

# CATHOLIC COUNTER-REFORMATION AND CHURCH AUTHORITIES

TOPIC

## ROOM 13: RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL AUTHORITIES - 17<sup>TH</sup> C.

### Tridentine Reform

#### Council of Trent (1545-1563)

The Counter-Reformation is the name given to the movement by which the Roman Catholic Church, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> c., reacted to the Protestant Reform brought about by the teachings of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564). The Catholic response was elaborated at the Council of Trent, held between 13 December 1545 and 5 December 1563. It led to a reaffirmation of central dogma and a general reorganisation of ecclesiastical authorities and bodies.

#### Local power of the church

The Lyon Church enforces the Reformation measures. The church was a veritable centre of local power, embodied by the Bishop who had high moral authority and stood at the head of a vast diocese. This was a role occupied by Alphonse de Richelieu, the brother of the Prime Minister, between 1626 and 1653. Camille de Neuville (**Inv. No. 2660**) succeeded him from 1654 to 1694 and as the mediator between the authorities and the local people, managed to prevent the development of Jansenism\* in Lyon.

### Precarious balance (1595-1630)

#### Tolerance of the Protestant faith

During the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., the Protestant community in Lyon numbered approximately 1,600 people. The Edict of Nantes allowed Protestant worship, but only in certain well-defined places of which Lyon, an ecclesiastical city, was not one. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> c., this function fell to the castle of Baron Jean de Chandieu (20 km south-east of Lyon). In 1600, following the attacks on Protestants, they obtained King Henri IV's consent to build a Protestant church in Oullins (just 5 km from Lyon). When Oullins was acquired by the Archbishop of Lyon in 1630, Protestant worship was banned. Despite the protests, Saint-Romain de Couzon (15 km north of Lyon, now Saint-Romain au Mont d'Or) was chosen to be the site of worship.

#### Catholic fervour

The first third of the century was marked by a regeneration of the Catholic faith and the creation of new religious communities: 39 monasteries for men and 36 for women were established in the diocese, such as the Capuchins or Minimes, the Ursulines or Visitationists. These orders disseminated a devout form of Christianity at the same time as religious instruction was encouraging the people of Lyon to attend all the devotions and sermons possible and to engage in personal meditation. In 1603, the Jesuits were entrusted with the city's only higher education institution, Trinity College (**Inv. N 610.11 - Longitudinal section**



Claude-François Ménéstrier, Jesuit, archaeologist, heraldist, historian of Lyon... and even director of concerts and ballet performances!, portrait, engraving, anonymous, printed by L.B. Nolin 17<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 37.140



St. Francis de Sales, portrait, engraving, 1st half of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., Inv. 37.151

of the Church College). Their considerable output of intellectual and religious texts, such as those by Claude-François Ménéstrier (1631-1705), laid the foundation stones for the Catholic Reformation, preaching for example the need for daily communion.

People turned increasingly to pilgrimage and festivals and processions, accompanied by confessions and communions, were held throughout the year. There were signs of intensifying fervour: on the death in 1622, at the Convent of Bellecour, of theologian saint Francis de Sales, a preacher and the founder of the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, the crowd rushed to gather his bladder stones from the surgeons!

Popular print to commemorate the Jubilee of the Church of Lyon 1666, engraving, anonymous, 1666, Inv. N 786.130



## Catholic reconquest (1630-1685)

### Moralisation of the “Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement”

Founded in Paris in 1627 by Henri de Levis (1596-1651), the *Compagnie du Saint Sacrement* (Company of the Blessed Sacrament) set up one of its branches in Lyon in 1645. The mission of this organisation, born of the Catholic Reformation, was to repress bad morals and circumscribe the freedom of Protestants to the strict limits of the rights guaranteed by the Edict of Nantes\*.

In Lyon, the Company was very active, with personalities like Bédien Morange (? -1703) – the vicar general of the diocese of Lyon – or Charles Démia (1637 – 1689) – the creator of popular education and “little schools for the poor”. It attempted to regulate all aspects of public life: taking a moralising stance, it took on blasphemers, duellists, libertines, tavern keepers and butchers who failed to respect Lent...it spoke out against theatre, night-time walks, public bar, the use of tobacco, certain songs and...plunging necklines.

After being supported in its early stages by Louis XIII, Richelieu and the Pope, the movement quickly became the object of suspicion, with Mazarin for example claiming it to be a “cabal of devotees” favourable to the King of Spain, against whom France was at war. It was dissolved by Louis XIV in 1666.

### Company for the Propagation of the Faith

In 1659, Camille de Neuville reluctantly gave in to a group of devotees, including his brother Antoine, and created the Company for the Propagation of the Faith. Designed to convert the “heretics” – Protestants and “bad” Catholics – it set up a highly organised army of officers who worked to spread the faith in people’s minds. This led to an increase in the bullying and harassment of Protestants and restrictions on which occupations they could hold. Between 1659 and 1685, there were more than 500 abjurations\*, more than two-thirds of which were attributed to the company. The Secular Community of New Catholics, which was an offshoot of this institution, was set up specifically to convert women.

These conversions came at a price. Despite donations from wills, from the Consulate, Assemblies of the Clergy, the Convention and the King himself, the company became increasingly indebted.



*La Cour Sainte ou institution chrétienne des grands*, tome 1, wood engraving, Pierre Guillimin, 1674, Inv. N 1356.74

## The end of Protestantism (from 1685)

### Exile or conversion

In 1685, the Edict of Fontainebleau, revoking the Edict of Nantes, accelerated the decline of Protestantism in Lyon. Protestant worship was forbidden, the church of St Romain de Couzon and the Protestant cemetery destroyed. Thanks to the intervention of Camille de Neuville, however, the city avoided the dragonnades\* implemented by the state minister of Louis XIV, François Michel Le Tellier de Louvois. As they were no longer tolerated in the city, one third of Lyon’s Protestants – about 630 people – fled to Switzerland. The others converted, although they remained in resistance by refusing to send their children to school or by taking in emigrant Protestants who were passing through. At the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> c., it is estimated that around twenty Protestant families remained in Lyon. The spiritual reconquest of Lyon was over and Catholicism was strengthened once again.



*Adoration of the Holy Trinity*, weaving, Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity, 1740, Inv. N 1125

### glossary

**abjuration:** the renouncement of a religion or an idea.

**dragonnades:** movement of forced conversion of Protestants to Catholicism by military force.

**Jansenism:** a religious and doctrinal movement based on the writings of Jansen, who denied the existence of the free will of man, emphasising the decisive role of God in the salvation of souls and preaching moral rigour.

**Edict of Nantes:** an edict of tolerance signed by Henry IV in 1598, granting freedom of worship to Protestants within well defined limits.