

**La figure martinienne,
essor et renaissances de l'Antiquité tardive à nos jours**
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**Saint Martin en tant que saint prêtre du « nouveau sacerdotal »
dans le XVII^e siècle français**

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I Phenomenon

In the first half of French 17th century Saint Martin of Tours is reinterpreted and reinvested as an ideal priest and bishop. Significant traces of this phenomenon can be found in works of art, for example the altar-painting of Souvigny-en-Sologne, 1629, and Le Sueur "Mass of Saint Martin" (Paris, Louvre), painted in 1654 for the Benedictine Abbey of Marmoutier.



Eustache Le Sueur,
La Messe de saint Martin,
Paris 1654, Musée du Louvre, Paris
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La seconde charité de saint Martin, 1629
Église paroissiale Saint-Martin,
Souvigny-en-Sologne

II Historical and ideological contexts

- 1) The **“renouveau sacerdotal”** in French Secular Clergy: In 1611 Pierre de Bérulle founded the Congregation de l'Oratoire de Jesus on the feast day of Saint Martin, the 11th of November. For the Oratorians, Saint Martin of Tours became a model of “perfection sacerdotal” in a perspective, that was post-tridentine as well based on discourses of French Catholicism: For the Oratorians and their followers the description Sulpicius Severus gave on the miracles, that occurred when Saint Martin celebrated Mass, were highly inspiring: Saint Martin's holy hand shone with divine light when he consecrated the host (Dialogi, III, 10). Sulpicius also described, that Saint Martin prepared himself for celebrating Holy Mass with an hour of spiritual retreat spent in solitude and contemplation (Dialogi, II, 1). During the 1620s similar practices of “exercices de retraite” became a major characteristic of priestly spirituality of the French Secular Clergy.
- 2) The **“Querelle des Évêques et des réguliers”** of the 1620s to 1650s, characterized by a harsh collision between secular Clergy (bishops, parish clergy) and the regular clergy, especially the Jesuits. The Jesuits staged themselves as clerical elite of Tridentine reform and gained massive influence in all groups of French society. When in 1622 Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier were canonized, the French Jesuits reinvested them as “Grands Prestres” and models of “perfection sacerdotal” and “discipline ecclésiastique”, hereby deliberately provoking the French secular clergy and its traditional claim for ecclesiastical superposition.

The “guerre ecclésiastique” that arose from this constellation was widely a “war of semiotics”: The **“scandal of Saint Germain”** is a good example. In 1624 the Paris Jesuits published an almanac, in which for the feast day of 31th of July the revered bishop Saint Germain de Paris of the 6th century was omitted and replaced by the new Roman Saint Ignatius of Loyola. French Secular clergy demanded the Parliament of Paris to prohibit the distribution of the Jesuit almanac. Alarmed by similar “scandals”, the French Secular clergy was eager to promote and to reinvest its traditional gallican Saints, especially those with semiotic qualities of “perfection sacerdotal” and “discipline ecclésiastique”. This process becomes manifest in the new theological and artistic interest in Saint Martin of Tours.

1632 the “querelle” reached its climax: Jesuits attacked the French episcopacy and denied its claim of being based on divine law (“de iure divino”) and arguing that it was not directly and autonomously connected to divine grace, but instead dependent on the pope and its distribution of jurisdictional and pneumatic prowess.

The French episcopate in January 1633 condemned these Jesuit texts as heretical and published ecclesiological treatises that emphasized the "ius divinum" and the pneumatic autonomy of the episcopate. This ecclesiological discourse again influenced the French secular Clergy's reinvesting of Saint Martin: From the 1630s to 1700 a high quantity of paintings were commissioned and distributed to French Parish churches that show Saint Martin in episcopal ornate with his right hand raised in the gesture of pontifical blessing. It was this gesture that had become a symbol of episcopal autonomy. The **right hand of the bishop** was – according to these secular clerical discourses – understood as a decisive instrument of channeling the „**summa in sacerdotia omnia munera potestas**“ manifest in the episcopal ministry. In the course of these discussions Saint Martin of Tours became interpreted as an ideal reference of **episcopal supremacy** as defended against contradicting ecclesiological concepts propounded by the Jesuit order and its papal networks.