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The origin of chantries¹

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Abstract

The chantry was a phenomenon of the later middle ages whose origins have never been satisfactorily explained. It is argued here that what led to its emergence in the thirteenth century was the inability of the monastic orders, at a time of rising population and increasing awareness of the pains of Purgatory, to cope with the growing demand for intercessory masses. For the wealthy layman or cleric anxious to ensure his salvation, one solution was the endowment of monks or canons specifically to say masses for his soul in perpetuity, thus in effect privatising the work of intercession which was a basic function of the monastic life. Alternatively he could establish a chantry attached to a cathedral or parish church and served by a secular priest – another privatised form of commemoration which became a characteristic form of late medieval piety. © 2000 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Throughout Western Europe, the chantry and the chantry chapel represented a characteristic form of late medieval piety, to which large resources were committed, both spiritual and temporal. Today it is the physical welfare of the old that threatens to place a disproportionate burden on the active members of society: then it was the spiritual welfare of the dead to whose salvation a substantial part of the economy was committed, and the monastery and the chantry were the institutions in which a

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¹ This essay develops in greater detail, and with appropriate scholarly apparatus, a thesis previously outlined in the author's book, *Architecture and the After-Life* (New Haven and London, 1991). He is indebted to Professor Henry Mayr-Harting, F.B.A., and Miss Barbara Harvey, F.B.A., for their encouragement and help.

numerous priesthood was employed in systematic intercession for Christian souls in general and for those of their founders in particular.

This spiritual 'welfare state' had its vicissitudes. By the end of the thirteenth century restrictions on the acquisition of property for pious purposes had been imposed by rulers like the kings of France and England, and even by some municipal authorities such as those of Strasbourg.² In any case, the needs of a soul in eternity could never in practice be matched by the 'perpetuity' hopefully specified in deed or testament. Long before the Reformation, inflation and the shortcomings of trustees had led to the disappearance of many chantries and to the amalgamation of others. In Northern Europe the final crisis came in the sixteenth century, when the theological validity of masses and other pious works for the benefit of the dead was called into question, resulting in the dissolution of monasteries and chantries alike, and in the confiscation of their endowments by the state. The course of these events is well known and has been ably investigated by competent historians.³ What has been less well understood is the genesis of the chantry as a privatised means of intercession.

A chantry (to use the English term for what on the Continent would be called 'chapellenie', 'cappellaria' or Altarpfründe) was essentially an endowment for the performance of masses and other works of charity for the benefit of the souls of specified persons. It might be established in perpetuity, or only for a limited period, and it might imply anything from a single priest saying masses at some existing altar in a parish church to a collegiate foundation with a specially-built church and residential accommodation for a corporate body of priests.⁴ Thousands of such chantries were set up in Western Europe during the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, not only by kings and queens and other great persons lay and ecclesiastical, but also by the rural gentry and the urban bourgeoisie. Physically, the essentials of a chantry were an altar and often (but by no means always) an associated place of burial. The altar might be accommodated anywhere in a church or chapel, and neither it nor the tomb necessarily required any structural alteration to the fabric. Many chantries have consequently come and gone without leaving any physical trace of their existence, though there may be a written record in the will of the founder, in the archives of the church in question, or (in England) in the royal licences to alienate land for the endowment that were required by law under the Statute of Mortmain of 1279.⁵

If we look at these sources we find that all over Europe the founding of chantries began to be general from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. In

²For France and England, see Sandra Raban, *Mortmain Legislation and the English Church 1279–1500* (Cambridge, 1982), 20–3 and *passim*. For Strasbourg see F. Rapp, *Réforme et Réformation à Strasbourg: Eglise et Société dans le Diocèse de Strasbourg (1450–1525)* (Paris, 1974), 111.

³For the erosion of chantry endowments, see, e.g., Rapp, 269–72, and J. Chiffolleau, *Le Comptabilité de l'au-delà, les hommes, la mort et la religion dans la région d'Avignon à la fin du Moyen Age (1320–1450)*, Ecole française de Rome (Rome, 1980). For the dissolution of the English chantries see Alan Kreider, *English Chantries, The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

⁴For collegiate and semi-collegiate foundations for chantry priests, see A. Hamilton Thompson, *The English Clergy and their Organisation in the later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947), chap. 5.

