

Summary

THE LOWER CLERGY IN MORAVIA DURING THE 18th CENTURY – BETWEEN AN ESTATE AND A PROFESSION

Careers, Social Status and Property Status Among Clerics in the Olomouc Diocese, 1741–1783

This work is rooted in the fact that the clergy represented an integral and indispensable part of Early Modern society; despite the relatively low numbers of clerics, they played an important role in the life of society – and not only in its religious aspects. Drawing on the findings of studies by Western European historians, who emphasize the role of the clergy in the processes of modernization that unfolded during the Early Modern era – and in view of the gaps in Czech research of these issues – the main focus of this work is on the analysis of key aspects connected with the issue of the clergy as a distinct social group. Instead of the traditional approach taken by ecclesiastical historians – which focuses primarily on the role of clerics in the ecclesiastical administration – this work accentuates the social-historical perspective; the main issues investigated here are the careers, social status and property status of clerics who were active in the Olomouc diocese from the 1740s to the 1780s. Within this context, the work explores the concept of clerical professionalization – an area that has not yet been adequately discussed by Czech researchers. Taking this concept into consideration, a question arises that is framed in the title of the work: During the period under investigation, to what extent did the Moravian clergy display typical features of an estate, and to what extent did it display the features of a profession?

With regard to the first part of the question, the most important element in the contemporary conception of the clergy as an estate in its own right was the delineation of the clergy as a separate entity from lay society – in theological, legal, administrative, and ultimately also social terms. Clerics were distinct from laypeople not only in their external

appearance (clerical clothing, tonsures), but also – and indeed primarily – in their ordination, legal status, specific education, lifestyle (celibacy), and in practicing the care of souls – which constituted a *de facto* profession. The clergy thus formed a separate social group within Early Modern society, a group with its own collective identity. This group was defined not only by its formal features (as an estate), but also by its function (professional features). It is already evident from this characterization that although the clergy still retained the features of an estate during the 18th century, it also displayed certain features of a profession.

This combination of the traditional aspects of the clergy (as an estate) and the aspects related to the process of modernization (as the clergy took on features of a profession) was concretized by the findings of an analysis of clerical careers. This analysis traced career paths not only within the usual ecclesiastical context – i.e. from the perspective of the Church authorities – but also with a view to the role played by the holders of patronage rights in clerics' professional careers; this reflects the fact that it was patrons who *de facto* decided who would be appointed to hold parish benefices. The analysis of this aspect of clerical careers was made possible by a uniquely well-preserved sample of source materials, comprising records of 136 clerics kept during the 1760s at seven North Moravian and Silesian estates belonging to the Prince of Liechtenstein. This research provided an important correction to previous ideas of clerical professionalization; it demonstrated that the traditional institution of patronage cannot be viewed *a priori* as an impediment to the process of professionalization – indeed, in the case of the Liechtenstein estates, it in fact played quite the opposite role.

As the patron, the Prince of Liechtenstein – assisted by his officials – was able to exert effective pressure on the clergy to improve their professional competencies. This pressure was further strengthened by the competition among clerics – which was particularly intense because the Liechtenstein estates represented an attractive working environment for clerics. If they wanted to achieve professional success and be awarded a benefice, they had to spend many years as auxiliary clerics demonstrating and improving their professional qualities in the care of souls within the Prince's estates; in this way clerics accumulated merits (*Meriten, Verdienste*), which from the patron's point of view were the main motive for clerics' career advancement. A successful clerical career thus depended not only on meeting the required professional criteria, but also on having demonstrated their aptitude and gaining merits while working

on the Liechtenstein estates. A characteristic feature of clerical careers in such a setting was the long-term connection with the patron (i.e. with his estates). This connection was manifested in several ways: (1) Most of the clerics working on the estates under investigation had their origins in the Liechtenstein estates (and indeed specifically in the investigated estates), so they were the sons of the Prince's subjects or employees. (2) The most frequent grantor of the *titulus mensae* to the analyzed clerics was the Prince of Liechtenstein. (3) Most of the clerics working on the estates investigated in this work had spent their entire previous professional careers within the Liechtensteins' estates. This was the case of almost all the clerics born within the Liechtenstein estates and those who had received the *titulus mensae* from the Prince of Liechtenstein.

