹ *Reg. Rotherham*, 192. "Grant of forty days' indulgence to those who subscribe to the gild of Corpus Christi, York, or who say the Lord's Prayer and the Angelic Salutation for the souls of the brothers and sisters of the gild or who are present when the Host is carried in procession on the feast of Corpus Christi or within its octave; with confirmation of indulgences granted by other bishops" (editor's summary).

⁵⁶² *CPR* 11: 605-621. "To all Christ's faithful who shall see the present letters. The recent petition of the present rector of the parish church of St. Mary, Baldok, in the diocese of Lincoln, and the master and wardens (*gardianorum*) and brethren and sisters of the fraternity or gild begun (*incepte*) in the name of Jesus in the said church contained that the said church was formerly solemnly built in honour of the glorious Virgin, and still exists there, and that its parishioners, both merchants and tillers of the soil, were so numerous that the then rectors could, alike from the predial and also from the personal tithes, and from other fruits etc. keep up becoming hospitality, but that the said town of Baldok and rectory have sunk to such poverty, and have so few parishioners, and that the fruits etc. of the said church have so much diminished, that the said present rector can keep up hardly any hospitality, and that the parishioners cannot repair or maintain the said parish church; wherefore, in order that the rector's hospitality may not utterly perish and the church suffer too much ruin, the rector and parishioners of the said church and town, have, for the conservation of hospitality and of the rector and the maintenance and repair of the said church, newly begun (*de novo ... inchoarunt*) a fraternity or gild to the praise of the name of Jesus, in which the master and wardens (*gardiani*) and brethren and sisters propose to meet together at certain times of the year for exercising certain pious works. The pope therefore grants to all penitents who on the Sunday immediately following the feast of Relics visit the said church from the first to the second vespers, and give aught for the repair and conservation of the said church and fraternity, relaxation in perpetuity of seven years and seven quarantines of enjoined penance; and grants that the said brethren and sisters may on the Friday and Saturday immediately preceding the said Sunday confess their sins to their own priests, and that

cases, the fraternity was engaged in some sort of public, apostolic activity—a procession, preaching, or teaching—that focused on deepening the faithful’s understanding of some aspect of Christian belief. In light of the doctrinal confusions and upheavals introduced by Wycliffite teachings and Lollard disseminations, prelates were concerned for the provision of orthodox doctrine, and wished to support the catechetical activities of fraternities, as one answer to the issue.⁵⁶³ Unity of belief in the basic doctrines of the Christian faith was essential to the peace and stability of the local Christian community of the parish and diocese, and bishops had great interest in encouraging it.

More commonplace than processions or plays were the feast and ferial liturgies that fraternities provided the parish. Bishops were eager to promote the liturgical activities, and offered standard indulgences of forty days to support them. Some grants were specifically for the members, for their attendance at certain liturgies and the saying of certain prayers. The guild of St. George, based in the parish of St. Peter, Nottingham, obtained an indulgence from Archbishop Rotherham that rewarded the devout hearing of the mass of St. George or the antiphons of the Blessed Virgin and the saying of the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary.⁵⁶⁴ Other grants rewarded men and women who supported a guild’s work financially or otherwise, but were not members of the guild. Their donations could go toward the support of the priest, who offered the masses and other services, and who also assisted the parish priest with his liturgical and educational

such priests may for five years after the present date absolve the said brethren and sisters, their own parishioners, in all things except cases reserved to the apostolic see” (editor’s translation).

⁵⁶³ Bishops also addressed the issue of orthodoxy among the faithful by offering indulgences to those who attended the sermons of specific priests. See A. Brodeur, “Preaching and Indulgences in Late Medieval England,” in *Weapons of Mass Instruction: Secular and Religious Institutions Teaching the World*, ed. J. Goering, F. Guardini, and G. Silano (Toronto: Legas, 2008), 105-113.

