

Purity of Blood and the Curial Market in Iberian Cathedrals¹

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In the following pages, I will analyze the coexistence of two different phenomena in a series of cathedral chapters in the Iberian Peninsula between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the one hand, the defense of the recruitment of exclusively Old Christians into these ecclesiastical elites, which took shape in the imposition of the so-called purity of blood statutes. On the other hand, the spread of commercialized methods of reproduction amongst these institutions. In the Early Modern Age, it was possible to obtain prebends –in other words, the benefices belonging to a chapter³– in a Roman market of provisions that were alien to the *converso* problem. In it, the decisive factor was money, not blood, but the Roman nominations had to be obeyed. Families of Jewish origin with enough money behind them did not let the opportunity pass. How did the racial factor interact with the financial aspect, and how did Roman interference interact with these Iberian principles?

Here I will not enter into details about the marketization of ecclesiastical benefices. Nor will I explore the process involved in implanting the purity of blood statutes in the Iberian chapters, beyond certain details that will help to explain the context. This question has already been discussed, for example in the extensive study by João de Figueiroa-Rego, amongst others.⁴ What interest me are the ways in which people accessed these elitist bodies, when in theory their doors were closed.

In this study, I will attempt to offer a comparative perspective of the matter in the Iberian Peninsula as a whole. The strategies used for the social instrumentalization of the chapters by *conversos* were similar in Castile and in Portugal. The timing was different on either side of the frontier. The Portuguese chapters experienced both the period of greatest access by New Christians and the reactionary anti-*converso* phase nearly a century after the Castilians. The first purity of blood statutes issued by chapters in Castile appeared in the first third of the sixteenth century, while their Portuguese equivalents appeared in the first third of the seventeenth century. This is a natural result of the differences between the *converso* communities in both territories.

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³ Basically dignities (such as deans, archdeacons, chancellors, treasurers or precentors), canonries and portions of different amounts. In the strictest sense, only benefices whose income represented a fraction of the common treasury or chapter administration were actually prebends. In practice, the term ‘prebend’ referred to any type of benefice associated with a chapter position, even when the income, as was the case with certain dignities, came from different sources, normally because they had been created at a later stage.

⁴ The first summary of the situation in Spain was provided by Antonio Domínguez Ortiz (1966). Previously, a number of studies had been published about the implantation (or attempted implantation) of purity of blood statutes, such as the paper by López Martínez (1959) on the cathedral of Burgos. At a later date, a number of contributions appeared about the documentary sources themselves, derived from genealogical records, as was the case in Córdoba (Vázquez Lesmes 1999), Jaén (Coronas Vida; Cañada Quesada) or Seville (Salazar Mir), some of which were merely an inventory of the contents. The statutes of the cathedral of Murcia were studied by Juan Hernández Franco (1995 and 2000) and those of the cathedral of Córdoba by Díaz Rodríguez (2012). The failed attempt in Salamanca was studied by Tellechea Idígoras (1986). In the case of Portugal, the study of reference is the thesis by Figueiroa-Rego (2009), published in 2011 by the Fundação Calouste –Gulbenkian and the FCT in Lisbon.

In theory, the purity of blood statutes adopted by several chapters brought an end to the entry of New Christians and their descendants into this sector of the clergy. This imposition was a result of the need of all elites to restrict access to their numbers. At a time marked by anti-Semitism, in a society with an undesirable multi-cultural past, the aim was to assimilate the status of prebendary of these churches with that of Old Christian. Having a purity of blood statute served to further improve the symbolic power of the chapter, already underpinned by aspects such as their renown, prestige, honor, authority or antiquity (Bourdieu). Given the current state of research into this issue, these statements are nothing new; nevertheless, they should be established as premises.

The hypothesis I will attempt to explain is that Rome was, without any comparison, the way in which *conversos* accessed the local Iberian ecclesiastical elites in the Early Modern Age. The Curial *market* was the way in which the New Christian minority was able to instrumentalize the Spanish and Portuguese chapters, even those with a purity of blood statute.

The purity of blood statutes in the Iberian cathedrals

In my opinion, the implantation of these cathedral statutes did not occur on a small scale as has been defended by some authors. A very different question is to identify in how many chapters this filter came into effect by demanding information on family backgrounds. The following table details the cases that I have been able to verify.

Cathedral	Date	Note
Badajoz	1511	
Seville	1515	Confirmed and enlarged later.
Córdoba	1530	Confirmed in 1555.
Guadix	1530	
Santiago	Records from 1545	Confirmed again in 1661.
Toledo	1547	Confirmed in 1548, 1550 and 1555.
Sigüenza	1548	Revoked in the 1560s.
Jaén-Baza	1552	
Granada	1553	
Málaga	1554	
Almería	Records from 1560	
León	1561 ⁵	
Osma	1562 ⁶	
Oviedo	1565	
Valencia	1566 ⁷	
Ávila	1580	Only for some canons.
Murcia	1595	Only for some canons. ⁸
Cádiz	Records from 1607	

⁵ Villacorta Rodríguez, 209.

⁶ Loperráez Corvalán, 424.

⁷ Domínguez Ortiz 1971, 98.

⁸ The statutes of purity of blood of 1517 and 1544 were not effective (Hernández Franco 2000).

Coimbra	1622 ⁹	Previous statute (1598) ineffective.
Elvas	Records from 1622	
Braga	1622 ¹⁰	Confirmed in 1625.
Oporto	1625 ¹¹	
Lisbon	1628	Confirmed in 1630.
Évora	1629	Confirmed later by Urban VIII.
Lamego	1635	
Faro		

According to Hernández Franco (1996, 68) the chapters of Coria, Plasencia and the Canary Islands declared that they would not admit New Christians. The first two possibly had a statute indicating this. I have still not been able to confirm it, but it does not seem that any checks were carried out to ensure compliance. In the Canary Islands, the chapter “vehemently” refused to adopt the statute, despite the demands of the Royal Council (Quintana Andrés 202-203). This was attempted unsuccessfully in Burgos in 1550 and 1584 (López Martínez). The same happened in Salamanca (Tellechea Idígoras), in Zamora and Tuy (Domínguez Ortiz 1966, 38-39). On the whole, it appears that the process of implanting the statute took root more firmly in the south of the Peninsula.

These purity of blood statutes, used by a number of chapters in the Iberian Peninsula, formed a part of their internal regulations. They were not general laws of the kingdom, or canons issued by a conciliar or pontifical decree. They were specific, private rules governing each particular chapter. The papal dispensations regarding compliance with any chapter statute were rejected, unless they referred to defects that could be remedied within a certain period once the person had entered the chapter, such as obtaining academic qualifications or for specific holy orders. Obviously, the stigma of having a New Christian origin did not enter into the list of remediable matters.

This led to conflict, when the rights of a pretender were supported by a fulmination from Rome (that is, a solemn pronouncement of papal justice). Any refusal to execute this mandate would have led to immediate excommunication. This meant that chapters were often forced to negotiate with the greatest possible discretion. Many undesirable pretenders never actually came to form a real part of the chapter, but simply taking possession of a prebend, even when they were forced to resign it, was something that would usually lead to future triumph. In many cases, this was a key factor.

The chapters did not want their image as the *optima pars* of the diocesan clergy to be undermined in any way. After the first waves of repression by the Inquisition, during which several chapters saw their ranks affected, the process of implementing these filters brought about two significant advantages.

Firstly, the institution presented itself as a select group that was prohibited to admit socially undesirable elements. In the Iberian world, there was nothing that represented this ideal like the *puritas sanguinis*. It was a condition that was equal or even superior to the position of nobility demanded by some chapters in France or the Empire.

⁹ Figueiroa-Rego 136-137.

¹⁰ Figueiroa-Rego 133-134.

¹¹ The statute in Arquivo Distrital do Porto: Arquivo do Cabido da Sé do Porto, Estatutos, 35r.-v.

¹² Noble family trees could be stained by infected branches (Soria Mesa 2007, 103-114). One may or may not have been a noble, but never impure.

Secondly, special emphasis was placed on publicizing the purity of blood of the prebendaries who approved the statute. Once the body had theoretically been purged of any trace of Judaism by the Inquisition, maintaining this purity was the main reason for approving it.

