

ARTICLE

# Antitheatrical Prejudice: From Parish Priests to Diocesan Rituals in Early Modern France

Joy Palacios

Classics and Religion, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada  
Email: [joy.palacios@ucalgary.ca](mailto:joy.palacios@ucalgary.ca)

For French theatre history, the seventeenth century paradoxically stands out as both the Grand Siècle, or golden age, in which Pierre Corneille, Molière, and Jean Racine produced their masterpieces, and as a period of intense antitheatrical sentiment in which Jansenist theologians like Pierre Nicole and Catholic bishops like Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet composed treatises against the stage and its players. French historiographers have given the name *la querelle de la moralité du théâtre*, or the quarrel over the theatre's morality, to the diverse episodes that called into question the theatre's place in public life in prerevolutionary France.<sup>1</sup> This quarrel merits a performance analysis. Whereas theatre scholarship has devoted careful attention to the material features of early modern theatre practice, antitheatrical sentiment's story has largely been told as a progression of ideas.<sup>2</sup> In works that remain essential reading, scholars such as Moses Barras, Marc Fumaroli, Jonas Barish, Simone de Reyff, Jean Dubu, Sylviane Léoni, and Laurent Thirouin have examined the rise and development of French arguments against the stage, reconstructing French antitheatrical sentiment's intellectual history from antiquity through the French Revolution.<sup>3</sup> As demonstrated by titles such as Dubu's *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre* [Christian churches and the theatre] and de Reyff's *L'Église et le théâtre* [the church and the theatre], enough of the period's antitheatrical fervor had religious roots that French theatre polemics are often also conceptualized as a conflict between the church and the theatre.

Surprisingly, though, little scholarly attention has focused on the human interactions and embodied activities that facilitated the spread of antitheatrical ideas among priests. Histories of French polemics about the stage can therefore give the impression that actors had bodies whereas priests did not, creating a

---

The research that gave rise to this article was funded by a Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship from the US Department of Education, as well as start-up grants from Simon Fraser University and the University of Calgary. I would like to thank colleagues at the American Society for Theatre Research and the American Academy of Religion for comments they provided on presentations leading to this article, with special thanks to Shannon Steen, Nicholas Paige, Michael Wintroub, Shannon Jackson, and Déborah Blocker for feedback they provided on early versions, and to Anna Rosensweig and the peer reviewers at *Theatre Survey* for their feedback in the final stages. All errors and oversights of course remain my own.

© The Authors, 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of American Society for Theatre Research, Inc. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the same Creative Commons licence is included and the original work is properly cited. The written permission of Cambridge University Press must be obtained for commercial re-use.

mind–body split in scholarship on antitheatrical sentiment by associating the theatre with materiality and the church with ideas. Alongside its use of writing, however, the Catholic Church used what theatre scholars could consider a performance repertoire to help transmit theological ideas, doctrinal propositions, religious values, and moral arguments to the laity. This repertoire consisted of the gestures, ceremonies, and sacraments that made up the liturgy, along with the modes of bodily comportment that helped churchmen forge their priestly identity at the altar and in daily interactions with parishioners.<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge about priestly repertoires matters for theatre history because priests at the parish level gave antitheatrical sentiment its teeth, transforming ideas about the theatre’s moral harm into material consequences for actors. They did this by excluding actors from the sacraments. In a Catholic kingdom where sacramental participation and civic life were practically synonymous, exclusion had grave consequences for a person’s well-being and reputation.<sup>5</sup> The nature of the sacramental exclusion imposed on actors varied from diocese to diocese but resulted in the marginalization of actors regardless of the exclusion’s specific form. In some places, actors could not receive Communion or marry. In others, they were refused the last rites and Christian burial. In many places, they could not serve as godparents. Only by renouncing their profession could actors obtain absolution and restore themselves to sacramental participation. Priestly repertoires, in other words, played a crucial role in antitheatrical sentiment’s history.