⁵⁶⁴ *Reg. Rotherham*, 193. “Grant of forty days’ indulgence to the brothers and sisters of the gild of st. George, Nottingham, who hear mass in honour of st. George or the antiphons of our Lady sung in the parish church of St. Peter, Nottingham, and say the Lord’s Prayer and the Angelic Salutation. 9 Oct. 1481.” (editor’s translation)

duties. The fraternity of St. John the Baptist, Wells, had fallen on hard times, and needed assistance in maintaining the fraternity chapel and the support of the fraternity's priest. They obtained from Bishop Bekynton of Bath and Wells an indulgence of forty days for anyone who contributed to these specific needs.⁵⁶⁵ In the same grant, Bishop Bekynton also awarded aged and infirm fraternity members licence to have a priest say the divine offices or offer mass on a portable altar in their presence when they were physically unable to attend in the fraternity chapel. This second reward could have acted as an incentive to join the fraternity and increase the dues-paying membership.

The papacy also had many of the same interests in supporting fraternities and their activities. Many of the papal grants of indulgence to fraternities also rewarded financial support for the material needs of the fraternity: the guild of the Holy Trinity in the parish church of All Saints, Northampton, obtained a papal indulgence of two years and two lents (forty days) for anyone who visited their chapel and gave alms on Whitsunday (Pentecost), perhaps also pointing to a desire to foster greater Trinitarian devotion.⁵⁶⁶ Other grants indicate that the papacy clearly saw indulgences as vehicles for the promotion of orthodox devotion, offering indulgences to anyone who attended the liturgies and services arranged by them. The fraternity of St. Mary the Virgin in the parish of St. Botolph, Boston (d. Lincoln) sought an indulgence for anyone who attended

⁵⁶⁵ *Reg. Bekyton*, 313. "Grant by the bishop of 40 days' indulgence to all contrite and confessed persons who shall contribute to the maintenance of the chantry, or fraternity, of St. John the Baptist in the church of St. Cuthbert Wells, and to the support of a chaplain thereof to celebrate masses at the altar of St. John the Baptist on the south side of the said church for the good estate of the brethren and sisters of the chantry, or fraternity, who are living and for the souls of those who are deceased. License also for the said chaplain, at the request of any of the brethren or sisters of the fraternity who are prevented by old age or infirmity from coming to the parish church to hear divine offices, to celebrate masses with a portable altar in the presence of any such brother or sister, in any suitable place in Wells, or, if he be lawfully prevented, to procure another chaplain to celebrate for him, provided that the rights of other be not prejudiced." (editor's translation)

⁵⁶⁶ *CPR* 4:411. "Relaxation of two years and two *quadrage*ne to penitents who on Whitsun day visit and give alms for the repair of the chapel of the confraternity of Holy Trinity, in the parish church of All Saints, Northampton." (editor's summary)

masses in honor of the Virgin in the fraternity chapel, and Pope Boniface IX chose to reward the request with an indulgence of 100 days.⁵⁶⁷ The guild later sought to boost membership and prestige by acquiring papal indults to obtain a confessor of their choosing who could, *in articulo mortis*, grant them plenary indulgence.⁵⁶⁸ However, as a measure against abuse, members needed to fast every Friday for one year in order to obtain the indult.

Episcopal and papal indulgences also supported the most basic commitment of fraternities, the promise to pray for the dead. Some grants of indulgence specifically mention the fraternal obligation to provide masses and prayers for the living and dead. Bishop Bekynton's grant to the fraternity of St. John the Baptist, Wells, rewarded donations to the fraternity precisely because it went to the maintenance of the priest who said masses on behalf of the living and the dead.⁵⁶⁹ The fraternity of St. John the Baptist in London, which was associated with the tailors' and armorers' craft guilds, had grown