However, since the Late Middle Ages the chapters had been the preferred destination of the *converso* minority. The Inquisition had only made a significant impact, regardless of the scandal surrounding their actions, on those who had assimilated the worst: the Judaizers. Although the content of the statutes would seem to indicate the opposite, the New Christian element had been and continued to be a very real presence. The moment when the purity of blood statutes were imposed in each cathedral is extremely significant. Beyond the best-known processes, on closer examination it is not unusual to find judgments from the Inquisition condemning chapter members in the years prior to the implementation of the statute.

The first statutes in Castile came about after the first, especially tough period of repression in areas with a large number of New Christians. In Portugal, the sentences passed by the Inquisition between the 1610s and 1620s were devastating, especially in the case of the chapters of Coimbra and Lamego. It could be said that the process of implantation was often forced into existence by exceptionally delicate circumstances. Here we can compare the cases of the statutes of Córdoba and Lisbon. In both, the danger of the entire chapter being exposed to society at large was a decisive factor, as indicated in the statute of the cathedral of Lisbon from 1630:

Considering the insult and scandal that the churches in this kingdom of Portugal have suffered for a long time, mainly the cathedrals (so called by the Council of Trent, Senate of the Church) due to the beneficed clerks who are descendants of the Hebrew generation, who in these calamitous times we live in frequently confess to the crimes of heresy and apostasy against our Holy Catholic Faith, and once convicted, expose us at every step on the public scaffolds of the Holy Inquisition (although this stain by the mercy of God has still not been held in our cathedral). (ANTT, Cabido da Sé de Lamego, Breves e bulas, 2, 11-A, 2v.)¹³

¹² The best known is undoubtedly in Lyon, although this select club also includes the *chapters nobles* of Metz, Nancy or Besanzón, which in theory were reserved for the nobility (Loupès 208). Fernández-Prieto Domínguez (420-424), includes a list of chapters that required a test of nobility. Similar tests were included in the purity of blood statutes. See the book by Duhamelle (1998) for the Rhineland region, the main nucleus of noble chapters. The most restrictive and elitist were probably the chapters of Strasburg and Salzburg, which were home to the sons of barons, counts or princes of the empire. The tests to become a prebend of Spira or Vienna only considered four sides of the family, while those for Bamberg or Paderborn considered sixteen. Other German chapters divided their membership between full-blooded nobility and university graduates, as was the case of Augsburg, Brixen, Freising or Osnabrück.

¹³ “Tendo deante dos olhos a afronta e escândalo que neste Reino de Portugal padecem há muito tempo as Igrejas, principalmente Cathedrais (chamadas pello Sagrado Concílio Tridentino Senado da Igreja) per amor dos Beneficiados que descendem de geração hebraea, os quais frequentemente nestes nossos calamitosos tempos saem confessos do crime de Herezia e apostazia contra nossa sancta fe cathólica e assim convencidos se nos estam expondo a cada passo nos cadafalsos públicos do Sancto Offício da Inquisissão (ainda que esta mácula por misericórdia de Deos nam aconteceo ainda até agora nesta nossa sé)”.

This was a shameful note, similar to the one that, “in former times, for having beneficed clerics in this church who were descendants of the generation of New Christians and Jews, some of whom were executed, and other reconciled and penanced” (Fresneda, 55), the members of the chapter of Córdoba were said to have feared one hundred years previously.

The mark of purity served to support the image of an aristocratic chapter that was carefully recreated after the Late Middle Ages. Here, the details included in the statutes, explaining why they were implanted, are very illustrative in their similarity. In the case of the cathedral of Córdoba, we can see that they were imposed after taking into account the following reasons, amongst others:

The great nobility and aristocracy of this city, and the purity of the beneficed clerks who are currently in this church, because the former prelates and prebendaries who were in this church have sought and defended that no clerk of this generation enters this church, and so it is now the church that is the cleanest of this stain than any other church in these kingdoms. (Ibid.)¹⁴

The confused combination of nobility and purity of blood as a backdrop is in no way fortuitous. One century later, the prebendaries of Lisbon referred to a number of bishops, cardinals and even a pope –John XXI– who had emerged from their ranks, and reasoned in a similar way:

Considering with all providence the honor of this distinguished church, from which, as in a seminary of prelates, are chosen its dignitaries and canons, and considered as the most worthy [...], so that so much brilliance of nobility and dignity may not be blemished by any affront. (ANTT, Cabido da Sé de Lamego, Breves e bulas, 2, 11-A, 2v.)¹⁵

In fact, we can find prebendaries who were notoriously Jewish in origin in both chapters. Even the origins of some of those who wrote and signed the statute of the chapter of Córdoba were not beyond suspicion.¹⁶ Amongst the chapter members who approved the statute of the cathedral of Lisbon, there are the signatures of at least two New Christians: the dean, Afonso Furtado de Mendonça, and the archdeacon, Lourenço da Gama Pereira, as indicated by Fernanda Olival and Nuno Monteiro (107). We can find a similar situation in other chapters in the Peninsula who referred to the purity of their members. Compared to other *converso* prebendaries from Jaén who opposed

¹⁴ “La gran nobleza y caallería desta Ciudad, y la limpieza de los Beneficiados que al presente son en esta yglesia, porque los Prelados passados y Beneficiados que han sido en esta yglesia han procurado y defendido que no entrasse en esta yglesia Beneficiado desta generación, y así es al presente la más limpia yglesia desta mácula que otra yglesia destes Reynos”.

¹⁵ “Atendendo nós com toda a providência à honra desta insigne Igreja da qual, como de hum seminário de Prelados, as Dignidades e os Cónegos sam escolhidos e assumidos como digníssimos [...], pera que tanto resplendor de nobreza e dignidade se nam possa escurecer com alguma afronta”.

¹⁶ The prebendary Francisco de Góngora or the canon Pedro de Castilla both had *converso* origins, for example. Although I have still not been able to contrast all of the details, I have reasons to believe that other *conversos* included the archdeacon Francisco de Simancas, the canons Francisco Sánchez de Ávila and Bartolomé de León, and the prebendaries Cristóbal de Hojeda, Bartolomé de Leiva or Alonso Gómez de Baena. The statute and its signatories in Fresneda (55r.). On the family origins of Francisco de Góngora, see Enrique Soria Mesa (2015).

implementing a purity of blood statute, the prior Francisco de Valdivia, whose ancestors had been condemned, supported it, and:

When it was brought, having been confirmed by His Holiness, they say that out of satisfaction for it he danced and was joyous and enjoyed himself immensely, because he thought that with it, he himself was being legitimized. (ACCo, *Limpieza de sangre*, 7.540, 50v.)¹⁷

As I have previously mentioned, the symbolic strength of the statute was such that it not only legitimized the condition of its future members, but also the very essence of the *corporate image*. The chapter became pure in the eyes of all who looked upon it, together with all of its members.

The application of the statute of purity of blood could be adapted, and indeed was adapted to the interests of the cathedral chapter. For Diego Pérez de Valdivia, a *converso* archdeacon of Jaén, with it the chapter members “wage war as they usually do, whenever they want, and against whoever they want” (Martínez Rojas 167).

We should not overlook a key aspect in the case of these institutions: the genealogical research report itself was not binding in the actual decision-making process. A group with reduced power, generally the so-called *in sacris* canons, voted in secret after examining the information that had been gathered, which was then filed away under lock and key. This is an aspect of great interest in terms of understanding how the process worked. What was truly binding was always the verdict issued by a small number of people, and not even the chapter as a whole. Just a few canons had the power to judge whether the statute had been obeyed or not, according to their criteria. With the vast authority of the institution they represented, they passed judgment on who was suitable, even despite evidence presented against the candidate. This was where their power resided.

The destabilizing element in this equation appeared and developed in parallel, for reasons that were not connected with the *converso* phenomenon: the curial market of ecclesiastical benefices. As we will see, there was major interference from Rome, which if it was not able to overturn the statutes, was able to force very tough negotiations. Many factors were in play, which meant that the dynamics of reproduction of these ecclesiastical institutions were somewhat complicated. New Christians continued to enter, both candidates who were favored –obviously without any problems– as well as some who lacked a sufficient amount of internal support. There were even those against whom efforts had been made to use information about the purity of their blood. This was a double-edged sword, as once they were forced to accept the pretender, the hint of infamy could blemish the entire chapter, and undermine the symbolic logic of the purity filter.