To reconstruct the early modern Catholic Church’s bodily repertoire, especially as priests used it in relation to the theatre and its players, requires a performance analysis of liturgical manuals and other ecclesiastical texts such as episcopal edicts, seminary rules, and priestly correspondence. Chief among such documents is the diocesan Ritual, a type of liturgical book issued by the local bishop that gave instructions for conducting all the sacraments except the Eucharist.<sup>6</sup> In the same way that a Missal details what priests are supposed to say and do while celebrating Mass, a Ritual contains instructions for the other six Catholic sacraments.<sup>7</sup> When a bishop wanted the priests in his diocese to exclude actors from the sacraments, he made this clear by listing actors in the diocesan Ritual as “public sinners,” thereby disqualifying them from the sacraments until they publicly renounced their actions.<sup>8</sup> As Dubu has shown in his study of 127 diocesan Rituals published in France between 1600 and 1713, 30 percent of the Rituals published after 1649 excluded actors from the sacraments, whereas only 10 percent had classified actors as public sinners during the first half of the century.<sup>9</sup> An analysis of the diocesan Ritual’s use in seminary training and parish practice between approximately 1640 and 1740 therefore offers one way to gain a more nuanced understanding of how attitudes against actors spread among French churchmen at the parish level.

Although diocesan Rituals provide a documentary link between antitheatrical sentiment and concrete actions taken against stage players, or between ideas and materiality, many questions remain about how to interpret the evidence they provide. Given the bishop’s responsibility for issuing a Ritual, a top-down hypothesis about the relationship between antitheatrical sentiment and the sacramental exclusion of actors implicitly informs scholarship on the theatre conflict. Dubu’s approach, focused on the bishops who issued Rituals rather than the clerical teams who often composed them or the priests who used them, exemplifies this

tendency. Stated explicitly, a top-down hypothesis would propose that antitheatrical ideas from treatises associated with the *querelle de la moralité du théâtre* inspired French bishops to list actors as public sinners, which in turn prompted parish priests to withhold sacraments from actors. This top-down version of events may certainly describe the transmission of antitheatrical ideas in some cases, especially after the 1660s. At least two important difficulties nonetheless challenge a top-down transmission hypothesis, namely, chronology and consistency.

From a chronological perspective, the first Ritual to list *comédiens* (professional actors) as public sinners poses a puzzle.<sup>10</sup> Published in 1649, it predates by at least a decade the century's major French antitheatrical treatises by Armand de Bourbon, prince de Conti (1666), Nicole (1667), the abbé Joseph de Voisin (1671), and Bossuet (1694). Its location also raises questions. Whereas one would expect to find the first antiactor Ritual in Paris, the hotbed of theatre debates, the first Ritual to specify that *comédiens* should not receive the sacraments was instead issued by Félix Vialart de Herse, the bishop of Châlons, where the sparse archival traces of theatre professionals make it unlikely that parish priests had many encounters with actors. What prompted the bishop of Châlons to add *comédiens* to the list of public sinners at midcentury?

Certainly, a growing tide of sentiment against the theatre during the first half of the seventeenth century provides important context. By 1649, English antitheatrical sentiment had already given rise to William Prynne's *Histrio-Mastix* (1633) and to the suppression of public theatres in England in 1642.<sup>11</sup> Debates about the theatre were intensifying in France, too. A protestant pastor named André Rivet published a pamphlet against plays in 1639, in response to which Georges de Scudéry published a defense of the theatre the same year. Between 1643 and 1646, Corneille's martyr plays, *Polyeucte* and *Théodore*, incited discussion about the theatre's capacity to represent sacred subjects. Most important, in 1641, at the behest of his chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII issued a royal edict in favor of actors. It declared that as long as their acting did not contain representations that could harm the public, such as "dishonest actions" or "lascivious words or words with double meanings," actors were not to be held guilty for their profession.<sup>12</sup> As Henry Phillips and Déborah Blocker suggest, French bishops who listed actors as public sinners in the wake of Louis XIII's 1641 edict may have done so to counteract the king's effort to protect stage players from the condition of infamy inherited from Roman law.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, neither the edict of 1641 nor the still-developing circulation of treatises for and against the theatre explains why one bishop rather than another would list actors as public sinners at midcentury. The history of ideas does not fully elucidate the material facts.