⁵⁶⁷ CPR 5: 389-96. "Relaxation of a hundred days of enjoined penance to penitents who are present whenever the mass of St. Mary the Virgin is celebrated aloud and with music in [sic], and who visit, the chapel of the fraternity of the brethren and sisters of the gild of St. Mary the Virgin, founded by Richard Frere, in the parish church of St. Botulph, Buston, in the diocese of Lincoln. *Bonifacius etc. Ad futuram rei memoriam. Universis etc. Bonifacius episcopus, servus servorum Dei. Dum precelsa etc. Cupientes igitur ut capella* (sic.) (*De mandato.*)"

⁵⁶⁸ CPR 11: 649. "To the brethren (*confratribus*) of the confraternity or gild instituted in honour of St. Mary in the church of St. Botulph, of the town of Bostone in the diocese of Lincoln. Grant and indult, as below. Their recent petition contained that Nicholas V granted indult to all the brethren (*confratribus*) of both sexes then belonging to their confraternity and those who should enter it for the next five years, that the confessor of their choice secular or regular might, after hearing their confessions, grant them absolution, in cases reserved to the apostolic see once only during five years, in non-reserved cases as often as opportune, in perpetuity, and might enjoin penance; and that such confessor might grant them, being penitent and having confessed, plenary remission of all their sins, in the hour of death, with the condition about making satisfaction, the provision against abuse, the requirement of fasting for a year on Friday or other day of the week during the said or following year, or as soon as possible, and power for the confessor to commute such fasting etc. [*see Cal. Papal Lett.*, X, pp. 86, 87, 235, 236]. At the said petition, adding that the said pope's letters took effect and that the said five years are ended, the pope hereby grants to the present brethren and sisters, and those who shall enter the confraternity during the next five years, that the confessor of their choice may, after hearing their confessions, grant them absolution, in cases reserved to the apostolic see once only, in other cases as often as opportune, and enjoin penance, and may grant them plenary remission of all their sins in the hour of death, with the above clauses etc., as if the said pope Nicholas's letters extended to the present brethren (*ad vos*) and to such five years. *Benigno sunt.* (*G. de Piccolominibus. | cxxx. N. Bregeon. A. Trapezuntius.*)"

⁵⁶⁹ See above, n. 565.

to such a size that its fraternal chapel in the parish church of St. Martin de Oteswicke was no longer large enough to hold all the brethren for the masses and offices for the dead.

They then built a guildhall suitable for their number and sought permission for the erection of a chapel and altar within it that would enable the

“more convenient fulfilling of the vows and devotion of the said confraternity ... they desire that masses and other divine offices may be celebrated and sung therein as often as there shall be need, and also that the anniversaries of the members of their confraternity or society, present and future, may be performed at the respective times of the year according to custom.”⁵⁷⁰

Boniface IX supported this with an indulgence of one hundred days to anyone who assisted the brethren in the construction of a new chapel, and numerous English bishops did likewise.⁵⁷¹

To be sure, fraternities used indulgences as a way of increasing prestige and of gaining membership, but they also saw them as a means to assist in meeting their corporate goals of mutuality among the living, solidarity with the dead, and the increase in devotion. Prelates chose to encourage these activities with indulgences because they saw these goals as manifestations of basic Christian doctrine, specifically the communion of saints and the mandate of charity. They also saw them as vectors of orthodox belief and practice, and supported these activities in the context of late-medieval doctrinal

⁵⁷⁰ CPR 11: 240. (Editor's translation).