This had happened at the end of the sixteenth century, with Francisco de Vera. Despite a series of obstacles, he obtained the post of archdeacon of Pedroche, and a canonry in the cathedral of Córdoba. The commissioner who was chosen by the chapter to undertake the investigations had ordered a reproduction of the offensive ‘*sambenito*’ worn by Judaizers –with “a dragon painted in green with flames spouting out of its mouth”– belonging to a predecessor of who was now a companion in the choir. The reason why we know about the attempt by one of the archivists, the erudite philologist

¹⁷ “Cuando se trujo confirmado por Su Santidad, dicen que de contento de ello el susodicho bailó y se alegró y holgó grandemente, por parecerle que con aquello se calificaba él”.

Bernardo de Alderete, to steal this document, is because of a fortunate sequence of circumstances that led one of his colleagues to state:

That being the witness the archivist of the archive that holds the reports of the aforementioned Don Francisco together with the others, he was told by Canon Bernardo de Alderete that it is now in Seville and he had another key, that they opened the archive and took out of it that bad report that had a *sambenito*, so that his successors would not question the canons who were living, due to having allowed the entrance of a New Christian into a church with a statute [of purity of blood], and this witness replied to Alderete that he did not want to. (AHN, Inquisición, 5.242, 2)¹⁸

This raises the question of how many case files were lost or destroyed by those who were the custodians of their own corporate honor. It is impossible to know the answer. Perhaps only a few, considering how closely the archive was controlled, as it was essentially an instrument and guarantee of power. Whatever the case, in the process of continuously recreating their image of distinction and purity there was no room for reality, which was more prosaic, but also more complex.

The promised land for *converso* clergy

From the end of fifteenth century, Rome became a major center of attraction for New Christians, firstly those from Castile and Aragón, and then those from Portugal. During the moments of greatest repression, it was a destination that offered a certain degree of safety for them and their property, out of the reach of Spanish or Portuguese Inquisition, and especially for families who knew that they could be most easily harmed. Apart from this, it was always handy to have someone in Rome to whom family members could be sent whenever necessary. It ensured success in business negotiations, or as part of the training of young men who would take over from their elders as clergymen, or curial agents or bankers. There are numerous testimonies to this situation.

The New Christian Gaspar da Costa de Mesquita had become wealthy thanks to his work as a banker at the Roman Curia. He had the clear idea that: “only in Rome could one live, for there one did not have to live with the fear that they were going to knock at one’s door, and one was the owner of what one had” (ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 1.240, 11r.). He had made this statement shortly before being arrested in Lisbon by the Inquisition. His prison sentence came as a major blow, although it did not lead to the ruin or the end of his family, the vast majority of whom had settled by then in Italy or in the Americas.

The merchant Tomás Rodrigues had less foresight. Both he and his wife, Violante de Oliveira, were New Christians. They had been freed from the prison of the Inquisition of Coimbra as a result of the General Pardon that was granted in 1605 (ANTT, Inquisição de Coimbra, proc. 42). Instead of leaving Portugal, he decided to set up business in Lisbon. There he took advantage of his business activity to obtain different ecclesiastical benefices in Rome for four of his five male children, including a canonry in the cathedral

¹⁸ “Que siendo este testigo archivero del archivo donde están las pruebas del dicho don Francisco con las demás, le dijo el canónigo Bernardo de Alderete que ahora está en Sevilla, que tenía otra llave, que abriesen el archivo y sacasen aquella mala información que tenía un *sambenito*, porque los sucesores no notasen a los dichos canónigos que vivían que avían dado entrada a un confeso en iglesia de estatuto, y este testigo respondió al dicho Alderete que no quería”.

chapter of Coimbra, against which they had to appeal until 1614.¹⁹ Throughout the 1620s, due to the investigations carried out in Coimbra that resulted in the prosecution and sentencing of a scandalous number of clergymen from the diocese (Andrade 1999), a series of prosecutions brought against the family by the Inquisition accumulated.²⁰ Only one of his children, Diogo de Oliveira, was able to escape, precisely because he was in Naples at the time, where he had gone to live with his uncle. The sixth child of Tomás Rodrigues, Canon Francisco Cardoso de Oliveira, was arrested in Seville by the Inquisition in the city, as he was on his way to Italy. In the prison of the Inquisition in Lisbon, his brother António complained to a cellmate about the poor judgment of his father, “who, knowing what this was and having escaped from here by a miracle, did not go to Italy with his money” (ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 750, 27v.-28r.).

An equally dramatic case was that of the banker at the Roman Curia Francisco Gomes Henriques, a *fidalgo* the king, and his son, Gregório Henriques, a merchant dedicated to curial business. The warnings he received from his friend Jerónimo Nunes, also a New Christian, on the same day of his arrest, did little to help him. He had been warned that, “in order to not be apprehended, should flee to Rome”. Nevertheless, he was able to place most of his family there (Baião, II, 214-215).

However, if Rome was presented to the New Christians as a land of opportunities, it was not only on account of it being a place of refuge. We should not forget that within this collective, not all of the cases were of individuals or families who were persecuted or under suspicion because of their faith. Regardless of the severity of the threat posed by the Inquisition, what Rome did offer was an alternative for enrichment and social integration through the Spanish-Portuguese secular clergy. In particular, and though it may seem paradoxical, this was accomplished through their most elitist local corporations: the cathedral chapters.

The Holy See had been able to create an alternative market that provided access to the benefice system. Through it, it was able to directly or indirectly supervise a very significant fraction of the provisions and transfers of benefices of all kinds, including the rich prebends of the cathedrals. The way was opened so that those with the ability to obtain and pay the corresponding bulls could access vacant benefices that were beyond the scope of bishops and chapters, and even to dispose of them.

Bearing in mind the significant proportional weight of the Iberian Peninsula in requests for ecclesiastical benefices and dispensations within Catholic Europe as a whole, then the significance of Spanish-Portuguese *conversos* within these circles comes as no surprise. On top of this, the companies of merchant bankers and their trans-national networks were essential for the correct functioning of this system. The credit instruments and circuits of information were fundamental. Here New Christians played a leading role, when they were not the same families, with one foot in the world of business and the other in the clergy. The overall image was that of a very high percentage of New

¹⁹ His brother, António de Oliveira, as another example, accumulated four different ecclesiastical benefices in the parishes of Santa Cruz in Lisbon, Santa María in Sintra, Santiago in Torres Vedras and Santiago in Coimbra. ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, proc. 750, 7r.-v.

²⁰ The daughter, Maria de Oliveira, a nun in the nunnery of Celas in Coimbra, was arrested in 1621 and sentenced two years later. A few months later she was followed by her father (who was burned at the stake in the *auto de fe* of 5 May 1624), her mother (who died in prison in 1623) and her three brothers, all priests: Simão, António and João de Oliveira. The last two also died in prison during the proceedings, burnt at the stake at the *auto de fe* of 13 March 1627. Their proceedings are included in the same order in ANTT, Inquisição de Coimbra, proc. 1.515 and ANTT, Inquisição de Lisboa, procs. 7.588, 6.081, 6.069, 750 and 2.536.

Christians amongst the Iberian clergy resident in Rome, as reflected in this poem from the period:

So in Rome at that time
no more news was spoken
than that some were fleeing
from the Holy Inquisition.
Many played at running away
and fly away with their money,
so there remain no tailors,
no abbots or nuns or priests.
To see them go is funny,
spread out in great number
like a handful of feathers
that you thron up into the air
(Gilman, 163).²¹

In other words, ecclesiastics of Jewish origin arrived in Rome in large numbers. Some of them, in order to escape the repression of the Inquisition (sometimes quite narrowly), “played at running away”. In general, all of them were attracted by the economic possibilities. The comparison is very visual: a pile of feathers, swirling into the air by the updraft caused by negotiating with ecclesiastical benefices. In the original version of the poem, not even the synonym used to refer to money is innocent: *caire* was the word used for profits made from prostitution. These ideas point towards the criticism leveled by followers of Erasmus and reformers against this curial market, which they rejected as being simoniac (Díaz Rodríguez 2012, 279-282). The profits involved could be enormous for many New Christians, as mentioned by a Portuguese observer in Rome in the sixteenth century:

They are exceedingly wealthy, especially those who fled from Castile who buy and sell and obtain many apostolic offices and benefices in large quantities. Certainly many times I heard that Gibraleom had more than sixty benefices from churches, some linked to other, even though he was burned in effigy in Castile. And he had many apostolic offices. Many of these [New Christians] were wealthy thanks to their offices and benefices. (Lopes 835)²²

The ‘Gibraleom’ referred to in the text was García de Gibraleón, a member of the *converso* lineage of the Benadeva family from Seville, who became well known and powerful in Rome by speculating with ecclesiastical benefices (Ollero Pina). It was an outstanding case, but not the only one. There were many others who accumulated benefices, technically known as pluralists, but better known as “lords of benefices” (Díaz Rodríguez 2016a).