⁵For the operation of this statute (and for legal expedients to evade it), see Sandra Raban, 29–129. The evidence afforded by the licences is usefully tabulated by Kreider, table 3.1.

England, to judge from the evidence of the licences granted from 1279 onwards, it reached a peak in the first half of the fourteenth century. Between 1300 and 1349 leave was given for 934 endowments of land to be made for the establishment of permanent chantries – those alone for which chapels might need to be built. During the fifty years after the Black Death (1349–1399) the total fell to 666.⁶ It is clear, therefore, that in England at least, the fashion for chantry foundations long preceded the Black Death. In fact it can be traced back to the early thirteenth century, when there is documentary evidence of the foundation of chantries in several English cathedral churches and at least one parish church.⁷ So when in 1287 Bishop Quinil of Exeter insisted on the need to obtain his permission before building ‘an altar with walls and a roof’ onto any church in his diocese, we may suppose that he had chantries in mind, and that some had already been built without his authority.⁸ In England the earliest chantry chapels that can be identified as such do in fact date from the second half of the thirteenth century.⁹ In French cathedrals such as Amiens and Paris, a few chantries were founded before 1200, but it was during the thirteenth century that the proliferation of chantry foundations led to the building of chapels which took the form of uniform additions to their naves or east ends, rather than, as in England, of individually designed chapels.¹⁰ In Italy, too, the earliest endowments for private masses date from the late thirteenth century, starting a fashion for the

⁶Kreider, 75. See also K.L. Wood-Legh, *Church Life under Edward III* (Cambridge, 1934), 124–5, for annual totals which tell the same story. In the diocese of Salisbury twice as many perpetual chantries are recorded to have been founded between 1300 and 1349 as between 1350 and 1399, A.D. Brown, *Popular Piety in late Medieval England. The Diocese of Salisbury 1250–1550* (Oxford 1995), 95.

⁷For examples of perpetual chantries founded in English cathedrals in the early years of the thirteenth century (in one or two cases just before 1200), see *Chartulary of the High Church of Chichester*, ed. W.D. Peckham, Sussex Record Soc., 45 (Lewes, 1946), 52, 109, 121; N. Orme, ‘The Medieval Chantries of Exeter Cathedral’, *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries*, 34–5 (1981–2); *Registrum Antiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln*, ed. K. Major, Lincoln Record Soc. (Lincoln), iv, 1937, no. 1135, x, 1973, no. 2938; *Early Charters of St. Paul’s*, ed. M. Gibbs, Camden Soc. (London 1939), nos. 140–1, 186, 213, 221, 240, 282, 295, 299–300; *Historians of the Church of York*, ed. J. Raine (Rolls Series, London, 1894), iii, 138–41. A parochial chantry was founded in Ettington Church, Warwickshire, by Henry son of Sewallis, who was alive in the reign of King John and is said to have died in 1220. His endowment was ad sustinendum unum capellanum qui pro anima mea & uxoris mee & puerorum meorum ... Missam celebrabit ad altare beati Nicholai quod construxi propriis sumptibus in ecclesia de Etindon, viz. quolibet die pro defunctis cum Dirige et Placebo et officiis ad obsequia pertinentibus defunctorum, and as each chaplain died another was to be appointed in his place by Henry or his heirs. The original charter in the Shirley family archives was published by E.P. Shirley, *Stemmata Shirleiana* (Westminster, 1873), 355–6, and there is a copy in the cartulary of Kenilworth Priory, to which the church belonged (transcript in Bodleian Library, MS. Dugdale 12, 299).

⁸*Councils and Synods with other Documents relating to the English Church 1205–1313*, ed. F.M. Powicke & C.R. Cheney, II(2) (Oxford, 1964), 1003.

⁹In England the Giffard Chapel at Boyton, Wiltshire, and the chapel at Bitton Church, Gloucestershire, founded by Thomas Bitton, Bishop of Exeter, in 1299, are well-known examples. The north chapel at Curry Rivel, Somerset, though reconstructed later in the middle ages, is another.