As clerical careers were dependent on the patron, clerics were effectively clients of their patrons. This fact did not impede the shift towards professionalization; in fact, it was inextricably linked with the patron's strict insistence on clerical professionalism. The demands placed on clerics by the patron also corresponded with the criteria imposed by the Church after the Council of Trent. Like the Church, the patron (the Prince of Liechtenstein) emphasized the need for clerics to lead exemplary lives and to perform their clerical duties effectively, i.e. in a professional manner. A further indication of the process of professionalization is the fact that the Prince of Liechtenstein and his officials stipulated certain criteria for the career advancement of clerics; these criteria were based on the assessment of the cleric's previous life and work in the care of souls. In this way the patron contributed to the standardization of clerical career progression.

The findings of the investigation into the situation on the Liechtenstein estates thus enable us to speak about a specific variant of the professionalization process – a variant linked with the institution of patronage. The combination of a cleric's traditional nexus of connections (in legal, social and economic contexts) with the trend towards professionalization confirms that in the time and place under investigation, the formation of a modern profession was not yet a completed process; rather it was "an Early Modern 'path toward a profession'" (Luise Schorn-Schütte). It is evident that the post-Trent Church was not the only driving force behind the professionalization of the clergy; the holders of patronage rights (or at least some of them) also played an important role in fostering this change. The phrase "some of them" needs to be emphasized, because although similar practices to those on the Liechtenstein estates have also

been found at the Schwarzenberg estates in South Bohemia, it is possible that this effective means of controlling the clergy – based on the notion of professionalism in the performance of clerical duties – did not function universally. For this reason, it was necessary to complement the findings from the Liechtenstein estates (assessing the influence of the patronage system on clerical careers) with an analysis of clerical careers encompassing a broader scope. This analysis traced the careers of one hundred clerics working at locations throughout the Olomouc diocese, taking into consideration the period from the first half of the 1740s to the beginning of the 1780s.

In the diocese as a whole, the connection between clerics and a specific patron was less strong than it was on the Liechtenstein estates. A majority (59%) of the one hundred analyzed clerics occupied positions under the control of at least two different patrons during the course of their lives. In comparison with the Liechtenstein estates, the diocese as a whole also had fewer clerics who had occupied a position in at least one parish that was subject to the patronage of the local lord of their place of origin (one-third of the sample of clerics from the diocese) or the grantor of the *titulus mensae* (less than one-fifth). With regard to clerics' relationship with their patrons, there was no single universally valid model of clerical careers. Rather there were several variants, ranging from permanent and comprehensive links to a single patron (links which accompanied the cleric throughout their professional life) to cases of clerics whose careers did not include any single relatively long-term (i.e. repeated) association with a particular patron.

Nevertheless, this variability did not change the fundamental dependency of the cleric on the holder of patronage rights (whether there was just one holder or several patrons during the cleric's career). This dependency had a major impact on the cleric's social status. In practice it was the patron who decided whether a cleric would be the recipient of a benefice – which provided permanently for the cleric's material needs and guaranteed a certain social status. As the recipient of a benefice, the cleric was in the position of the patron's client – i.e. a similar position to that which he had previously occupied with regard to the grantor of the *titulus mensae*. The social inequality embedded in this relationship is clearly demonstrated in the requests for the *titulus mensae* addressed to the Prince of Liechtenstein during the period under investigation. The writers of these requests (future clerics) were predominantly individuals born on the Liechtenstein estates – both subjects and the sons

of the Prince's officials or employees. If the applicant's request for the *titulus mensae* was successful, and the applicant was thus ordained and began working in one of the Liechtenstein estates (which was the frequent practice), their dependent, clientelist relationship with the lord (patron) meant that their position in the estate's social hierarchy was analogous to the position of a member of the Prince's staff. However, clerics' individual social status varied; it depended whether the patron had granted them a benefice or not. In an ideal situation, their social status could approach that of an estate official, and in worse cases it could be close to the status of the estate's auxiliary administrative staff.