²¹ “Pues en Roma a la sazón / más nuevas no se dezían / sino que algunos huhan / de la Sancta Inquisición./ Muchos juegan de esgarrón / y se afufan con el cayre,/ que no queda remendón,/ abad ni monja ni flayre./ Vellos yr es un donayre,/ derramados en gran suma/ como manojo de pluma / que la soltáis en el ayre”.

²² “São ricos em demasia, principalmente os que fugiram de Castela que compraram e alcançaram muitos ofiços apostólicos e benefiços em grande cantidade. Certamente muitas vezes ouvi dizer que tinha Gibraleom mais de sessenta igrejas curadas humas anejas às outras, sendo sua estatua queimada em Castela. E tinha muitos ofiços apostólicos. Muitos destes avia em grande maneira ricos de ofiços e benefiços”.

Commodification as a factor of social integration

The following table shows fifteen examples of individuals with Jewish origins who obtained prebends at the cathedral of Córdoba after the implementation of the purity of blood statute. Amongst the list of names it is possible to find a common denominator in terms of how they accessed these prebends: by means of apostolic letters. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, and is only illustrative. Similar lists could be shown for other Iberian chapters which had implemented a statute.

Some *converso* prebendaries after the implantation of the statute in Córdoba

Name	Prebend	Access
Valerio Ruiz	Half portion	Bull of resignation (1540)
Fernando de Solier	Canonry	Bull of resignation (1543)
Bartolomé de Baena	Half portion	Bull of resignation (1547)
Antonio de Eraso	Portion	Bull of resignation (1552)
Juan de Velasco	Half portion	Bull of resignation (1554)
Juan Sánchez Sevillano	Half portion	Bull of resignation (1554)
Martín Fernández de Salazar	Canonry	Bull of resignation (1560)
Andrés Vela	Canonry	Bull of resignation (1564)
Francisco de Astudillo	Archdeaconship of Pedroche	Bulls (1577)
Luis Carrillo Garavatea	Half portion	Bulls (1578)
D. Luis de Góngora	Portion	Bull of resignation (1585)
D. Francisco de Vera	Archdeaconship of Pedroche	Bulls (1595)
D. Francisco de Hoces	Half portion	Bulls (1610)
Francisco de Mendoza	Half portion	Bull of coadjutorship (1645)
Juan de Mendoza	Half portion	Bull of resignation (1659)

For many *conversos*, the curial benefice market opened up a number of possibilities after obtaining an apostolic letter of provision. The first, naturally, was to present the letters to the chapter and thereby successfully overcome the purity of blood trials. At the end of the day, the potential to clear up a problematic past was, in itself, a demonstration of power that was capable of opening the doors of the institution.

In 1585, Luis de Góngora did not have any serious problems with the statute in the chapter of Córdoba. It was not because of a lack of Jewish blood in the famous poet's family, as has been demonstrated by Enrique Soria (2015). For generations, Góngora's family had formed a part of the chapter. In fact, he succeeded his uncle thanks to a bull of resignation.

Another good example was the *converso* Antonio de Eraso. In 1552, his attorney and relative, Francisco de Góngora (Luis de Góngora's uncle), presented his letters to take over a prebend from Cristóbal de Hojeda. There was minor opposition, which was

quickly silenced after the main troublemaker was arrested on the orders of the dean. What was behind this confrontation was not so much a question of purity of blood, but rather of personal interests. The cardinal of Santiago, Juan de Toledo, also wanted this prebend, but granting possession to Antonio de Eraso meant that the chapter would be joined by the brother of the emperor's powerful secretary (ACCo, Actas capitulares, 14, 59r.).

The same arbitrariness when applying the *anti-converso* rules occurred in other chapters in Spain and Portugal. As correctly indicated by João de Figueiroa Rego, any pretender considered to be an undesirable intruder came up against the statute: "the most effective way of rejecting them would be to discover a note of infamy in their blood" (Figueiroa-Rego 145).

Let us consider the chapter of Évora as an example. It was under the pontificate of José de Melo, archbishop of Évora from 1611 onwards, when the Holy See was requested to confirm the statute of purity of blood. This did not arrive until the 1630s, but before its arrival, the *anti-converso* briefs of Sixtus V and Clement VIII were used, which had been valid since the sixteenth century. Obviously, they were used whenever they were of interest.

In the same year of 1611, the chapter had complied with "an execution in which it was ordered to give possession of a canonry left vacant after the death of *senhor* Diogo Rodrigues, providing in it for Francisco Pereira, an agent of His Majesty" (ACSE, Livros de Lembranças, 11, 64r.). Not only were there no problems whatsoever with regard to his origins, but they also hindered the intentions of the nephews of the former holder of the canonry to mortgage it with an ecclesiastical pension. The cause was argued as being the fact that the executing judge of this pension, the precentor of the cathedral of Elvas, was suspicious: the former archbishop, Teotónio de Bragança, "on the advice of a number of prebendaries, was prevented from being canon of these cathedral for being black in [his skin] color" (Ibid. 62v.). One month after taking possession, the chapter appointed a new attorney in Rome, a person with privileged access to the bodies of power in the papal court and the Curia: its new brother, Canon Francisco Pereira Pinto (Ibid. 67r.-v.).

In 1616, Monseigneur António Mendes Henriques requested from Rome, through his attorney, the notary of the Inquisition of Évora, to take possession as archdeacon of the city. This was one of the richest prebends in all of Portugal, for which it had papal bulls of appointment. António Mendes was the personal secretary of the pope and a powerful cleric, the owner of a veritable fortune in ecclesiastical benefices, including the post of archdeacon at the cathedral of Viseu. The chapter hastened to offer him possession without any problems, despite the fact that he was a renowned New Christian (ACSE, Posses, 1, 102r.). Years later, his father, the banker Francisco Gomes Henriques, was burned at the stake for being a Judaizer, as we have already seen.

Only three years previously, the chapter had reacted in a very different way when faced with an attempt to access a canonry by the *converso* António de Gouvea, who was also a resident in Rome. The chapter respected the papal bulls to avoid excommunication, but opposed the appointment immediately. To start with, it ordered to read at the cathedral the papal briefs that prohibited New Christians from entering the chapter.

And in dealing with the position that was said to correspond to the graduate António de Gouvea, in the canonry left vacant following the death of Damião Dias Magro, it was ordered that this should be blocked, because it was said that he was a New Christian, and that every necessary remedy be taken against this, requesting

that His Majesty take action in the same way as he did with the chapter of Coimbra. (ACSE, Livros de Lembranças, 11, 172v)²³

Gouvea was not the powerful Monseigneur Mendes or the agent Francisco Pereira Pinto, both of which were cases of interest for the institution. Together with Gouvea, André Correia de Mesquita was competing for the same canonry, with equally valid papal bulls, and as the member of a family that had been present in the chapter for decades. Faced with this situation, the *anti-converso* filter was applied. Nevertheless, the chapter members required that the new Canon Mesquita provided a personal guarantee against Gouvea who, because of the papal bull of provision, had the right to request a compensatory pension.

Obtaining an apostolic provision always meant obtaining something of benefit from a chapter: initially from its economic capital, and then from its symbolic capital in the long term. The only exceptions to this were the very rare cases when, after a chapter appealed to Rome, the pope retracted the bull. Here it was necessary to demonstrate that it had been obtained through falsehood or trickery. In other words, it had to be demonstrated that the applicant had acted maliciously, by omitting details or making false statements. This was nearly impossible in most cases, as applicants could allege that they were unaware of the supposed blemish in their forebears. Together with this was the possibility of descendants of people who had been condemned by the Inquisition being authorized by the pope. This was an added complication in these types of lawsuits, but in theory these authorizations were not valid in the face of specific rules such as those of the chapters (although they were in the case of the briefs that prohibited access by New Christians to ecclesiastical benefices in general in Portugal).

Ultimately, those who were legally empowered through apostolic letters had a series of acquired rights, and would have to be compensated if they were forced to resign for reasons alien to the Roman Curia. This was the key to the success of the curial market of benefices between New Christians.