⁵⁷¹ *Memorials of the Guild of Merchant Taylors: Of the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist in the City of London*, ed. C.M. Clode (1875), 49-52. “Oure moste holy fader in God Bonyface pope the sixth of that name hath of his mere mocyon to cause people to devocion, to all Cristen people that wyll putte to their helping handes to the making of the said chapell or to the mayntenaunce of Goddes service in the said place and to all them truly penitent and shryven that visyt the said chapell in the ffeestes of Cristmas, Circumcisyon, Epiphanie, Easter, th'Ascencyon, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, th'adnunciacyon, Purificacyon & th'Assumpcyon of our blessed Lady Saint Mary, and in the ffeest of the Nativitee of Seint John Baptist the ffeest of Peter & Paule and in the ffeest of the dedicacyon of the said chapell, hath mercifully for eche of these ffeestes graunted vij yeres and vij lentes of remission, and whoso within th'utasses of Cristmasse, th'Epiphanie, Easter, th'Assencyon, Corpus Christi, the Nativitee and th'Assumpcyon of the blessed Virgyn Mary, the Nativitee of Seint John Baptist, the ffeest of the blessed Apostels Petir & Poule and of the vj dayes immediatly ensuyng the ffeeste of Pentecost, are willyng devoutely to visyte the said Chapell or to put to their helping handes for every daye within th'utasses hath mercyfully graunted [c dayes of indulgence].

disquiet and heresy. In the context of parish life, these fraternal endeavors could work toward the maintenance of peace and solidarity, for their activities were not exclusive, nor were the indulgences that were awarded them. Rather, the broader parish community benefitted from the activities and the indulgences, participating in the fraternal prayers and liturgies and receiving the spiritual benefit of indulgence for this participation and/or benefaction. In this way, indulgences to fraternities enhanced the pursuit of peace and solidarity within parish life.

Indulgences and Parish Fundraising

One of the more ubiquitous types of indulgence in the registers is the grant for parish fabric. Over 200 grants for church fabric appear in published the public episcopal registers, indicating interest in maintaining or improving the material icon of the local community at the local and episcopal levels. Parish churches were often the central building in the community, and were the physical expression of a community's social, economic and religious health and identity. Throughout the later middle ages, English parishioners had a greater role and increasing responsibilities in the management of parish affairs, especially in the growth of the office of churchwarden, the role of the laity in parish visitation and accountability, and in the maintenance of the church fabric. Churches were expensive to build, expensive to maintain, and expensive to fit with suitable decoration. Such maintenance was sometimes beyond the means of the general or occasional support of parishioners, who turned to a variety of fundraising methods to

pay for maintenance and improvements to their building.⁵⁷² Although it is difficult to know how effective indulgences were as a parish fundraising tool, due to the lack of sufficient detail in parish accounts,⁵⁷³ parishes clearly saw indulgences as one method for encouraging support of this parish-wide endeavor, and, judging by the numbers of parishes that requested them, were considered a good source of income for parish fundraising campaigns.

The parish church was the physical expression of the community's identity, and the maintenance of it was not simply an obligation laid on the people of the parish by the church hierarchy, but was a responsibility seized and shaped by the parish community itself.⁵⁷⁴ In stone and mortar, glass and metal, wax and cloth, parishes communicated their identity and distinguished themselves from the parishes of the surrounding countryside. If a church were simply an artfully arranged pile of stones, then the parishioners had the job of deciding the number and quality of the stones and how they were to be arranged and decorated. And, as the architectural evidence of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century building campaigns suggest, parish churches became the distinctive calling-card of a place and its people.

Financing a parish maintenance and improvement scheme was costly. As churchwardens' accounts indicate, significant sums were paid for workmen and materials, and these sums needed to be raised independently of that other charge to parish households, the tithe. The tithe was obligatory and went to the support of the parish incumbent, who was often non-resident and outside the parish. It was the to the parish

⁵⁷² Kumin, *Shaping of a Community*, 65-147; French, *People of the Parish*, 99-141; A.D. Brown, *Popular Piety in Late Medieval England: The Diocese of Salisbury, 1250-1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 67-131.

⁵⁷³ See above, n. 548.

⁵⁷⁴ French, 99-102.

community that the additional costs of maintaining the church building fell, the contribution to which was, in theory, voluntary. Leaky roofs, broken locks, bell ropes and sundry emergency expenses needed to be raised in addition to tithes and the basic operating funds needed for lights and tapers, vestments and books. And, if a parish wished to improve the building and its fittings, substantial fundraising was required.