¹⁰For Notre Dame, Paris (where the nave chapels were added from 1235 onwards, those round the east end between 1296 and c. 1315), see H. Kraus, ‘New Documents for Notre-Dame’s Early Chapels’, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th. ser. 74 (1969), 121–34; for Amiens, H. Kraus, *Gold was the Mortar* (London, 1979), 40. See also L. Bériou, ‘Les chapellenies dans la province ecclésiastique de Reims au xiv^e siècle’, *Revue d’histoire de l’église de France*, 57 (1971), 231. For contemporary inscriptions recording the establishment of chantry chapels in southern France in the thirteenth century, see *Corpus des Inscriptions de la France médiévale*, ed. R. Favreau et al., 11 (1986), 84 (Ille-sur-Têt, 1289), 12 (1988), 13 (Carcassonne, 1266).

building of family chapels that was to reach its height in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹¹

Why did the chantry become fashionable in the thirteenth century? This is a question to which no satisfactory answer will be found in the existing histories of the medieval Church, where its popularity in the later middle ages tends to be taken for granted, without any serious attempt to account for it. Dom David Knowles, the historian of English monasticism, suggested that by the thirteenth century 'both the monasteries and the parish churches were, on the whole, adequately provided for, and this naturally led to a search for new expressions of piety'. More interestingly, he also suggested that those who founded chantry chapels were satisfying the desire for a private church of their own that had once been met by the proprietary church of the earlier middle ages.¹² In her excellent book on the chantry as a working institution, Kathleen Wood-Legh points out that it was more adaptable to the means of founders of widely differing status and wealth: whereas only kings or barons had the resources to found monasteries, lesser men and women could establish a chantry, or, indeed, club together to found one under the auspices of a guild of which they were members.¹³ But as many chantries were founded by very wealthy people as well as by those of more modest means, this cannot be the whole explanation.

By the thirteenth century pious giving among most ranks of society was undoubtedly finding new objects. The friars (a new expression of asceticism calculated to appeal particularly to townspeople) were the chief beneficiaries, and in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many parish and cathedral churches were to be rebuilt or embellished with the aid of indulgences or the support of confraternities.¹⁴ But in the past what had inspired so many men and women to help to endow monasteries was not so much disinterested piety as the need to ensure the salvation of their souls. Every monastic cartulary contains the texts of hundreds of charters giving this or that estate or church or rent *pro salute anime mee* – 'for the salvation of my soul'. Men and women do not alienate their property during their lifetimes or deprive their heirs of it without good reason. The fact is that although to a Christian death is the gateway to eternal life, for most medieval Christians the distant prospect of Heaven was clouded by apprehension. How would the balance tip between good and evil when they came to render their account at the Day of Judgement? Who would claim their souls – an angel or a devil (alternatives vividly illustrated by wall-paintings in many contemporary churches)? An adverse balance – so the Church assured the faithful – could be rectified by the prayers of those still on earth and by good works

¹¹Samuel K. Cohn, *Death and Property in Siena, 1205–1800* (Baltimore, 1980); Julian Gardner, *The Tomb and the Tiara* (Oxford, 1992), 38–9; Mary Hollingsworth, *Patronage in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1994), 37–9.

¹²As reported by K.L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries in Britain* (Cambridge, 1965), 5, and by Kathleen Edwards, *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1949), 293.

¹³Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries*, 5.

¹⁴Rose Graham, 'An appeal about 1175 for the building fund of St. Paul's Cathedral', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd. ser. X (1845–7), 73–6; C.R. Cheney, 'Church-building in the Middle Ages', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 34 (1951–2), 20–36; J.L. Biget and M.H. Vicaire on the financing of cathedral and other church building enterprises in the south of France in *La naissance et l'essor du gothique méridional au xiii^e siècle*, in: *Cahiers de Fanjeaux*, 9 (1974), 127–60 and 209–48.