“To go and yet to stay, and staying to go away”²⁴: resigning with conditions

An oxymoron similar to the verse by Lope de Vega defines the agreements that were reached between New Christians and chapters with statutes of purity of blood. The statute was sometimes insuperable, and the institution refused to publicly accept the person appointed by Rome. Legal action and negotiations became inevitable. It was only on rare occasions that someone who had invested large amounts of money to acquire a prebend in the curial market would abandon the quest after the first rejection from a chapter. Generally, the solution was conditional resignation, which some contemporaries denounced as Simoniacal (Díaz Rodríguez 2016a). This is what was known in Castile at the time as the *medio de dar a pension* or “means of giving for pension”. This way offered three different types of agreement to the parties involved, ranging from the simplest to the most complex. All of them gave the impression of having taken a step backwards, when in fact they resulted in getting a foot in the chapter’s door, even when this was simply as an act of acknowledgement. I will explain this using other terms.

²³ “E tratandose sobre a posse que se diz havia de tomar o licenciado António de Gouvea, provido no canonicato que vagou por morte de Damião Dias Magro, se ordenou se formassem huns embargos contra isso por se dizer que era cristão novo e se procurasse contra isso todos os remédios necessários e se pedisse a Sua Magestade cartas na forma que as concedeo ao Cabido de Coimbra”.

²⁴ “Ir y quedarse y con quedar partirse” (Rivers 215).

To avoid undermining their image of purity, chapters with statutes could not accept as one of their own someone who was not able to pass the *anti-converso* filter. It did not matter if the real obstacle was the general notoriety of their background, their inability to re-invent the memory –due to a lack of economic and social resources–, or simply because of group interests within the chapter itself.

Pretenders who were rejected resigned the benefice in exchange for an income that mortgaged it. They were left with proof of having been technically appointed (the canonical provision). This was the *medio de dar a pension*: to relinquish the title of ownership, while keeping part of the income –or even all of it, as we will see. The case of Gouvea we saw previously refers to these economic demands.

The next step was to wait for an appropriate length of time, sometimes a few years, or sometimes a couple of generations. Having conveniently forgotten the legal battles and their true causes, the family would have the opportunity to argue the validity of the apostolic letters of provision. Obviously there would have been failed attempts, financial ruin, scandals that brought disrepute to the family or biological accidents, but nevertheless, with sufficient luck and power, the logic of the mechanisms of social mobility would finally be imposed.

Around 1557, Martín Fernández de Salazar obtained a prebend from the cathedral of Jaén through his brother, Andrés Vela, an active buyer and speculator of ecclesiastical benefices in Rome. Shortly before, the chapter of Jaén had adopted an *anti-converso* statute. As his grandparents were Jewish, and his ancestors had been condemned by the Inquisition, problems arose with the appointment (ACCo, Limpieza de sangre, 7.540). Andrés Vela was a papal chamberlain –*camerarius*–, one of the agents in the Curia at the Catholic Monarchy, and with no lack of either contacts or money (Díaz Rodríguez 2016b). The chapter finally reached an agreement: it handed over the possession of the prebend, taking effect from the moment of the pontifical provision, and paid a large amount as compensation for the income that Martín Fernández de Salazar had lost. In exchange, he agreed to resign in a few months. When the moment arrived, the prebend was discretely passed on to a third brother, Francisco de Valdivia Salazar. He held the dignity of prior of the cathedral, and had entered before the statute took effect. There was no need to investigate his purity of blood, and the matter was resolved. Years later, witnesses taking part in the proof of blood trials of descendants of the family pointed out that Fernández de Salazar had been a prebendary of a cathedral with a statute. It did not matter for how long: it was demonstrated in the bulls in the archive, as well as by the document in which he renounced the post. Otherwise, how could he possibly have resigned the prebend if he was not its legitimate owner?

The litigants with the greatest negotiating powers were not satisfied with just a pension. One variation of this conditional resignation system was the resignation with *reservatio*. For a little more money than the price of bulls of resignation with a pension, it was possible to obtain the reservation of salary, status and renown. In this way, the Curia offered the person relinquishing the benefice the opportunity to reserve all rights and income for themselves, except for the title of ownership in itself. In practice, this was almost the same as not resigning. In fact, this was expressly stated in bulls with the clause *ut si minime resignasset*.

The third way of conditional resignation was by means of the so-called *regressum*. Using this formula, the person who resigned could obtain the future options of the prebend. In other words, they reserved the right of ownership of the benefice they had renounced for when it became vacant in the future. It was more complicated to negotiate this than to resign with a pension, although it was more profitable. The pacific possession

that was initially denied could well be obtained years later in a second attempt. This margin of time could be used to cover up past events, forge closer friendships and obtain wider support. Here we will see a number of examples.

Fernando Solier was a *converso* cleric who had moved to Rome at an early age. He reached the position of apostolic writer –*scriptor*– and obtained numerous benefices, including the dignity of archpriest at the cathedral of Segovia, his place of birth. In 1542 he obtained an expectative bull for a canonry in Córdoba, although problems soon arose due to the existence of other pretenders (ASV, *Schedario Garampi*, 10, 30v.). The chapter was engrossed in a confrontation between two factions, one of which was led by Bishop Leopold of Austria. Solier reached an agreement to give up his rights in favor of Esteban del Hoyo, the bishop's servant. In exchange, he received a pension and the right to return –the *regressum*– (ACCo, *Actas Capitulares*, 12, 117v. and 120r.).

In 1559, after the death of Canon Hoyo, the Inquisition became interested in the prebend. Solier did not hesitate to attempt a second onslaught against the chapter, making use of his right to return (ACCo, *Actas Capitulares*, 16, 151r.). The correspondence from one of the inquisitors from the area with the Council of the General Inquisition clearly shows the lack of information that characterized these situations:

Some say that a Canon Solier from Segovia is entitled to it, although the majority are not sure of this; I point this out because if anything comes of it, they say that he is very much *converso* and this church has a statute against them. (AHN, *Inquisición*, 2.392)²⁵

From Rome, Solier negotiated an agreement in private with the chapter that was similar to the previous one that brought an end to the lawsuit that had been lodged with the Curia. After completing the agreement, in 1560 the inquisitors in Córdoba received an order from Madrid to desist with their pretensions towards the canonry. The chapter immediately handed over possession to him, ignoring the purity of blood statute. After enjoying the prebend for eleven months, Solier resigned in favor of Juan Sigler de Espinosa, another servant of Bishop Leopold of Austria, this time in exchange for the right of return and the reservation of status and income. Outside of Córdoba, Solier was considered to be a canon of the cathedral until his death (ACCo, *Actas Capitulares*, 17, 9r. and 102v.).

Another example is that of the member of the Curia, Juan Rubio de Herrera, the son of a family of *converso* silversmiths. He was a personal friend of the vice-datary Brandão, a Portuguese New Christian who was responsible for overseeing all of the agreements relating to benefices from the Datary. This position, and his impressive knowledge of curial practices, allowed him to accumulate a significant number of ecclesiastical benefices, including a half-prebend from the cathedral of Córdoba and a canonry at the cathedral of Murcia. His Jewish ancestry and judgments against his family by the Inquisition were notorious. It did not take long for problems with the statute of the cathedral of Córdoba to arise. He appeared before the court of the Curia –on his home ground– with the bulls of provision. After years of litigation, for which abundant documentation still remains, both parties arrived at the usual agreement. As a result, the chapter was able to proclaim in Córdoba that the statute remained intact. Meanwhile, in Rome, Rubio de Herrera was able to continue to refer to himself as a prebendary of

²⁵ “Dicen algunos que un canónigo Solier de Segovia tiene derecho a ello, aunque los más no lo tienen por cosa cierta, avísolo para si algo saliere, dicen que es muy confeso y esta iglesia tiene estatuto contra ellos.”

cathedrals with statutes of purity of blood, receiving most of the associated income. On his headstone, commissioned by his nephew, which bears a coat of arms imitating that of the Duke of Sessa, he is referred to as a noble of Córdoba and prebendary of the cathedrals of Córdoba and Murcia (Díaz Rodríguez 2016b).

It is important to note that these are not exceptions, but instead the rule. The vast majority of *converso* pretenders that have been studied to date by historiographers as examples of rejection, of rejection that led to failure, actually benefitted in some way. This is where we find the need to cross the historical sources, to put together the vast amount of local and curial documentation in order to properly calibrate the phenomenon, especially as concealment was the common denominator. Records on purity of blood, negotiations with benefices and resignations were carried out with the greatest possible discretion.