Fund-raising was truly parish-wide affair, particularly in rural areas. Organized perhaps by churchwardens and other leading persons and families of the parish, its success nonetheless required the participation of the broader parish community.⁵⁷⁵ According to French, fundraising generally took one of five forms: gifts, rents, sales, collections, and entertainment.⁵⁷⁶ Parishioners might gift the parish in their wills with things that a parish could sell to convert to cash, such as the costly rosaries and rings given by women of the parish.⁵⁷⁷ Parishioners might give animals or land, which the parish might opt to keep for rental income, rather than outright sale, such as the swarms of bees given to the parish at Morebath, Exeter.⁵⁷⁸ Parishes might also rent out church houses and their kitchen tools for brewing and baking. Parishes might also use obligatory parish-wide collections as a way to meet temporary or emergency expenses, to which households contributed based on income.⁵⁷⁹ Entertainments such as ales and the hocktide and Robin Hood revels could also form part of a fund-raising strategy.

One strategy that is often overlooked in discussion of parish financing is the use of indulgences. This is likely due to the fact that extant parish accounts rarely kept

⁵⁷⁵ Brown, *Popular Piety*, 83-91. Brown notes that some urban parishes were able to rely on steady streams of income from property rentals, and therefore required less participation from parishioners.

⁵⁷⁶ French, 99-102.

⁵⁷⁷ Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 76; C. Burgess, "The Benefactions of Mortality: The Lay Response in the Late Medieval Urban Parish," in *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England*, ed. D.M. Smith, Borthwick Studies in History 1 (York: Borthwick Institute for Historical Research, 1991), 65-87.

⁵⁷⁸ Duffy, *Voices of Morebath*, 75.

⁵⁷⁹ French, 114-115.

meaningful track of this sort of income. Nonetheless, parishes sought them in significant numbers, particularly in the war-torn north of England and along the southern coasts prone to rough weather and piracy. For instance, of the approximately 150 grants of indulgence in ten published registers of the archbishops of York, one-third (47) of the grants were for church fabric. In 1318, Archbishop Melton gave forty days' indulgence to anyone who helped to rebuild Carlisle cathedral, which had been burned by the Scots in the ongoing conflict between Robert Bruce and Edward I.⁵⁸⁰ Earlier, Archbishop Romeyn had offered a similar grant of indulgence on behalf of the cathedral and canons of Whithorn, burned in mysterious circumstances.⁵⁸¹ In the diocese of Exeter in the south, one-third of the approximately 160 grants from six published registers were grants for church fabric. The greatest number of grants in both these areas, however, came in the great church building boom of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, so it is possible

⁵⁸⁰ *Reg. Melton*, 71-72. "40 days to all who shall contribute to the rebuilding of Carlisle cathedral, burned, together with the neighboring houses, by the Scots, so that the clergy of Carlisle have nowhere to lay their heads; provided that the fabric funds of York Minster, Beverley, Southwell and Ripon be not thereby prejudiced." [Editor's translation].