The second challenge to a top-down hypothesis about the transmission of antitheatrical ideas among parish-level clergy has to do with the lack of consistency with which priests excluded actors from the sacraments. In Gaston Maugras's words, "everything is inconsistent" in the history of the French church's refusal to administer sacraments to actors.<sup>14</sup> To begin with, as studies of the early modern French theatre unanimously attest, not all bishops listed actors as public sinners. Although the number of diocesan Rituals to exclude actors from the sacraments increased sharply during the second half of the seventeenth century, most bishops chose not to exclude actors from the sacraments. The 30 percent of antiactor Rituals

identified by Dubu represent an important share of French diocesan Rituals, but far from the majority, which either suggests that antitheatrical tracts had limited influence in episcopal circles or that other factors, beyond the theological arguments advanced by figures such as Nicole and Bossuet, helped determine whether a diocese adopted measures against actors.

To make an inconsistent situation still more unpredictable, not all priests refused sacraments to actors, even in those dioceses with an antiactor Ritual. French clergy did not, for example, refuse sacraments to Italian actors, even though diocesan Rituals did not specify that an actor's nationality had any bearing on their status as public sinners.<sup>15</sup> Nor did churchmen consider singers, dancers, and opera performers *comédiens*, which consequently spared them from sacramental exclusion.<sup>16</sup> Even within a single parish, variability occurred. Parish registers suggest that priests sometimes allowed actors to list an alternative profession so they could participate in the sacraments, especially for baptisms. Molière, for example, used his titles as "Valet de chambre tapissier du Roi" and "Écuyer" in parish registers that list him as the godfather at baptisms for his nephew in 1659 and for the children of fellow actors Du Parc in 1663 and La Grange in 1672, as well as baptisms in 1661 and 1663.<sup>17</sup> At least two of these baptisms were conducted in the Parish of Saint-Eustache, whose clergymen would later refuse to give Molière a Christian burial. The parish's priests thus knew Molière's profession as an actor when he served as godfather and chose to overlook it. Actors who lacked titles as illustrious as those possessed by Molière listed themselves as "bourgeois de Paris," again suggesting that priests occasionally allowed for loopholes when it came to sacramental exclusion.

A further element of inconsistency arises in relation to the clergymen who penned antitheatrical treatises. They were not the same priests who withheld sacraments from actors, creating yet another breach between the history of antitheatrical ideas and their implementation at the parish level. Bossuet provides the best example. Although in 1694 he authored a refutation of the stage, Bossuet never issued a diocesan Ritual in his capacity as bishop.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, the priests whose names have entered the historical record for withholding sacraments from actors did not compose treatises against the theatre. Nor did they, in general, belong to the highest ranks of the church. The three priests who refused to come to Molière's bedside—Fathers Lenfant, Lechat, and Paysant—were *prêtres habitués*, a type of priest that Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun calls "the true plebs of the clergy."<sup>19</sup> Such priests lived together in a parish without any kind of benefice and supported the curate and vicar by conducting smaller religious services, such as masses for the dead and vespers, the revenues from which they shared in common.<sup>20</sup> As the century progressed, the likelihood that such priests had some kind of formal ecclesiastical training increased but, particularly during the first half of the seventeenth century, the average level of education for French diocesan clergymen was low, a trend that only gradually began to change after the 1640s with the foundation of France's first seminaries.<sup>21</sup> Even in the Parisian parish of Saint-Sulpice, where most known cases in which a priest refused sacraments to an actor occurred, and where the priests had a greater level of education thanks to their close connection to the parish's seminary, the clergymen who withheld sacraments from actors did not contribute any of their own pamphlets to the century's theatre debates.<sup>22</sup> To understand why some priests refused sacraments to some actors under some

conditions therefore requires attention to the diversity of the early modern priesthood, the process of ecclesiastical professionalization over the course of the seventeenth century, and the particularities of a sacramental encounter that might make it more or less difficult for a priest to exert his authority in relation to an actor.