carried out posthumously in the name of the deceased. Hence the great apparatus of intercession which grew up to ensure the salvation of countless sinful men and women. Of that apparatus the monks were the first agents. Every monastery had its founder. Some were founded by saints who needed no earthly advocacy; but most were founded by some great feudatory whose burial, normally near the high altar, was the signal for an elaborate sequence of vigils, masses (celebrated by those who were in priest's orders), recitation of psalms or paternosters (by those who were not), and the distribution of food to the poor – a work of charity which itself engendered more prayers for the dead from the grateful recipients. Every year, on the anniversary of his death, some or all of the funerary ritual would be re-enacted. In this way the founder of a monastery set in motion an annual cycle of intercession which in theory would cease only on the Day of Judgement. Every monk of the house was entitled to some similar (but less elaborate) commemoration, and laity might obtain participation in the prayers of the community by an appropriate benefaction. Some of them might even be admitted to membership of it on their deathbeds and so qualify for commemoration as if they were monks.¹⁵ At the great abbey of Cluny, whose repute as a centre of intercessory prayer extended throughout Europe, the anniversary services were carefully graded. In the eleventh century the highest, or *magnum anniversarium*, was accorded only to abbots of Cluny itself and to a very select list consisting of the Emperors Henry II and Henry III, the Empresses Adelaide and Agnes, and King Ferdinand of Leon, all of whom had been considerable benefactors to the monastery.¹⁶ At the English Benedictine abbey of Reading, which was founded originally with monks from Cluny, and retained close links with its parent house,¹⁷ this intercessory tariff was reflected in the twelfth century by promises to commemorate a substantial benefactor 'like a brother', a greater one 'like a special brother', a bishop 'as for an abbot'.¹⁸

In every abbey the names of all deceased abbots, monks and *confratres*, both lay and ecclesiastical, were inscribed in a *Liber Vitae*, or 'Book of Life', which lay on the high altar as a symbol of their participation in the *opus dei*. A famous example, begun in the ninth century, is the *Liber Vitae* of Durham, which contains the names of some 3,150 men and women who were remembered in this way, first at Lindisfarne and subsequently in the cathedral church at Durham.¹⁹ On the anniversaries of their deaths, many of the same persons would be commemorated in the daily chapter by the reading out of their names from a calendar known as a 'martyrology' or obituary book, followed by the singing of masses for their souls and the distribution

¹⁵D.H. Williams, 'Layfolk within Cistercian Precincts', *Monastic Studies*, II, ed. Judith Loades (Bangor, 1991), 87–116; David Postles, 'Monastic Burials of Non-Patronal Lay Benefactors', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 47 (1996), 620–37. See also C.R. Cheney, 'A monastic letter of confraternity to Eleanor of Aquitaine', *English Historical Review*, 51 (1936), 488–93.

¹⁶C.J. Bishko, 'Liturgical Intercession at Cluny for the King-Emperors of Leon', *Studia Monastica*, 3 (1961), 53–76.

¹⁷D. Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge, 1949), 281–2.

¹⁸*Reading Abbey Cartularies*, ed. B.R. Kemp (Camden Soc., 4th. ser., 31, 33, 1986–7), i, nos. 323, 531, 533; ii, no. 1079.

¹⁹Published in facsimile by the Surtees Society (vol. 136, 1923). For obituaries in general see N. Huyghebaert, *Les Documents Necrologiques* (Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age occidental, Fasc. 4, Turnhout, 1972).