The desire to receive a parish benefice can be viewed as the primary motivation for professional mobility among clerics within the hierarchy of positions in the ecclesiastical administration. By comparing an individual's first position (in the large majority of cases, a cooperator) with his situation at the time of his death, it was possible to trace trends in the development of clerical career paths. In less than one-tenth of cases, individuals underwent a process of career regression (the loss of a clerical position, so they lived out the rest of their lives as unemployed clerics). One-quarter of clerics experienced career stagnation, and two-thirds of clerics achieved career progression, ending their career in a position at least one level above their starting position. Nevertheless, only half of the investigated sample of one hundred clerics achieved substantial career progression; 51 of them achieved the position of independent beneficiaries (parish priests, or at least permanent administrators or local chaplains). The even distribution of beneficiaries and auxiliary clerics (i.e. non-beneficiaries) in the analyzed sample corresponds with the professional structure of the entire clergy in the Olomouc diocese. The diocesan clergy was divided into two basic groups: auxiliary clerics (who were dependent on their superiors, i.e. parish priests, and who lived on low incomes and attempted to gain the favour of a particular patron in an attempt to obtain their own parish) and independent beneficiaries (holders of benefices, which provided for their material needs on a stable basis). A comparison of the careers of these groups showed that the professional careers of the independent beneficiaries were more dependent on a particular patron than was the case with clerics who spent their entire lives in auxiliary positions, as non-beneficiaries. It can therefore be stated that a higher degree of dependency on a particular patron increased a cleric's chances of career success (i.e. the receipt of a benefice), though even clerics who held several different positions that

were subject to the patronage of various different persons or institutions still had a chance of becoming independent beneficiaries.

The analysis of the careers of one hundred clerics from the Olomouc diocese also helped to identify other elements in the trend towards professionalization. It was found that the clerics under investigation (with just occasional exceptions) spent almost their entire clerical careers working in the ecclesiastical administration. Based on this finding, it can be stated that the constitutive features of the lower clergy during the investigated period no longer included solely the external, formal criteria defining the clergy as an estate; they also encompassed the actual performance of clerical duties – indicating that the clergy displayed attributes of a professional “performance elite” (*Leistungselite*). On the other hand, it should be added that besides these functional features (clerics’ role in performing professional duties), certain features also survived that were more typical of the traditional, formal conception of the clergy as an estate. These traditional features included the fact that although cooperators, if illness made them unable to carry out their clerical duties, generally left their posts, parish priests did not leave their posts in such circumstances; despite their inability to perform their duties, they held onto their positions and remained beneficiaries until their death. In other words, although parish benefices were primarily intended to provide an income for priests who were actively performing their duties in the parish, the lack of functioning pension provision meant that benefices effectively acted as a substitute pension system for elderly parish priests.

While just two-fifths of the investigated clerics spent their entire professional lives in parishes under the control of just one patron, for the entire sample (one hundred clerics) it was the Olomouc diocese that provided a basic professional framework; it was in the diocese that they were born, and it was there that they spent their careers. Nevertheless, in view of the large area covered by the diocese, it is unsurprising that clerics’ geographical mobility – alternating between various different positions in different locations – was usually contained within smaller orbits than the diocese as a whole, most frequently on the regional or sometimes even the local level. This geographical mobility was influenced by a number of factors. Besides the already-mentioned links to a particular patron (his estates), these factors also included clerics’ language skills; clerics who could speak only one of Moravia’s two main languages (German and Czech) could only operate professionally in an

area where that language was spoken by their parishioners. A role was also played by clerics' ties to their birthplace or native region – i.e. an environment with which they were familiar, suffered from no language barriers, and could draw on an existing social network, including family ties. The existence of family played an important role especially for younger clerics who had not yet received a benefice; if they lost their clerical position, their original family was often able to assist them. By the same token, an independent beneficiary was also able to use their benefice to offer material assistance to members of their own family. In this connection the importance of acquiring a benefice again comes to the fore as a key milestone in a clerical career – an acquisition which had a fundamental impact on the cleric's social status (including his economic position). The most detailed insights into these issues are offered by the probate documents of individual clerics, so this documentation was used as the next heuristic basis for analyzing the social position of the investigated sample of one hundred clerics.