In other words, the story of antitheatrical sentiment needs its own performance history. The diocesan Ritual offers a starting point for a performance account of antitheatrical sentiment because it was not merely a prescriptive text that facilitated top-down reforms; it also functioned as a ceremonial object. When we focus on the ceremonial function of the diocesan Ritual and its relation to priestly performance rather than on its status as a prescriptive text, a different story of French antitheatrical activity emerges. A performance analysis reveals that the Ritual's physical presence during liturgical rites authorized a limited but nonetheless significant degree of ceremonial innovation on the part of clergymen who found themselves in situations for which the diocesan Ritual's content did not offer explicit instructions. This margin for innovation had important consequences for stage players—especially during the 1640s, when Catholic reform gained momentum in France and diocesan Rituals did not yet include instructions for how to deal with new cultural figures, such as the professional actor, who were gaining visibility and political legitimacy. Rather than trickling down from regulatory texts imposed by the church's elite, the diocesan Ritual's ceremonial status suggests that the idea of excluding actors from the sacraments emerged first among France's parish clergy in places where clergymen who did not belong to religious orders—known as secular priests—were struggling to professionalize by improving their ceremonial skills. Seminaries proved just such places. In them, ecclesiastical action against actors began as ceremonial experiments, captured the attention of France's higher clergy, and thereafter passed into normative documents like the diocesan Ritual, reinforcing antitheatrical discourses by enabling the theatre's opponents to cite the church's liturgical handbooks in their arguments against the stage.

### The Ritual as Prescriptive Text and Ceremonial Object

The diocesan Ritual's dual nature as both a prescriptive text and a ceremonial object created a bridge between the realm of ideas and the priest's liturgical and pastoral activity, making it a particularly flexible tool for the church in its confrontations with the theatre. In its prescriptive aspect the Ritual helped standardize priestly practice, while in its ceremonial aspect it enhanced the priest's authority. These two dimensions of the Ritual's use operated in tandem and fostered a slow process by means of which some features of local practice—such as the refusal of sacraments to actors—could enter the church's normative repertoire.<sup>23</sup> To scholars focused on the Ritual's content, its prescriptive aspect may seem to dominate. Talal Asad emphasizes the Ritual's function as a set of instructions in *Genealogies of Religion*, where he explains that long before the word "ritual" came to signify symbolic behavior, it designated a "book directing the way rites should be performed."<sup>24</sup> Here, prescription overshadows ceremony.

From the earliest days of the diocesan Ritual's history in the Middle Ages, however, the development of its content and structure derived from local needs; the flow moved predominantly from practice toward codification rather than the reverse. Produced for

the purpose of facilitating liturgical practice, the precursors of the early modern diocesan Ritual, which date from the tenth century in France, were often designed for use by a local monastery and bore names such as *Agenda*, *Sacerdotale*, *Pastorale*, *Sacramentale*, *Promptuarium*, *Liber officialis*, or *Enchiridion*.<sup>25</sup> As this variety of titles suggests, the size, length, and content of these texts varied greatly.<sup>26</sup> So did their function and authority. The term *Sacramentale*, for example, referred to the book's content, which concerned the sacraments, and *Agenda* evoked the idea of functions "appropriate" for those in a pastoral position.<sup>27</sup> Neither of these names emphasized the text's prescriptive nature. Nor were France's early Rituals necessarily issued by a prelate. In the first part of the sixteenth century, many were prepared by printers and booksellers who recognized in the Ritual a marketable product or by theologians responding to local need.<sup>28</sup> Only gradually did the Ritual come to serve a standardizing function across the church, and even today each diocesan Ritual preserves its local flavor.