of food to the poor in their memory. As the years went by, the number of anniversaries naturally multiplied, but it was enormously increased by agreements between monastic communities for mutual commemoration, and one of the attractions of such great confederations as that of Cluny was precisely the interchange of names for intercessory purposes.²⁰ The result was that by the end of the twelfth century some of the obituary books contained many thousands of names. That of the Cluniac priory of St Martin des Champs at Paris, for instance, contained 20,000 names, ranging from kings and bishops to ordinary monks and laity. It has been estimated that there must have been some 45,000 names in the lost obituary of Cluny itself.²¹ Not only did this mean an annually increasing burden of commemoration on virtually every day of the year (the major feasts only excepted), it entailed giving away a prodigious quantity of food. At Cluny, where in the middle of the twelfth century at least fifty persons were commemorated daily, the number of meals distributed every year exceeded 17,000: in its role as a guardian of men's souls Cluny had also assumed that of a major distributor of charity in its most basic form.²² It was a function that not even Cluny could maintain indefinitely: as its great abbot, Peter the Venerable, put it, 'the dead threaten to drive out the living'.²³ As a result Cluny was obliged not only to abandon the attempt to commemorate every monk and benefactor individually, but also to cut down its distribution of food to the poor.²⁴ Other monastic communities followed suit: at a meeting held at Reims some time in the twelfth century and attended by over eighteen abbots of French Benedictine houses, it was agreed that the commemoration of deceased brethren should henceforth be limited to four occasions a year, that priest monks should say three masses a year for the dead when they chose, that lay monks should recite the psalter, and lay brothers repeat 150 Paternosters.²⁵ The Cistercians, anxious as ever to avoid the mistakes of their Cluniac brethren, were always more restricted in the spiritual services that they provided for the dead, but even for them the burden of intercession eventually proved too heavy. In 1225 the general chapter of the order decreed that in future anniversary commemorations should 'not be as easily granted as hitherto' and that such as were conceded should entitle the beneficiary only to a single private mass once a year in every abbey of the order.²⁶ Despite further restrictive measures in 1250, by 1272 the order was considered to be so burdened by the number of anniversaries granted that the general chapter decided that they should all be concentrated into twelve general commemorations, one every month in each abbey of the order.²⁷

²⁰For further details see Bishko, 'Liturgical Intercession', and H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'Unions and Confraternity with Cluny', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 16 (1965), 152–62.

²¹J. Wollasch, 'Les obituaires, témoins de la vie clunisienne', *Cahiers de la Civilisation Médiévale*, 22 (1979), 152–55.

²²Wollasch, 161.

²³'ne processu temporis crescentes in immensum defuncti vivos expellerent', *Recueil des Chartes de l'abbaye de Cluny*, ed. A. Bernard & L.A. Bruel (Paris, 1876–1903), v, 479.

²⁴Wollasch, 161.

²⁵U. Berlière, 'Les chapitres généraux de l'ordre de S. Benoit avant le IV^e Concile de Latran', *Revue Benedictine*, 8 (1891), 260. The date of the meeting is uncertain.

²⁶*Statuta Capitulum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis*, ed. J.M. Canivez, 2 (Louvain, 1934), 36.

²⁷*Statuta Capitulum*, 2, 351, 376; 3 (Louvain, 1935), 115.

The growing demand for anniversaries that the monks could not satisfy must have been due in some measure to the very considerable increase in population which Europe experienced in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: in England, where the Domesday Book suggests a population of perhaps two million in 1086, it may have risen to as much as six million by the end of the thirteenth century.²⁸ But the recognition by the Cistercians of their inability to keep pace with the demand for anniversaries coincided with a major theological development: the declaration in 1274 by a Church Council that Purgatory had a place in Christian doctrine. The notion of a probationary or purgatorial state, in which souls were suspended midway between Heaven and Hell, can be traced almost to the beginnings of Christian thought, but it was not until the thirteenth century that its implications were fully investigated by theologians, and it was only in 1274 that the existence of a purgatorial state was formally recognised by the Church.²⁹ Just how sins were expiated in Purgatory was a matter to which some of the best intellects of the thirteenth century devoted themselves. Their ingenious reasonings about such matters as the nature of purgatorial fire (which inflicted pain without consuming) need not concern us here, but as the Church explored the spiritual geography of this imagined realm which its theologians had created, so it tended to assume a role in its management by drawing up a purgatorial tariff against which every sin could be measured. The confessional was of course the mechanism through which the Church exercised this role, and from 1215 onwards annual confession was imposed on every Christian as a duty.³⁰ After many centuries of uncertainty, everyone now knew where he stood in relation to the after-life: his sins were expiable by the routine of prayer offered by others on his behalf, and by the vicarious practice of good works set in motion by his will. To that extent the formalisation of Purgatory offered a reasonable hope of salvation to all. But on the other hand the layman was now well and truly caught in the toils of a triumphant Church. At every confession he saw his purgatorial indebtedness mounting, and the best remedy (if he had the means at his disposal) was to employ a priest to reduce it by saying masses after his death. The prayers of one's friends and relations could help, but a priest was a more efficacious agent of salvation because only a priest could say mass, and in terms of purgatorial accountancy masses were worth more than mere prayers.