The analysis of the probate documentation, especially inventories of the clerics' property, confirmed the existence of substantial differences in property status between independent beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (auxiliary clerics) – in terms of both their total assets and the structure of these assets. This variation was also traced with respect to the setting (rural or urban) in which the clerics worked. The first category in the analysis of assets structure was property with mainly economic importance, i.e. property that was connected with providing for the cleric's material needs (housing, clothing, food) and with generating surplus assets (financial or non-financial). The basic indicator of a cleric's ability to generate surplus assets was the level of his cash holdings. Cash was one of the main ways of storing assets amassed by an individual, as well as representing a resource for investment. The most common way of investing cash funds was via loans; these were listed in the inventories along with unpaid receivables from individuals or institutions, which were payable to the cleric as active debts. By providing loans, clerics generated profit in the form of interest (if they charged interest), and their lending helped them to generate valuable social capital. In specific cases, money-lending can be interpreted as a deliberate career strategy or (among unemployed clerics) as an investment in securing the social security they lacked. Compulsory war loans were an entirely different matter; this was one way in which the Austrian state forced the clergy to help finance the war against Prussia.

The existence of surplus assets is also attested by the occurrence in the inventories of items made from precious metals. Their economic relevance was substantially lower than that of financial assets; their primary role was as a means of showcasing the individual's social status. A similar role was played by other luxury items, which were found mainly in the households of the richer parish priests – such as sets of porcelain crockery or gold-ornamented glassware. Nevertheless, the majority of items in clerical households were utilitarian in nature – particularly furniture, kitchen items and various everyday household items including table linen and bed linen. Both in its scope and in its value, this category of assets reflects very substantial differences between the living conditions of auxiliary (or unemployed) clerics and those who held benefices, who lived in their own house (the rectory) in which they ran their own household. Moreover, an important part of a benefice was also a parish farm, whose equipment formed a characteristic component of the assets of independent beneficiaries. For this reason, livestock, agricultural crops and food were listed (with only occasional exceptions) exclusively in the inventories of independent beneficiaries, for whom this property made up a substantial proportion of their total assets. (Agricultural crops came both from the parish farm and from payments in kind received from parishioners.)

Overall, the equipment of clerics' households and farms not only provide insights into general aspects of material culture in contemporary urban and rural society, but also offer tangible evidence of specific aspects of the lives and professional activities of members of the clergy. They include items related to clerics' own personal religious observance (prayer stools, cult items) which was closely connected with their professional activities, as well as equipment used during their clerical duties (horse-drawn carriages used when visiting the sick). The inventories of another category – clothing – also reveal a combination of items that were specifically associated with the clerical estate (i.e. distinctively clerical items) and universal items (used by both clergymen and laypeople).

Other items fulfilled a purpose that was not primarily economic but rather symbolic or functional, as they were closely connected with their owner's profession as a clergyman and his personal interests; foremost among these items were books. The use of books formed an integral part of the clerical profession, and this is reflected in the fact that the large majority of books in the clerics' libraries were theological texts, though the libraries also included volumes from other fields – and not only those

that may have had a direct connection with theology (e.g. law, philosophy, history). For example, the clerics also owned books on language, which were either practical guides or reflected a deeper interest in the topic. Clerics' personal areas of interest are also reflected in their ownership of books from other fields, such as geography, natural sciences and economics.

From the inventories of clerics' collections of artworks (mainly paintings) it is evident that these items had only marginal economic significance among their assets, and that they had a clear connection with the clerical profession, with a predominance of works depicting religious motifs. The artworks with various secular motifs again indicate the wide range of the clerics' non-professional interests – interests which are also reflected in various other items. These include musical instruments, games (cards, chess), and other objects revealing their owners' interest in fields such as natural science or technology. Half of the clerics owned weapons, revealing either a theoretical interest (as collectors) or a purely practical interest (hunting), as well as considerations of personal security; the dangers to which clerics were exposed are illustrated in contemporary reports on burglaries at rectories. This information indirectly demonstrates the general perception that parish priests (or at least some of them) were relatively prosperous – a perception that is also reflected in certain cases of the usurpation of priests' property that are described in the analyzed probate documentation.