⁵⁸¹ *Reg. Romeyn*, 123: 8-9. J., etc., venerabilibus in Christo fratribus, coepiscopis nostris, et dilectis in Christo filiis, abbatibus, prioribus, collegiis, archidiaconis, officialibus, decanis, rectoribus, vicariis, presbiteris, et ministris, necnon aliis universis ecclesiarum prelati per Eboracenses diocesim et provinciam constituti, salutem in amplexibus Redemptoris. Inter cetera pie devocionis opera id in conspectu Altissimi credimus fore gratum, quod ad fundacionem, sustentacionem, et reparacionem ecclesiarum graciose convertitur, que tanquam sancta et salubria in terris habitacula fideles ad orandum recipiunt, et ad impetrandum, in fide sacramenti altaris, quod pro salute credencium in ara dominica sacrorum cotidiano misterio sacerdotum offertur, speratam veniam, placato Deo, de peccatis. Cum, itaque, cathdralis Candide Case ecclesia, nostre provincie, in qua gloriosi confessoris Ninani venerabiliter conduntur reliquie, per repentini incendii voraginem cum domibus et edificiis adjacentibus quasi ad extremam consumpcionem, ut dolentes accipimus, sit redacta, ade quod vix habent ministri ecclesie ubi capita valeant reclinare, nec ad reparacionem tam miserabilis ruine ejusdem suppetant facultates; nos tanto discrimini paternis affectibus prospicere censuimus et spiritualibus quibus possumus munusculis intimius subvenire, devocionem vestram, igitur, studiose requirimus et in Domino attentius exhortamur, vobis in remissionem peccaminum nicholominus injungentes quatinus, cum procuratores prefate cathedralis ecclesie ad vos venerint pro fidelium elemosinis colligendis, eos admittatis benivole, eorum negocium parochianis et subditis vestris efficaci compendio exponentes, ipsosque parochianos et subditos vestros Dei et nostri intuitu benignius inducatis ut de bonis sibi a Deo collatis ad restauracionem, refeccionem, et fabricam predictarum ecclesie et domorum larga conferant subsidia caritatis, in quibus eternale premium mereri poterunt accipius coram Deo. Nos, autem, de ejusdem Omnipotentis Dei miti misericordia, et gloriose Virginis Marie, matris sue, beatorum apostolorum, etc., juxta exhortacionem nostram predictam ecclesiam relevaverint memoratam, et ad fabricam ejusdem et domorum de bonis sibi a Deo collatis manus porrexerint adjutrices, xl dies de, etc. Presentibus per septennium continuum tantummodo duraturis.

that the desire for improvement as much as the desire for repair or maintenance drove some of these requests for indulgence. Thus, in Edmund Lacy's fifteenth-century register were numerous grants for the maintenance of churches,⁵⁸² chapels⁵⁸³ and belfries.⁵⁸⁴

Why did these parish communities seek an indulgence? If an indulgence created no specifically identifiable revenue stream in parish accounts, what was its purpose? While it is assumed that indulgences could act as incentive to people outside the parish to contribute to their building projects, perhaps they acted more effectively within the parish, as an inducement to recalcitrant or parsimonious parishioners to participate in parish fundraising activities. Episcopal grants of indulgence to encourage subsidies of parish fabric ranged from twenty to forty days of remission from enjoined penance, and

⁵⁸² *Reg. Lacy*, 3:2. "Universis [etc] Edmundus [etc] salutem in Eo per quem fit remissio peccatorum. Ad Domini nostri Jhesu Christi laudem, qui manibus et pedibus in crucis patibulo perforatis suo sanguine nos redemit, sancte eriguntur ecclesie, ut in ipsis que domus oracionis existunt devotis oracionibus et lacrimosis suspiriis omnium supernorum suffragia a christifidelibus devocius implerentur, quorum presidiis suffulti ad eterne beatitudinis gaudia Salvatore largiente pertingere valeant. Cum itaque ecclesia parochialis de Okhampton nostre diocesis et eiusdem ecclesie cancellus ac campanile nuperrime tanta vetustate operis ac materie antiquitate et debilitate reducta fuerint, quod de necessitate ad novam reedificacionem eorumdem et construccionem denuo oportuit omnino redire et ea de novo per omnia construere, prout ad Dei laudem et fidei nostre exaltacionem de non mediantibus benefactoribus eiusdem ecclesie, et specialiter et in specie discreto viro magistro Johannis Newcomb in decretis bacallario, perpetue vicarie eiusdem ecclesie vicarius, immensis suis expensis et laboribus, existunt mirifico opere et tabulatu honorifico laudabiliter undique constructa et perfectius reedificata; volentes igitur huiusmodi benefactores ecclesie antedecte, et presertim dictum magistrum Johannem Newcomb, qui huiusmodi laudabilis et pii operis inter ceteros benefactores in inicio operis eiusdem et sine precipuis extiterat benefactor et adiutor, quatenus in nobis est premiis remunerare celestibus, de Dei igitur Omnipotentis immensa misericordia, et beatissime virginis Marie genitricis eiusdem ac beatorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli patronorum nostrorum omniumque sanctorum meritis et precibus, confidentes, omnibus parochianis nostris et aliis quorum diocesani hanc nostram indulgenciam ratam habuerint pariter et acceptam, de peccatis suis vere penitentibus, contritis et confessis, qui pro salubri statu predictorum benefactorum, et presertim ac specialiter et in specie pro salubri statu prefati magistri Johannis Newcomb vicarii predicti, quam diu vixerint et vixerit idem magister Johannes et post mortem eorumdem atque in specie post mortem eiusdem magistri Johannis vicarii prelibati, pro salute animarum huiusmodi benefactorum, et specialiter pro salute anime eiusdem magistri Johannis, unam oracionem dominicam cum salutacione angelica mente devota dixerint, xl dies indulgencie tociens quociens misericorditer in Domino concedimus per presentes.