Diocesan Rituals that designated actors as public sinners figured into a larger trend in which French bishops in the seventeenth century enhanced the prescriptive function of Rituals by offering progressively more exhaustive instructions to clergymen. Other groups found themselves decried as public sinners in these longer Rituals, too, including heretics, schismatics, heavy drinkers, and duelists.<sup>29</sup> This trend toward longer Rituals began circa 1540, when French bishops started to embrace the Ritual as a tool for internal reform and an expression of their episcopal authority, as demonstrated by title pages that bore the bishop's name or arms. The Rituals of the period manifest the text's increasingly prescriptive aims by featuring a pastoral letter at the beginning of the volume and by choosing the term *Rituale* to designate these texts.<sup>30</sup> As Hyppolite de Bethune, bishop of Verdun, explained, the term *Rituale* meant "the rules that pastors must observe in carrying out their functions are therein prescribed."<sup>31</sup> In 1614, Pope Paul V issued a Roman Ritual, further developing the genre's prescriptive function. Without eliminating Rituals published for dioceses and religious orders, Paul V proclaimed "Amidst the numerous and existing rituals it [the Roman Ritual] would rank as the official and authorized one, by whose standard the officiants could fulfill their priestly office unhesitatingly, and with uniformity and precision."<sup>32</sup> In France, bishops emulated the regulatory aims set out by Paul V, in some cases by adopting the Roman Ritual at the diocesan level (Fig. 1) and in most cases by either adding local instructions to it or incorporating portions of the Roman Ritual into a revised diocesan Ritual.<sup>33</sup> Either way, although the overall production of Rituals decreased in the seventeenth century as compared to the sixteenth, their length grew in keeping with their enhanced prescriptive aims.<sup>34</sup> The Ritual of Bourges published in 1666, for example, fills two volumes, each of more than five hundred pages. In this multiplication of instructions given by bishops to their clergy—increasingly in French rather than Latin—one can see the church's effort to train and control parish-level interactions between priests and parishioners.<sup>35</sup>

The terms selected to designate actors in these longer diocesan Rituals suggest varying degrees of antitheatrical zeal. *Comédien*, the most frequently occurring term, connoted a certain degree of respect because France's most reputable troupes used it to describe themselves. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the term *historion*, inherited from Roman law, connoted infamy and contempt.<sup>36</sup> The term *farceurs* designated those who specialized in farce, a genre that had mostly disappeared



Figure 1. An early seventeenth-century woodcut of a parish priest holding a diocesan Ritual while blessing water to make holy water. Source: *Rituale Romanum Pauli Quinti, pontificis maximi iussu editum* (Lugduni [Lyon]: Michaelis Chevalier, 1616), 247.

from Parisian stages by 1648, while the term *bateleurs* referred to acrobats and street performers. Both *farceur* and *bateleur* had derogatory connotations, especially when applied to actors who considered themselves professionals, like those at the Comédie-Française after 1680.<sup>37</sup> France's most extreme example of an anti-actor diocesan Ritual used all three terms for performers. Issued in 1667 by Nicolas Pavillon (1597–1677), the Jansenist-leaning bishop of Alet, it demonstrates how the placement of actors on the list of public sinners promoted their exclusion from the sacramental community. “Who are those who must not be admitted to Holy Communion?” it asks in the chapter on the Eucharist. The response:

Those who are considered publicly unworthy, as are the excommunicated, forbidden, infamous; for example, those who are recognized as cohabiting, usurers, magicians, sorcerers, blasphemers, drunks, actors, farce players and acrobats; women of ill repute, duelers, those living in enmity, and other public sinners.<sup>38</sup>

If a person from any of the above categories were to request Communion, the Ritual commanded the priest to turn them away until their behavior had changed: “You must refuse Communion to all these people until they have corrected themselves, made the appropriate penance, and repaired the scandal they have caused.”<sup>39</sup> The Ritual thus taught priests in Alet to treat actors, professional or otherwise, as public sinners and chase them from the altar.