In the structure of their assets outlined above, Moravian clerics were no different to their counterparts in neighbouring provinces. Comparison of the structure of clerics' assets also demonstrated the already-mentioned division within the lower clergy, corresponding with the hierarchical division into clerics who spent their entire careers in auxiliary positions (i.e. as non-beneficiaries) and those who held benefices. These differences were rooted in the differing sources of income of the two groups. Auxiliary clerics were paid in the form of a wage, so naturally the majority (over two-thirds) of their assets were monetary in nature (cash and active debts). By contrast, the independent beneficiaries drew on a more varied portfolio of income sources from their benefices, so the structure of their assets was also more varied. Financial assets represented only one of the pillars of their total assets; the other key pillar consisted of assets related to the operations of their parish farms and households. The greater overall wealth of the independent beneficiaries was reflected in the fact that their assets

(of all categories) were of substantially higher average value than those of the non-beneficiaries.

Among the independent beneficiaries, the analysis of summary economic indicators revealed distinct differences between the priests working in rural and urban locations. Although the property of both groups of beneficiaries comprised both monetary and non-monetary assets (as a result of the income structure from their benefices), among the rural priests the most valuable category of assets consisted of livestock, agricultural crops and food (on average 46% of all assets), while among urban priests monetary assets were predominant (cash and active debts – on average 52% of all assets). Nevertheless, because urban priests were generally wealthier than their rural counterparts, their total assets in livestock, agricultural crops and food were in fact greater than those of the rural priests. During the period under investigation, agrarian production still contributed an important part of the income of parish benefices – not only in villages, but also in smaller urban communities and towns.

The findings outlined immediately above draw on an evaluation of summary data for all the clerics under investigation, so they essentially represent an artificially created image of “average” representatives of the various categories of clerics. To a substantial extent, such an evaluation conceals the specific features of individuals’ property situation, which may have differed in certain ways from the general model. For example, some of the non-beneficiaries lacked financial assets, and owned only a small number of essential items. However, alongside them there were (albeit substantially fewer) non-beneficiaries who were wealthier, and whose property situation in certain ways resembled that of the independent beneficiaries. There were also differences among the beneficiaries themselves. This group included not only relatively wealthy clerics whose solid financial position enabled them to invest in cultural items and devote themselves to various personal interests, but also one poor priest who lacked certain basic types of property. It is evident that the formal criterion of career success – the receipt of a benefice – did not automatically mean that a cleric would be entirely spared material worries.

Besides the structure of clerics’ assets, the second fundamental indicator of the economic differentiation among different clergymen was the total value of their assets. A comparison of the average value of clerics’ assets (both gross and net) with information on their professional position

revealed that the clerics' wealth essentially corresponded with their place in the Church hierarchy. Nevertheless, individual cases which deviate from this general tendency demonstrate that economic stratification was not restricted to differences among individual categories of clerics, but also existed within the categories themselves. This internal differentiation was again analyzed with respect to the two basic groups of clerics – the non-beneficiaries (who were generally poorer) and the independent beneficiaries. Among the latter group, the average values of their total assets displayed substantial differences between the generally less wealthy rural clerics and their more prosperous urban counterparts. However, a comparison of data for individual clerics indicated that there existed a degree of internal differentiation within each of these subgroups, so it would be wrong to reduce the situation to a simple contrast between rural and urban settings. A more detailed analysis of the differences in the property situation of the analyzed clerics confirmed that the independent beneficiaries enjoyed a much higher standard of living than the non-beneficiaries (they were wealthier), yet they also displayed a greater degree of social stratification – reflecting the substantially greater differences among the incomes of individual benefices.