⁵⁸³ *Reg. Lacy*, 3:210. "Indulgence of 40 days to all visitors, truly penitent and confessed, to the chapel, *nuperrime constructa*, of St. Clement and St. Mary Magdalene in the parish of Saltcomb on the feasts of those saints or at other times, for pilgrimage or for prayer, and to those who celebrate or have masses said, or contribute to the fabric, lights, ornaments, etc; also grant of a license for divine service there on the two patronal feasts and at other times..." [Editor's summary]

⁵⁸⁴ *Reg. Lacy*, 1: 304. "Dominus concessit 40 dies indulgencie omnibus de peccatis suis vere penitentibus, confessis et contritis bona aliqua contribuentibus ad sustentacionem, reparacionem sive construccionem...for the belfry at Molton." [Editor's summary]

most required the gift of alms and sometimes prayers for the dead or the Lord's Prayer and the Angelic Salutation, in addition to the standard requirement for contrition and penance.⁵⁸⁵ The grants do not dictate how much or in what specific context the indulgence could be obtained, so it is possible that a parish fabric indulgence could be obtained by those who came to the ales and drank, or grudgingly pitched in to the collections for the sake of the maintenance of the church building. Many of bishop Edmund Lacy's grants to Exeter churches and chapels are sufficiently broad, stating in general, as one example, "forty days to contributors to the building, repair, and restoration of the parish church of All Hallows on the Walls, Exeter."⁵⁸⁶ In the case of this grant, as in the case of most others, outside of the standard requirement that one be contrite and confessed, anyone could give whatever amount in whatever manner in order to obtain the indulgence.

Parish fabric indulgences assisted in the solidification and unification of parish identity through their support of parish fundraising activities. They could serve to rally parishioners around the common cause of the extraordinary expenses associated with emergency upkeep and maintenance of the church, as well as the cost of improving the building and its decoration, to the glory of God and to pride of the parish community.

Conclusion

Parishes were complex communities of remarkable diversity. While this diversity at times had the potential to create divisions within parish unity, there existed mechanisms that worked to promote peace and solidarity among parishioners and among the various

⁵⁸⁵ See above, n. 582. As an example of the standard language in indulgences for donations to church fabric, Lacy grants 40 days "de peccatis suis vere penitentibus, contritis et confessis."

⁵⁸⁶ *Reg. Lacy*, 3:1.

groups that existed within the parish structure. Indulgences required sincere confession of sins within the sacrament of penance, which in turn required amendment and reconciliation with neighbors. Indulgences encouraged participation in the rituals and ceremonies that emphasized the strengthening of bonds within the parish community, the bonds among the living and the bonds with deceased kith and kin that transcended time and space. Indulgences supported the unity of belief and practice within the parish, particularly in their support of fraternal activities. Finally, indulgences encouraged parishioner participation in the maintenance and enhancement of the parish church itself, the physical representation of the community's spiritual, social and economic aspirations.