For those who could afford it the endowment of personal masses was therefore a better way of ensuring salvation than the overburdened system of monastic commemoration. By the twelfth century gifts and endowments for anniversary commemoration

²⁸For these figures, see John Hatcher, *Plague, population and the English Economy 1348–1530* (Economic History Society, London, 1977), 68; *Before the Black Death*, ed. Bruce M.S. Campbell (Manchester, 1989), 49.

²⁹J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (London, 1984); R.W. Southern, 'Between Heaven and Hell', *Times Literary Supplement*, 18 June 1982. The Councils of Florence (1439) and Trent (1562) were to give Purgatory the status of a dogma (*Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, ed. A. Vacant et al., 13 (Paris, 1936), 1251–82).

³⁰A. Hamilton Thompson, 'Doctrine to the Lateran Council of 1215', *Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1929), 690–1.

ation had become general,³¹ and in the thirteenth their application to secure the performance of regular masses was a natural development. As early as 918 King Charles the Simple of France had established a body of canons who were to pray night and day for him and his family in a chapel in the royal palace at Compiègne,³² and in 1100 King Alfonso of Leon and Castile (d. 1109) provided in his will for two similar establishments at Burgos.³³ Moreover, at Cluny, where Alfonso had been an outstanding benefactor, contributing largely to the construction of the great new church from about 1088 onwards, one of the principal altars was reserved for masses to be said for his salvation for one year after his death, and thereafter on its anniversaries.³⁴ In 1093, in return for confirming his grandfather's foundation of an Augustinian monastery, a Limousin baron specified that the canons should celebrate once a week for himself and his wife during their lifetime, and that after his death, besides an annual general anniversary for his family on 28 February, there should be a 'perpetual celebration of mass' (*fiet perenniter missae celebratio*) once a week as before.³⁵

In Norman England such specific undertakings were rare. When a monastery was founded by an Anglo-Norman lord it was understood by both parties that the monks would pray for his soul and for the souls of his lineal descendants, but the spiritual services to be performed were rarely if ever set out in the charter. The assumption was that the whole community would engage in prayer on his behalf and that he would be the principal beneficiary of the masses and other services celebrated for the dead.³⁶ But for a subsequent benefactor it might be necessary to define his participation in the benefits of the house rather more precisely. When, some time in the reign of Henry I (1100–1135), a Norfolk baron called Alan fitz Flahard gave a manor to Norwich Cathedral Priory, he did so on condition that he and his wife were received into the confraternity of the house and that one monk should always serve God specifically on their behalf.³⁷ Some sixty years later, Richard Peche, Bishop of Coventry, gave a wood to the Cistercian monks of Bordesley in Worcestershire, stipulating not only that he should (in effect) be received into the confraternity of their order, but also that two monks of the house should be bound to pray for him

³¹For the origins of 'la mémoire individuelle' and donations in the expectation of anniversary commemoration, see D. Iogna-Prat, 'Les morts dans la comptabilité céleste des Clunisiens de l'an Mil', in *Religion et Culture autour de l'an Mil*, ed. O. Iogna-Prat and J.C. Picard (Paris, 1990), 64–67.

³²*Recueil des Actes de Charles III le Simple*, ed. P. Lauer (Paris, 1940), 219.

³³L. Serrano, *El Obispado de Burgos y Castilla Primitiva*, vol. 3 (Madrid, 1936), 110–112.

³⁴Bishko, 'Liturgical Intercession'; S. Baluze, *Miscellanea*, vi (Paris, 1713), 476–7, gives the text of the *concessio beneficiorum* by Abbot Hugh of Cluny in about 1060.

³⁵*Gallia Christiana*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1873), Instrumenta, cols. 197–8. Mention should also be made of Edwin the Thegn, who, shortly before 1066, made a bequest to Bury St Edmunds Abbey, in return for which he expected masses to be said for the souls of himself and his brother, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. D. Whitelock (Cambridge, 1930), 89.

³⁶Janet Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain 1000–1300* (Cambridge, 1994), 216–7.