The bulls themselves were not presented to the chapter until the very last moment, with the knowledge of the smallest possible number of people. In fact, people speculated with benefices in Rome and the chapter was not even informed of these papal provisions. Possession was not taken, although the rights of ownership were obtained by way of the bull. If the pretender did not want to challenge the purity of blood statute or become involved in litigation, there was the possibility of obtaining an economic benefit by resigning in favor of the best bidder for these rights. This sometimes led to phantom prebendaries, such as the *converso* Brito. In Rome, he was considered as a canon of the cathedral of Évora until his death, while in Évora, the chapter members denied any knowledge of him, or of the existence of this provision (ACSE, Poses, 1, 76r.-v.).

The Catholic monarchy was well aware of the existence of this market. At the end of the day, it played a fundamental role in the social dynamics of the territories under its control. Occasionally, it would intervene in these curial matters, either through its ambassador to the Holy See, or through its own network of specialized agents (Díaz Rodríguez 2016c). Perhaps one of the most famous cases was that of the arch-deaconship of Toledo during the reign of Philip II of Spain. This was the richest prebend in Castile, and was often reserved for members of the royal family or high-ranking nobles. However, in 1571, Pope Pious V gave it to his private chamberlain, Francisco de Reinoso y Baeza.

Events could have proceeded in the same way as other cases. However, the prebend in question was too relevant, and the *converso* origins of the pretender to the post was impossible to conceal. He was the son of Jerónimo de Reinoso, lord of Autillo, and Juana de Baeza, the daughter of Pedro de Baeza and Leonor de las Casas, both of whom were *conversos*. The Jewish ancestry of his family could well have been glossed over, if it were not for having such recent and notorious convictions from the Inquisition.

Fray Gregorio de Alfaro, the biographer of Reinoso, disguised the real reason for his journey to Rome as a desire to “move forward” in service to the Catholic Church (Alfaro 4v.-5r.). This must have been a truly burning desire, as he left in 1561 once he was able to raise a sufficient amount of money, when the embers of the great *auto de fe* of Valladolid of 1559 were still glowing in people’s memories. During this event, his sister Catalina had been burned at the stake, while another sister, Francisca de Zúñiga Reinoso, and a cousin Francisca de Zúñiga y Baeza, had been sentenced to prison. The family of his sister Inés’ husband, the Vivero Cazalla, was decimated (Llorente 403 and

408-409). These seem to have been sufficient reasons to set off and seek a new life in Italy, as his other brothers did.²⁶

Under the protection of the Spanish embassy, he entered the pontifical court, until he reached a position of power as the pope's chamberlain. His fortune grew as a result of ecclesiastical benefices, several of which he shared amongst his family members. From this position within the curia, it was logical that he should attempt to enter a chapter with a purity of blood statute, considering how these filters actually worked.

However, attempting to obtain nothing less than the post of archdeacon of Toledo led to the king intervening directly. A position of enormous prestige was at stake, together with a yearly income of thousands of ducats. The scandal could rage out of control if one of the highest cathedral positions in Castile was not only given to someone suspected of being a *converso*, but also to the brother, cousin and brother-in-law of notorious heretics, who had been condemned in the most influential and solemn *auto de fe* in the entire kingdom. King Philip II himself had been present, and he attempted to convince Reinoso not to present his bulls, and to commence the genealogical information process.

The most interesting aspect of this case is how the correspondence reflects, on the one hand, the monarch's clear understanding of this complex curial dynamic, and on the other, the perception that Rome had of this particularly Iberian obsession.

Through his envoy in Madrid, the pope requested Philip II to forget about the problem of Reinoso's family background—"to dissimulate with the statute of the church", in the king's own words (AGS, Estado, 917)—, as had been done so many times before with knights belonging to military orders:

It is Our Lord's wish that having conferred the post of archdeacon of the church of Toledo to Francisco Reinoso, the aforementioned Francisco may take possession without discussing whether the statute of this church prevents him or not, given that he has dispensation of His Beatitude, and given that in the military orders, on the request of Your Majesty, the same statute has been dispensed for men who have some part originating in the Moors, and if the pope, in the light of the situation, has calmed his conscience on the request of Your Majesty, who has judged that in these men this defect should not blemish them, in the same way it seems highly convenient that Your Majesty may calm his own, due to the knowledge that His Holiness has of this Chamberlain who was almost brought up by him, and placed at his service by the ambassador of Your Majesty. (Ibid.)²⁷

Meanwhile, through his ambassador in Rome, the king suggested secretly to reach the usual solution with Reinoso, provided he would not divulge that it was an initiative of the Crown. What he proposed was nothing less than a conditional resignation, or the means of *dar a pensión*:

²⁶ Alfaro falsifies the information about his *converso* ancestry, and dispatches Reinoso's sisters with the brief note that: "The daughters also lived in different states, to their great glory and that of their parents" (Alfaro, 3v).

²⁷ "Desidera N. S. che havendo conferito l'Archidiaconato della Chiesa di Toledo à don Francesco Raynoso, possa il detto don Francesco piglar la possessione senza entrar in disputa de il statuto di quella Chiesa li obsta o no, poi che li ha Sua Beatitudine derogato, et poi che nelle Militie ad instantia della M. V. è stato derogato più volte al medesimo statuto per huomini anchora che da qualche lato havevono origine da Mori, et si come i Papi alla dispositione de quali sono queste cose, hanno quietato la conscientia loro sopra la instantia di V. M. la quale ha giudicato quelli huomini tali a chi quel deffetto non debba mocare, così par molto conveniente che la M. V. possa quietar la sua sopra la cognitione che ha Sua Santità di questo Cameriere quasi allevato da lei et posto a suo servitio dal Ambasciatore di V. M."

Don Francisco de Reynoso, by the means in which you consider appropriate, must understand how bad an idea it is to insist with this intention, the negotiation of which bestows little honor upon him, and which will not go well for him, and that he understands in this part my will and determination and how much better for him it will be to enjoy this dignity without restriction, giving it for a pension, and if His Holiness were able to make this so, with him keeping the *return*, then it would be even less inconvenient for his person, and that with the pretext of wishing to be at the service of His Holiness with whom [Reinoso] he has such an obligation, he wishes to make use of it in this way, and in effect it would be to keep the piece, within his rights. [...] This could give satisfaction to him, if the effect contained in the statute [of purity of blood] is achieved. (Ibid.)²⁸

The best solution for Phillip II was that Reinoso resigned from the post of archdeacon in favor of Cardinal Alejandro Farnesio, under the pretext that he wished to continue serving the pope in Rome. With the return clauses and reservation of benefits, it would effectively be the same as maintaining the post, as occurred in so many other cases. If this were not enough to convince him, he could offer him the resignation by Farnesio of the archbishopric of Monreale. The king considered the technique of *promoveatur ut removeatur* as “very good means and measures to get out of this difficulty” (Ibid.). Also, it revealed the idiosyncrasy of the chapters with statutes of purity of blood: dignified individuals from the episcopate were not good enough for these theoretically closed, local ecclesiastical aristocracies.

However, Reinoso was more interested in accumulating income than in pastoral work at that time –“he had no wish to be a bishop”, he is said to have replied to the king’s offer (Fernández Martín 19). Finally, he decided to resign the prebend, with the reservation clause. He reached this agreement together with Francisco Dávila, an inquisitor and later a cardinal, who had been a close friend of Reinoso’s since they had both studied in Salamanca. In other words, apart from having the title, Reinoso enjoyed the benefits of the archdeaconship, with a variable annual income that was still exorbitant, of between 24,000 and 30,000 ducats of gold (Ibid. 44). He rejected the archbishopric of Monreale, which was obtained by the *converso* Luis de Torres (Gulik & Eubel 250). As compensation, the pope granted him a series of ecclesiastical benefices and pensions resigned by his nephew, Cardinal Alexandrino.