Conclusion

By the time of their sixteenth-century twilight, indulgences had become a well-established and popular way of attending to one's afterlife and for shaping one's religious and penitential experience in this life. That it was a significant part of religious devotional practice in late medieval England has been established by Swanson and others, that it had become a mechanism for reinforcing or creating social cohesion and solidarity among groups characterized by difference and diversity of background or aims has been the thrust of this thesis. People used indulgences to shape their devotional worlds, it is true, and they also used them to shape their social and material worlds as well. Petitioners sought indulgences from bishops in an effort to reach new people to help them realize their goals—of material sufficiency, of release from captivity, of cohesion across lines of age, ability, or socioeconomic status, of enriched unity in local parish life. Institutions like hospitals used them to encourage material generosity and to tie themselves more firmly into the material and spiritual economies of their community. Parishes used them to achieve communal goals and to reinforce social and spiritual cohesion in their members. Bishops granted indulgences on behalf of the petitioners for similar reasons, and for additional penitential and spiritual purposes. Indulgences were aimed at meeting natural needs, to be sure, but bishops held firmly their supernatural purpose as well: the establishment of communion among persons on earth, as well as the instauration of communion between the living on earth and the saints in heaven.

In 1534, Parliament granted royal supremacy in religious affairs to Henry VIII, thereby severing the English bishops from the papacy, whose power and jurisdiction they shared in when granting indulgences. Episcopal indulgences persisted for a few more years before fading away altogether—the last remaining extant indulgence was granted in 1536 in Exeter—ultimately pressed into oblivion by a variety of policies that restricted the activities of professional pardoners working on behalf of institutions and individuals who were promoting their own personal indulgences. The Vagrancy Act went into effect in the winter of 1535, under which pardoners and individuals seeking assistance by means of an indulgence were to be treated as vagrants and illegal beggars. The veneration of indulgenced images and relics, which drew thousands to pilgrimage each year, were banned in the Royal Injunctions of 1538. The restrictions on the external practices of indulgences—granting, promotion, public veneration—meant that private devotional prayer was the last frontier to be controlled. The final blow to devotional indulgences came in 1547, with the ban on books that included indulgenced prayers. With this final act, all of the elements upon which indulgences had rested, depended, and thrived were eliminated.⁵⁸⁷

At the heart of the reforms was the dismantling of the old ideas about sin, penance, satisfaction, and justification, at first gradual under Henry VIII, and then at an unrelenting pace under Edward IV. Penance, penitential practices and charitable activities were no longer essential to salvation. The care of the poor and the infirm were no longer the reliable keys to the heavenly gates as they had been, for the lock of justification had been changed. In the new reformed regime, unshakeable faith in Jesus Christ as one's savior at the point of death was sufficient for justification and opening the

⁵⁸⁷ Swanson, *Passports to Paradise?*, 489-515.

gates, regardless of one's previous actions and history. Reformers decried as fraudulent the belief in purgatory and penance and declared vain any arguments for their necessity to obtain heaven.

The reforms that drove indulgences out of England ushered in a host of social changes. The abolishment of indulgences, which had acted as a mechanism of unification and solidarity of the local parish, also affected charity and its distribution. Much of the patchwork of institutions and individuals who previously cared for the poor was swept away in the destruction of the monasteries and other religious institutions, to be replaced gradually by the mandates of the Poor Laws, beginning in 1552. The crown, which had been previously rather uninvolved in the ransoming of captives, established Trinity House as the formal agency of fundraising for captives. Hospitals continued to use crown-sanctioned collecting campaigns and agents, but they were stripped of their ability to offer services of commemoration for dead benefactors, their confraternities and indulgences by which they had previously cultivated donors. Into all of these charitable activities, a rising and expanding government bureaucracy inserted itself. In the end, the passing of indulgences was but a small part of the broad, seismic changes that shook Europe in the Reformation period.

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