³⁷*Charters of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, II, ed. B. Dodwell, Pipe Roll Society, N.S. (London, 1978–80), no. 364. A charter of Roger, Earl of Warwick (1125–1153), giving two churches to Kenilworth Priory, founded in 1125 by Henry I's chamberlain Geoffrey de Clinton, stipulates that in return 'I ought always to have one canon in that house' (Et ego pro hac mea concessione in ipsa ecclesia semper debeo unum Canonicum habere) (Bodleian Library, MS. Dugdale 12, 286). As neither prayers nor masses are mentioned, this may have been merely the right to nominate a canon, but in any case the canon's duty at least to pray for his patron may be assumed.

and his successors in perpetuity.³⁸ Early in the thirteenth century the Augustinian canons of Blackmore in Essex acknowledged a benefaction by Gilbert Basset, the lord of Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, by allowing him and his heirs to nominate a member of the community who was to be known as 'the Basset canon' and who was to celebrate in perpetuity for the soul of his nephew Alan de Sandford.³⁹ At Egglestone Abbey in Yorkshire there were four 'bishop's canons' (still known as such in the early fourteenth century) instituted by Bishop Philip of Durham (1197–1208), and at Sawley Abbey in the same county six monks prayed 'in perpetuity' for the souls of William de Percy (d. 1245) and his wife and family.⁴⁰ Many other examples could be given of monks or canons sponsored in this way by benefactors for whose souls they were bound to pray or to celebrate daily, sometimes at a specified altar.⁴¹ There are even cases of individual cells in Carthusian monasteries being built or endowed by benefactors for whose souls the monk in occupation would celebrate.⁴² The purpose of such a foundation was essentially the same as that of a chantry. The difference was that the chaplains were not secular priests but established members of religious orders celebrating in their own monastic churches. For the monk or canon there was the promise of maintenance within his own community, for the benefactor the assurance of intercession in a way that the old system of obits and anniversaries could no longer guarantee.

So, for those who could afford it, the monks and canons continued to provide an acceptable form of intercession. But for the great majority the chantry served by a single secular priest offered a financially more manageable alternative. From the thirteenth century onwards many chantries were founded in cathedral churches,⁴³ which were furnished with numerous altars at which arrangements could be made for masses to be sung either by vicars choral or by other suitably qualified priests.⁴⁴ By the end of the thirteenth century the parochial system was sufficiently well established in most parts of Western Europe for every man or woman to belong to a

³⁸*English Episcopal Acta*, vol. 16: *Coventry & Lichfield 1160–1182*, ed. M.J. Franklin (Oxford, 1998), 5–6, no. 6.

³⁹*Basset Charters*, ed. W.T. Reedy (Pipe Roll Society, London, 1995), no. 248.

⁴⁰*Registrum Palatinum Dunelmense* (Rolls Series, vol. 62, London, 1874), ii, 1158–1160; *Sallay Cartulary*, ed. J. McNulty (Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record series, vol. 87, Leeds, 1993), i, no. 33.

⁴¹Notably *Lanercost Cartulary*, ed. J.M. Todd (Surtees Soc., 203, Gateshead, 1997), no. 33, of 1167/82; T. Madox, *Formulare Anglicanum* (London, 1702), no. cccclxliii (Canwell Priory, temp. Henry III); British Library, Campbell Charter VIII, 22 and P.R.O., Ancient Deed L. 168 (Beeleigh Abbey, 1253); *Sir Christopher Hatton's Book of Seals*, ed. L.C. Loyd & D.M. Stenton (Oxford, 1950), no. 499 (Combe Abbey, 1133/5). For the extraordinary arrangement whereby, in 1293, a detachment of seven monks was sent from Meaux Abbey to a Yorkshire manor-house to serve a perpetual chantry there, see *Chronicon de Melsa*, ed. E.A. Bond (Rolls Series, vol. 43, London, 1867), ii, 192–205, 294–6.

⁴²T. Madox, *Formulare Anglicanum*, no. ccccli; K.L. Wood-Legh, *Perpetual Chantries*, 132–3. For French examples, see Bodleian Library, MS. Gaignières 5, f. 79 bis.

⁴³Above, p. 165.