If we add to these the lucrative prebends he already had in a number of dioceses, we can understand the doubts he shared with his friend Dávila when he officially informed him of the king’s intention to present him to a bishopric in Castile, meaning he would be forced to renounce all of his benefices:

My fortune is brief with regard to the spiritual; with regard to the temporal, although I barely pay any intention to it, in none of these churches that you

²⁸ “Don Francisco de Reynoso, por los medios que a vos os paresciere, deve entender quán mal le estará insistir en esta pretensión, cuyo <trato> le es de tan poco honor, y de la qual no puede bien salir, y que entienda en esta parte mi voluntad y determinación y quánto mejor le será disponer desta dignidad sin venir a <esto restricción>, dándola a pensión, y quando él pudiese obtener de Su Santidad que esto fuese, quedando con el regreso, aun sería con menos quiebra de su persona, y que con título de que quería asistir al servicio de Su Santidad a que tanta obligación tiene, quería disponer en esta forma, que en efecto sería quedar con la pieza y en su derecho. [...] Podríasele dar en esto satisfacción, como se consiga el efecto de que el estatuto se guarde”.

mention, will they give me as much money as I have, the costs of the officials are higher, the finances are more accountable, and there is less liberty to make use of them or to bequeath them. (Fernández Martín 41)²⁹

Finally, he was recommended as bishop of Córdoba in 1597 (Gulik & Eubel, 178). According to one of his biographers (Fernández Martín, 21), the Jesuits had managed to convert the Renaissance clergyman used to easy living, into a charity-conscious priest who advocated Catholic reforms. For Luis de Góngora –who despite being quite spiteful, was still one of the people who knew the most about this sector of the clergy to which he belonged –Reinoso’s motivations were more focused on gaining wealth and possessions: “a pastor and priest / who marries his church / for a dowry of forty thousand [ducats]” (Góngora 23).³⁰

Cathedral purity of blood statutes and logical conformism.

Not all of the Iberian cathedrals had a purity of blood statute. Rome opened a way that partially compensated for this obstacle, although in the curial market less problematic prebends could be had for a similar price and effort.

Obviously, in the process of obtaining genealogical information, hurdles could be discovered that were unknown by the pretender. Family secrets that were kept hidden for generations played a role in the processes of social integration, although this only happened in a small number of cases. Having verified a large number of families, it can be affirmed that those who were well integrated and with sufficient power did not have any serious problems in surmounting the purity of blood statutes.

On the contrary, families whose Jewish origins were still remembered, who had been sentenced by the Inquisition and did not form a part of the local elite, or who had opposition from within the chapter, had every possibility of having their past uncovered. In theory, this information was secret, but rumors spread quickly. An application that was rejected or held up was enough to strike a note of infamy. So why did people who were rejected try to enter these chapters? To answer this question, we first have to consider the legitimizing capacity of these institutions, which I will illustrate with an example.

In 1645, Francisco de Mendoza had managed to take over a prebend from the cathedral of Córdoba with a bull of coadjutorship. The purity investigations revealed his Jewish ancestry. Like many other cases, the chapter forced him to step down. Publicly, the statute had been respected. In fact, after a decade of litigation, he was offered an identical prebend in exchange, discretely and ignoring the *anti-converso* filter (Díaz Rodríguez 2012, 412-413).

This problem once again reared its head in the Spring of 1659. His brother, Juan de Mendoza y Figueroa, appeared before the chapter so that the papal fulmination could be executed in relation to the prebend that was being disputed. He had been provided with apostolic bulls, and so, under the threat of excommunication, the chapter had to give him possession. The stratagem was quite striking, although there was nothing extraordinary about the situation. Other similar cases are documented. Without any connection to these local diatribes, in the offices of the Curia, Francisco de Mendoza had been legally appointed. This meant he had the right to resign in favor of whoever he wanted –even if

²⁹ “Mi caudal es corto quanto a lo espiritual; quanto a lo temporal, aunque no ago tanto caso de ello, en ninguna de esas iglesias que v. md. nombra me darán tanto como yo tengo, las costas de oficiales son mayores, la hacienda más obligada, menos libre para disponer de ella ni testar”.

³⁰ “Un pastor y sacerdote/ que se casa con su iglesia/ por cuarenta mil de dote”.

he had not been able or not wanted to take possession of the benefice— providing he paid the corresponding amounts. He transferred his rights to his brother and the chapter of Córdoba once again used the purity of blood statute against him. The proceedings began in May of the same year, and the witnesses were carefully chosen from amongst the most highly qualified people.

Firstly, they visited the home of the councilor Francisco de las Infantas Córdoba y Aguayo, who was 74 years old. He swore on the cross of his habit—he was a knight of a military order—that he knew the pretender and all of his family as being Old Christians. Logic dictated that this could not be any other way, if he had a brother who had been received as a prebendary “in a church of such brilliance, authority and greatness as that of Córdoba, and which takes such care of its purity of blood statute” (ACCo, *Limpieza de sangre*, 5.026).

This statement, and the fact that he always referred to Francisco de Mendoza using the respectful form of address *don*, must have touched a nerve with one of the informants, who replied to him with certain derision. Feathers were ruffled, and the old knight refused to answer any further questions, “because in this I believed I was doing a service to the church, in making this statement, because there was no credit in the estimation of this Holy Church that an individual could have vanquished it” (Ibid.). The insistence by the chapter members resulted in such an uproar that they had to leave hurriedly.

They then visited the graduate Jacinto de Aguado, a priest in his sixties, canon of the Royal Collegiate Church of San Hipólito of Córdoba, notary of the Inquisition and a member of at least four or five confraternities with purity of blood statutes. He was a perfect declarant and much calmer in nature, although to the surprise of the informants, he said that he also considered that all of the family members of the pretender were Old Christians. Moreover, he affirmed that it was well known in the city that the tests “that were given to *don* Francisco de Mendoza by an informant appointed by the gentlemen of the Chapter were completed very well” (Ibid.). This was the last thing they had expected to hear from him.

They immediately asked him again if he was not aware of the problems and lengthy litigation with the chapter due to these tests. As he was a notary for the Inquisition, was he unaware of the notorious fact that he was a descendant of family members who had been condemned by this tribunal? His answer was even more shocking: of course he was aware of this. However, with regard to the sentences, “he said that he did not know of them in any detail, only vaguely,” and that in addition he knew several of the witnesses who had spoken poorly of him the first time.

Before, he was reputed to be the descendant of *conversos* and convicts, but now that it has been seen that *don* Francisco de Mendoza has entered the church and is in possession of a half prebend in it, the decision has changed, and it is considered that Diego García de Orbaneja [his grandfather], his ascendants and descendants, are Old Christians, pure, of pure status and origin. (Ibid.)³¹

The informants of the chapter insisted, as the witness had previously declared that he was aware that Mendoza had *converso* origins. Once again, the witness: “said that after

³¹ “Antes le tuvo en reputación de descendiente de confesos y penitenciados, pero ahora que ha visto que el dicho don Francisco de Mendoza ha entrado en la iglesia y está en posesión de una media ración de ella, ha mudado de dictamen y lo tiene al dicho Diego García de Orbaneja [su abuelo], a sus ascendientes y descendientes, por cristianos viejos, limpios de limpia casta y generación”.

don Francisco entered into the church, he and all of his ascendants were considered as good and pure, as he has said”(Ibid.).

When asked about the information he has regarding the purity of the pretender and his ascendants, whether he would accept him or all of them and vote for him to be members of one or all of the confraternities to which this witness belongs, or if he would admit them if he could as ministers of the Holy Inquisition in the same way as the witness is, he said that he would vote for each and every one of them as members of the Holy Inquisition and for any other confraternity with a purity of blood statute, because the brother of the pretender was admitted as a prebendary of the Holy Church of Córdoba. (Ibid.)³²

The witness had probably been bribed, or he may have even been one of many *linajudos*, professional blackmailers who specialized in genealogical problems of this kind, who were found throughout the Iberian Peninsula (Pike 2000; Soria Mesa 2010). But what I want to highlight is not this, rather, the framework of perception of reality shown by the justifications of the witnesses, its implicit symbolic logic. Even when the informants decided to call on the witness unannounced, to guarantee independent opinions, they came across the same line of reasoning.

In the street, they asked Luis Martínez de Mesa to declare in the nearby convent of San Pablo. Like many people in the city, he was aware of the lengthy litigation process with the chapter, and that *don* Francisco de Mendoza had left for Rome to litigate. Nevertheless, “today he is in possession of this half prebend, and so he considers that he has all of the qualities required by the purity of blood statute of this Holy Church” (ACCo, Limpieza de Sangre, 5.026). To continue seeking further information would have been ridiculous. It was pointless to fight against a logic that was imposed by the prevailing social order. We can find similar declarations in purity of blood proceedings from other cathedrals with statute.

