Sulpice vous a rescrit comme, la veille de l’ascension, on luy offrit un certain benefice de grand revenu si on en pouvoit jouir, et qu’il l’a accepté, attendant si on le luy conferera en Hollande. Cependant 4 jours après, sa nomination qu’il avoit pendante à Lille est escheue par la mort d’un chanoine, et Boèce a accepté la chanoine et elle luy a esté conférée. On prend possession pour luy. Je verray si quelque Satan Romaniste ne luy fera pas guerre, comme ils font souvent. Mais Boèce a mis tant d’empechemens, qu’il croit que les Romanistes perdront leur peine. Voilà comme Dieu en un moment accomode les affaires de Sulpice et Celias, et contre tout ordre et opinion. Car Sulpice n’était que le deuxiesme en nomination. Et cependant Dieu en fait mourir deux chanoines, l’un 24 heures après l’autre. Il a envie de la changer en simples benefices. On luy en offre desja 600 florins en un bénéfice, mais il requiert la residence en un lieu privilégié. Le temps esclorra les occasions.¹

In the early 1620s, the pious and learned correspondence between Cornelius Jansenius and his French partner in crime Saint-Cyran suddenly took a prosaic turn when the Louvain academic discussed his recent fortunes in the clerical job market. Only a few years before, in 1617, the fresh president of the new Holland College had balked at engaging in the scramble for benefices, assuring his correspondent that he would only accept one if it fell into his lap.² But Jansenius did not object to giving the wheel of Fortune a nudge in the right direction. One year later, in 1618, he had obtained a nomination letter from

¹ Jansenius to Saint-Cyran, 2 June 1623, ed. Orcibal, Correspondance de Jansénius, 217. Sulpice and Boèce are code names for the author of the letter, Celias is an alias for the abbé de Saint-Cyran, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne (1581–1643; henceforth referred to as Saint-Cyran), with whom Jansenius had studied at Louvain and Paris and whom he had joined in his home diocese at Bayonne until his return to Louvain in 1617.

² “Quand à moy, je suis encore sans benefice, non pas toutesfois sans esperance d’en obtenir avec le temps, si je voulois esperer. Mais je suis, peu s’en faut, sur le point de me resoudre à n’en chercher jamais de ma vie, s’il ne s’offre de soy mesme. Jay ma vie et ce qui me faut, pas une maille davantage.” Jansenius to Saint-Cyran, 18 May 1617, ed. Orcibal, Correspondance de Jansénius, 11.
the university for benefices in “famous churches.” Five years later, God unexpectedly closed a door (for the two canons He had chosen to call) and opened a window of opportunity for the young academic from Holland. The collegiate church of Saint Peter’s at Lille figured prominently among the top 10 benefice pools in the region targeted by “Satans from Rome,” its canonships being among the most coveted benefices in the Habsburg Netherlands. This is not to say that Jansenius was impatient to broaden his horizon beyond the walls of the Ivory Tower: he obviously wished to continue his stay at the university by the grace of the university’s privileges de fructibus percipiendis in absentia. The appropriately poor and erudite Jansenius, who described himself as a cleric without “une maille d’avantage,” owed a lot to his re-found Alma Mater, whose privileges had enabled him to lay hands on this canonship and to use it as a source of income for his scholarly activities.

Poverty and learning had been the hallmarks of university men in Louvain’s privileges. In 1483, in the bull Urget Nos, Pope Sixtus IV had granted the Louvain rector the right to appoint, under specific conditions, poor clerics of the university to (lower) ecclesiastical benefices in the Burgundian Low Countries. According to the bull’s preambles, appropriately called the Narratio in Diplomatics, the pontiff wished to safeguard the competitiveness of university men in a clerical job market reportedly dominated by powerful magnates outside the university, and to save them from misery during their old age. Thirty years later, in 1513, Pope Leo X endowed the dean of the Arts faculty, in the bull Admonet Nos, with a similar privilege in favour of those clerics who had obtained the degree of Magister Artium. The circumstances

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3 Jansenius’ nomination by the university in 1618 was registered in Registre aux nominations, RAL, OUL, 4784, 35r.
4 Privilegia, 85–90.
5 Privilegia, 92–103. Already in 1512 and 1513, faculty members perceived their future privilege as an extensio, an extension, of the rectoral prerogatives granted to the university back in the 1480s. Indices, 1512 and 1513, RAL, OUL, 729, 3 and 9; Acta Facultatis Artium, 17 and 27 April 1510, RAL, OUL, 712, 295v, and 296v. Elaborate fragments of Urget Nos had been resumed in the narrative parts of the faculty’s privilege of nomination. The university’s bull was a necessary item of evidence in lawsuits against faculty nominees, Acta Universitatis, 9 December 1533, RAL, OUL, 54, 128v. Legal tradition could, if necessary, be invoked to argue that if by accident lacunae were found in the extension, the gaps could be filled with the help of its genetrix, Urget Nos; opponents, in return, claimed that this applied to the restrictions in the university’s bull as well; cf. “Dum collatores gravant, qui non habent plusquam 6 beneficia” Quaestio 2, Puncta Aliquot.