⁴⁴See, e.g. L. Blondel, 'Autels, Chapelles et Cloître de St. Pierre, Ancien Cathedral de Genève,' *Genava*, 24 (1946); P.B.G. Binnall, 'Notes on the Medieval Altars and Chapels in Lincoln Cathedral', *Antiquaries' Journal*, 42 (1962), 68–80; Eric Gee, 'The Topography of Altars, Chantries and Shrines in York Minster', *Antiquaries' Journal*, 64 (1984), 337–50. In the fourteenth century there were as many as 73 perpetual chantries in St Paul's Cathedral, London, K. Edwards, *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages* (Manchester, 1949), 294.

church in whose cemetery he or she would normally expect to be buried, and in which it was therefore natural to institute an intercessory mass. For many this could only be a temporary alleviation of the purgatorial ordeal, but for the rich there was the possibility of a 'perpetual' chantry with its own priest, occupying a chapel or aisle newly built at the founder's expense, or freestanding in the churchyard.⁴⁵ The friars, especially in the Italian cities, offered a further alternative to the older monastic orders as the recipients of a beneficence that was always closely linked with the reciprocal obligation of intercession.

In origin the chantry can therefore be seen as the answer to what was essentially a monastic problem: how to continue effectively to intercede for an army of the dead whose ranks were already growing uncontrollably even before the official recognition of Purgatory had drawn fresh attention to their predicament. It was a privatised means of salvation devised to cope with an increasing demand for intercession with which the established monastic corporations could not cope. Moreover, as Knowles suggested, the chantry may well have satisfied, in a way acceptable to the Church, the deep-rooted desire for a religious establishment under private control which, in its grosser forms, had been stamped out by the reforms of the twelfth century. Its flexibility in terms both of endowment and of duration enabled it – unlike the monastic foundation – to be adapted to the means of all ranks of society, so that what had begun largely as a form of seigneurial piety came in time to be adopted by the new squirearchy of the later middle ages and by self-made men like wool-merchants, who could identify with a parish church in a way that they perhaps could not with an old-established monastery of royal or baronial foundation. In Tudor England even bishops and abbots chose occasionally to found chantries in parish churches with which they had personal associations, though they might still be buried in the great cathedral or conventual churches over which they had once presided.⁴⁶

In England the history of the chantry was brought abruptly to an end in the middle of the sixteenth century. The endowments were confiscated by the state and the chantry chapels attached to monastic churches were mostly demolished with their parent structures. But those that were attached to parish churches often continued to fulfil a long-standing function as the burial places of the gentry. Chantry chapel became family chapel: the priest disappeared, and with him the altar, which sometimes gave way to a manorial pew, more often to a grandiose Elizabethan or Jacobean monument. In Catholic countries – above all in Italy – the *cappellania* or *chapellenie* had another two centuries of life before changing attitudes to death and the after-

⁴⁵Chantry chapels standing detached in churchyards were once quite common, but in England were mostly demolished at the Reformation and on the Continent when urban churchyards were paved over following their closure by Enlightened legislation at the end of the eighteenth century. In England a few survived by being converted into schools, as at Bray, Berkshire, and Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire. On the Continent surviving examples can be seen at Joigny, near Auxerre in France, and at Ulm in Germany. For early documented English churchyard chantry chapels, see *The Kalendar of Abbot Samson of Bury St. Edmunds*, ed. R.H.C. Davis (Camden Society, 3rd. series, 84, London, 1954), 91–2 (dated 1205), and *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, New Series, 21, 1937, 268–9 (dated 1293).

⁴⁶The chapels of John Morton, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1500), at Bere Regis, Dorset, of William Rokeby, Archbishop of Dublin (d. 1521), at Kirk Sandal, Yorkshire, and of Nicholas West, Bishop of Ely (d. 1533) at Putney, Surrey, are notable examples.

life at last freed Enlightened man from the terrors of Purgatory and from what now began to be seen as the spiritual tyranny of priests. The buildings, however, remain as a witness, not merely to the resourcefulness of succeeding generations of architects in handling the subordinate chapel, but also to the longevity of an institution whose origins in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it has been the endeavour of this essay to trace.