In 1665, Álvaro Ferreira de Carvalho presented to the chapter of Évora the bulls of resignation in his favor of the canonry that had been in the possession of Nuno de Mendonça Furtado. The pretender was rich and considered as a nobleman, and was the grandson of a canon from this Portuguese cathedral, Álvaro Ferreira Magro. The witnesses considered that this latter aspect was a sure sign of purity, as “it was enough to be a canon in the cathedral of Évora, where at that time the same proceedings were carried out as they are today in order to be canons of this cathedral” (ACSE, Habilitações: Cónegos, 2). And so it was accepted by the informants. In fact, when Ferreira Magro took possession of his canonry in 1606, the chapter of Évora neither had a purity of blood statute, nor did it carry out any tests in this regard (ACSE, Posses, 1, 85v.). Although he was indeed pure, being a prebendary in Évora at that time was not actual proof in itself of being an Old Christian. During this same period, a number of notorious New Christians entered the chapter, such as Monseigneur António Mendes or Francisco Pereira Pinto. However, this operated as a powerful, retroactive fiction.

³² “Preguntado si por las noticias que tiene de la limpieza del pretendiente y los demás sus ascendientes, a él o a todos ellos los recibiera y votara por él para ser cofrades de alguna o de todas las cofradías de que es cofrade este testigo, o los admitiera si estuviera en su mano por ministros del Santo Oficio como el susodicho lo es, dijo que votara por todos y por cualquiera de ellos para el tribunal del Santo Oficio y cualquiera otra cofradía de estatuto de limpieza, por cuanto su hermano del pretendiente está admitido por racionero de dicha Santa Iglesia de Córdoba”.

In the case of the Salazar family, whom we saw before in the chapter of Córdoba in the mid-sixteenth century, it is quite enlightening to see how the family made use of this. In a purity procedure that had taken place some fifty years earlier, the fact that Martín Fernández de Salazar had received a prebend was presented as a positive proof. Amongst the prominent witnesses that were called was Ambrosio Suárez del Águila, a councilor from Jaén. He swore that he knew the facts in detail, and how in fact Martín Fernández de Salazar had been admitted on the condition that he would resign, but that he also knew of his condition as an Old Christian. The informant immediately asked him how he could affirm such a thing, knowing the contents of the lawsuit with the chapter. The councilor's reply could not have been any clearer with regard to the legitimizing capacity of the chapter:

The prebendaries of this Holy Church always proceed so rigorously in everything they do, especially in the preservation of their purity of blood statute, that when they dealt with the prebendary Martín de Salazar, this witness understands and believes that they would not have given him the possession he has been heard to have been given, if they were not satisfied of his purity, and with the respect that a tribunal as serious as that of the prebendaries of this Holy Church gave this prebendary possession of this prebend even if there had been any suspicion of his purity, with this it was made good. (ACCo, Limpieza de sangre, 7.540, 40r.-v.)³³

All of the references indicated above demonstrate the logical conformism that is a key aspect in the process of social legitimization. This meant that the chapters with a purity of blood statute were precisely the object of desire of any family with the need to purify a stigmatized past. Here we are not only talking about cathedral clergy, but instead about the foundations of the Iberian societies during the Old Regime. As indicated by Émile Durkheim:

La société ne peut-elle abandonner les catégories au libre arbitre des particuliers sans s'abandonner elle-même. Pour pouvoir vivre, elle n'a pas seulement besoin d'un suffisant conformisme moral; il y a un minimum de conformisme logique dont elle ne peut davantage se passer. (Durkheim 24)

Conclusions

The cathedral chapters were set up as selected holy senates, the *optima pars* of the clergy in each diocese. In the Iberian Peninsula, this implied defending the timelessly distinguished and Old Christian condition of their members. In fact, many cathedrals had purity of blood statutes that prohibited access by people of Jewish origin. In practice, they could be and were instrumentalized by the New Christians, as part of a game that combined fraud, the collusion of other chapter members, the use of ecclesiastical censures or a privileged position in Rome. It was the extraordinary ability to act as machines to channel and legitimize this mobility, within the social system of the time, which made the chapters bodies of great sociological significance (Díaz Rodríguez, 2012).

³³ “Los señores prebendados de esta Santa Iglesia proceden siempre con tanta justificación en todas las cosas que tratan, especialmente en la conservación de su estatuto de limpieza, que en la que se trató del dicho racionero Martín de Salazar, entiende y cree este testigo que no le dieran la dicha posesión que ha oído decir le dieron, si no tuvieran satisfacción de su limpieza, y respecto de que un tribunal tan grave como los prebendados del cabildo de esta Santa Iglesia dieran al dicho racionero posesión de la dicha ración aunque hubiera alguna sospecha de falta de limpieza del susodicho, con aqueso se reparaba”.

Of course, the Roman market was not the only way of accessing certain ecclesiastical benefices, particularly the much sought-after cathedral prebends. Some *conversos* were able to enter different Iberian chapters thanks to the support of a group of individuals within these institutions, or more usually, thanks to being favored by a bishop. Nevertheless, in quantitative terms, Rome was by far the most usual recourse, which I believe was for several reasons.

Firstly, because of the commercial factor associated with a large number of Roman provisions. It was much simpler to pay in the Curia for a bull for the provision of a benefice, than to become involved in the complicated web of power struggles in the local ecclesiastical sphere. Also, the favor of a bishop did not automatically lead to receiving a canonry. A chapter could make the process almost impossible if it chose to do so.

In comparison, apostolic letters had an added coercive value that is well worth taking into account. The ecclesiastical censures and threats of excommunication that accompanied the process of fulmination of a bull were very useful instruments when dealing with chapters who had closed ranks. Statements such as the following are quite usual:

The vicar general and canons said that having seen and examined these bulls, and for respect towards the apostolic commandments and *for fear of the censures and sentences of excommunication contained in these bulls*, they removed Sancho de Castilla from the possession of this canonry, and admitted Doctor Pedro de Guiral to this prebend and canonry. (ACCo, Actas Capitulares, 6, 110r.)³⁴

Even when the existence of purity of blood statutes in some of these corporations theoretically made it impossible for this type of individuals to enter (at least not without the blessing of an internal power group that was capable of legitimizing quite unconvincing family backgrounds), obtaining a pontifical provision and using the associated coercive power was a first-rate tactic. Thanks to this, it was possible to obtain some type of economic or social benefit from the ecclesiastical chapters.

In addition to this, the Roman Curia was the scenario of competitions to win ecclesiastical benefices over and beyond the question of purity of blood. It was a social distinction that was criticized, and even ridiculed in Rome (Domínguez Ortiz 1965-66). Control over the New Christian minority was a factor that was present in the policies of several papacies during this period. However, there can be no comparison to what it meant in the daily life of the Iberian societies. For the Spanish and Portuguese worlds, it was a phenomenon that went beyond the religious and the sincere –or insincere– practice of faith; a phenomenon that was very much a daily obsession, and which conditioned the possibilities for social mobility.³⁵

³⁴ “Los dichos señor provisor e canónigos dijeron que vistas e examinadas las dichas letras, así por reverencia de los mandamientos apostólicos como *por miedo de las censuras e sentencias de excomunió en las dichas letras contenidas*, amovían e amovieron al dicho don Sancho de Castilla de la posesión de la dicha calongía e admitían e admitieron al dicho Doctor Pedro de Guiral a la dicha prebenda e calongía”. My italics.

³⁵ Amongst the extensive current bibliography on the importance of the *converso* phenomenon, purity of blood and genealogy in social mobility in the Iberian Peninsula, there is the recent study on Spain by Enrique Soria Mesa (2016), who has dealt with the matter in previous contributions (Soria Mesa 2004 and 2010). It has also been studied by Juan Hernández Franco (2011), and in collaboration with José J. Ruiz Ibáñez (2003). For Portugal, the names of reference are undoubtedly Fernanda Olival (2004) and João de

Figueiroa-Rego (2011). For the sake of brevity, I will not enter into the abundant publications on purity of blood in Brazil and Latin America.

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Abbreviations:

ACCo: Archivo de la Catedral de Córdoba
 ACSE: Arquivo Capitular da Sé de Évora
 AGS: Archivo General de Simancas
 AHN: Archivo Histórico Nacional
 ANTT: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo
 ASV: Archivum Secretum Vaticanum

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