Given that Rituals circulated among dioceses, the prescriptive influence of anti-actor Rituals could readily extend beyond the parishes for which it was officially intended.<sup>40</sup> During an episcopal visit in 1659, for example, the bishop of Lodève

discovered that the priests in his diocese were using Rituals from Bordeaux, Lyon, and Toulouse.<sup>41</sup> A Ritual's prescriptive content alone, therefore, tells only one part of the story of the way the proscription of actors as public sinners spread from one diocese to another. Its movement, too, mattered. Nor were Rituals static texts: in dioceses such as Chartres, Rouen, Paris, Lyon, Le Mans, and Toulouse, the bishop issued updated versions as often as seven to twelve times in the sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The Ritual's prescriptive ambitions must be considered, then, in light of the way priests used it.

Despite the diocesan Ritual's growing prescriptive force in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it remained a ceremonial object, too. Seminary textbooks on how to conduct the sacraments offer a glimpse of the way priests thought of and used books such as the diocesan Ritual. A clergyman named Matthieu Beuvelet from Paris's Seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet authored one of the seventeenth century's most widely circulated liturgical handbooks, the *Instruction sur le manuel* [Instruction on the Ritual], which had already reached its fourth edition by 1659. Based on thirty-eight Rituals from France, Germany, and Spain, Beuvelet's *Instruction sur le manuel* compiled what he considered the best instructions from each of his source texts, creating a synthesis of European diocesan Rituals intended to showcase what was, in his view, the church's ceremonial uniformity.<sup>43</sup> Overlooked by previous studies on France's theatre conflict, Beuvelet's handbook is particularly interesting for the history of antitheatrical sentiment's spread among parish clergy. Inspired, no doubt, by the Ritual of Châlons, which is listed among its sources, the handbook classified actors as public sinners. "To whom can one give the last rites?" it inquires. "To all the faithful who request it, with the exception of two types of people":

1. Public sinners, like usurers, concubines, actors [*comédiens*], those who are excommunicated or denounced by name, unless they have beforehand made satisfaction.
2. Those who for some accident of illness, like frenzy, weakness of mind, a violent and continual cough, vomiting, and the like, cannot receive the blessed Sacrament without some irreverence.<sup>44</sup>

Seminarians who learned to conduct the sacraments with the help of this handbook, whether they came from or later worked in a diocese with an antiactor Ritual, would come to see actors as public sinners who must make satisfaction by renouncing the stage before receiving the church's ceremonies. Beuvelet's handbook makes it safe to assert that, in comparison to clergymen who never spent time in a seminary, a seminary-trained priest was more likely to perceive actors as morally dangerous, more likely to refuse sacraments to actors and, if he later climbed the ranks to bishop, more likely to issue an antiactor diocesan Ritual.

Beuvelet's handbook also sheds light on the diocesan Ritual's ceremonial functions. It does so by highlighting the very tactile relationship a priest needed to have with a diocesan Ritual, which Beuvelet signaled by choosing the Greek term *Enchiridion* to designate his text, rendered as *Manuel* in French, meaning a small handbook. The term *Manuel* denotes a Ritual, he explained, "because one must have it almost always at hand, or at least render the use of it so familiar that

when you are looking for something, you can find it right away upon opening the book.”<sup>45</sup> Kept at hand, the diocesan Ritual constituted a key ceremonial element. To keep the Ritual at hand despite its length, priests either had an assistant carry it or kept an abridged version that could more easily fit in a pouch or pocket.<sup>46</sup> Rather than a dry reference text stored on a clergyman’s shelf, the Ritual accompanied a priest as he conducted sacraments in the parish. By calling diocesan Rituals “manuals,” Beuvelet and the seminaries that used his compilation taught priests to consider the Ritual essential to ceremonial enactment.