The analysis of the information on clerics' property recorded in the probate documentation thus led to the conclusion that the lower clergy was not a uniform group of people with identical economic status (and therefore also social status). The basic differentiation of the clergy can be deduced from the criterion of whether or not an individual held a benefice; however, the reality was far more complicated, and cannot be reduced to an explanation based on a simple distinction between poor auxiliary or unemployed clerics on the one hand, and rich parish priests on the other. Both these categories of clerics were internally differentiated – particularly the independent beneficiaries. The social group analyzed here thus incorporated a range of individuals with highly differentiated property status, from well-off clerics (whose economic status was approximately comparable to that of estate, municipal or lower-ranking state officials) to clerics who lived in poverty.

The results of the detailed analysis of clerics' property to a certain extent again indicate the clergy's ambivalent position between an estate and a profession. On the one hand, clerics' property was specific to their estate – both in terms of its components and in terms of its origin in the Church (though in some cases an important role was also played by clerics' private assets, e.g. property inherited from their parents).

On the other hand, however, the total value and structure of a particular cleric's property reflected the individual course of his career. These aspects were not determined solely by a cleric's formal membership of the clerical estate; primarily they reflected his professional success, and thus they also to some degree reflect the nature of the priesthood as a profession.

The final question related to clerics' economic situation and social status is the issue of whether entering the lower clergy can be seen as a path to social advancement in the investigated period. It was not possible to provide a precise answer to this question due to the absence of comparable data; we know about individuals' assets and position in the Church hierarchy at the time of their death, but analogically precise data on their initial status (i.e. on the assets and social status of their parents) is not available. An analysis of available information on the origins of clerics revealed only that the sample of one hundred clerics from the Olomouc diocese was dominated – in line with the general trend at the time – by individuals who came from towns and cities (in the large majority of cases, subject towns), who alongside natives of smaller urban communities made up almost three-quarters of the sample. Only slightly more than one-quarter of the clerics in the sample were born in villages (though a majority of all clerics working at the Liechtenstein estates in North Moravia and Silesia during the 1760s had rural origins). More detailed information on ten clerics from the diocese who were ordained during the period 1741–1745 indicates that their fathers included urban tradesmen and representatives of the social elite in subject towns or villages. A more substantial set of more recent data for the Liechtenstein estates shows that in the second half of the 18th century, applicants for ordination included the sons of estate officials or employees, members of municipal authorities in towns, smaller urban communities and villages, as well as ordinary people from these locations – not only wealthy farmers, but also poorer rural inhabitants and even landless peasants. This indicates that during the period under investigation, a clerical career that remained restricted to the lower levels of the Church hierarchy (i.e. the parochial clergy) was used – depending on the social origins of the individual – either as a means of retaining the individual's original social status as inherited from their parents, or as a means of advancing to a higher level in the social hierarchy than that which was initially occupied by the individual's family.

An individual's success in achieving a solid property status and the corresponding social prestige depended on a range of factors. If the key milestone in a clerical career – the receipt of a benefice – could only be

achieved by half of the lower clergy during the period and in the location under investigation, and if even this success did not always guarantee the requisite level of financial security (and the associated social status), it is evident that there were also cases in which we could speak not of social progression, but of some degree of social regression. In some cases a cleric's career ended prematurely as a result of illness, causing them to lose their position and live out the rest of their lives in poverty, while in other cases the cleric "merely" spent their entire professional life in less-than-satisfactory auxiliary positions and died not in poverty as such, but in a status lower than that in which they had grown up.

The analyzed criteria of clerics' career progression and their property and social position naturally reflect only the external success of the individual's career; they may not reflect the extent to which an individual's expectations of a clerical career were met, and what kind of life an individual desired to lead. These aspects are much harder to explore, and they remain a challenge for future research which would take as its basis detailed accounts of the lives of individuals and make maximum possible use of all available sources (including ego-documents) to gain a deeper insight into the inner world of selected clerics. Nevertheless, even a study conducted along those lines would only be capable of generating partial conclusions. Above all, it would not be viable without a broader factual and interpretative framework which would enable the findings on the individuals' lives to be situated into the context of more general findings on the clergy as a specific social group. The aim of the current work has been to contribute to this more general interpretative framework – and also to provide an impetus for the further study of the lives of clerics in the context of the development of Early Modern society.

Translated by Christopher Hopkinson