When held in the hands of a priest during a rite or sacrament, the Ritual not only enabled him to find quickly the liturgical information he needed. It also constituted a ceremonial object: even if its pages remained closed, the diocesan Ritual’s physical presence underscored the priest’s authority, enhanced the respect due to the actions carried out during the rite, and functioned as a locus for the negotiations implied by any sacramental undertaking. Seventeenth-century France’s literate population recognized such functions as characteristic of ceremonial objects. According to Antoine Furetière’s *Dictionnaire universel*, objects and actions that augmented the splendor, seriousness, or good reputation of a person or institution were at the heart of ceremony, which he defined as “The assemblage of several actions, services, and ways of acting that serve to render something more magnificent or solemn,” or, in an ecclesiastical context, “those things that can render divine worship more august and venerable.”<sup>47</sup> A diocesan Ritual’s presence in a priest’s hand likewise made a sacrament more splendid.

Splendor involves power. Thanks to the diocesan Ritual’s ceremonial function, a priest could reinforce his ecclesiastical power by displaying the diocesan Ritual. Not surprisingly, issues concerning power and its expression imbue each of Furetière’s definitions, epitomized by the royal entry “carried out with great *ceremony*.”<sup>48</sup> Twenty- and twenty-first-century ritual theorists interested in ceremony likewise highlight the types of power dynamics implicit in Furetière’s royal entry example. “Ceremony is manifestly competitive, sometimes conflict-laden, and often divides the world into ‘us’ and ‘them,’” notes Ronald L. Grimes.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, sacramental practice at the parish level frequently entailed conflict and competition. A diocesan Ritual in hand, a priest had a valuable resource for asserting his position in such situations. The diocesan Ritual, in its ceremonial aspect, symbolized the priest’s power and helped him realize the authority attributed to him by post-Tridentine doctrines on the priesthood.<sup>50</sup>

The special treatment accorded to the Ritual during the administration of the sacraments further testifies to its ceremonial status. Not a sacred object, liturgical instructions offer fewer details for its handling than for objects like the consecrated Eucharistic wafer. Most of the time, the diocesan Ritual’s content assumes that its ecclesiastical readers already know how to deploy a liturgical book in a ceremonial context. Nonetheless, the rare occasions where the Ritual mentions itself afford a glimpse of how its presence helped a clergyman produce priestly authority and elicit respect for his actions. Beuvelet’s chapter on the sacrament of Extreme Unction, for example, specifies that upon being summoned to a sick person’s home to administer the last rites, the priest should first go to the church to find a cleric to accompany him, whose job it was to carry a small cross in his right hand and the Ritual under his arm.<sup>51</sup> From a practical perspective, it would have been easier to carry the

Ritual in a bag, which was in fact suggested for some sacraments.<sup>52</sup> Instead, the priest and cleric formed a small procession in which the Ritual enjoyed a privileged position, near the holy oil carried by the priest. The Ritual of Bourges, on which Beuvelet draws extensively in his own handbook, also emphasizes the placement of the Ritual under the cleric's arm or—if a cleric could not be found—under the priest's arm. Whether carried by priest or cleric, the instructions placed the diocesan Ritual on display as a ceremonial object.

Through its display in the context of the sacrament of Extreme Unction—the sacrament during which a priest would demand that an actor renounce the stage upon threat of not receiving the last rites—the diocesan Ritual ceremonially underscored the priest's authority. First, by delegating the responsibility of carrying the Ritual to a cleric, the liturgical instructions for Extreme Unction gave the priest an entourage. According to early modern ceremonial protocols, the greater a person's entourage, the greater his or her magnificence.<sup>53</sup> A priest accompanied by a cleric who carried his Ritual thereby enacted the importance attributed to the priesthood by the Council of Trent. Second, even without a cleric, a priest who carried the Ritual under his arm while holding a cross in his right hand associated the sacramental actions he would perform—described in the Ritual's pages—with the power and agency attributed to the Crucifixion in the Catholic tradition. Finally, by holding the Ritual the priest could increase the laity's respect by making his own respect for the ceremonies visible. As the Ritual of Reims argued, the priest had a responsibility to “make outwardly visible” his respect for holy things.<sup>54</sup> To show this respect, the Ritual admonished priests to follow its instructions precisely and to read out loud to their parish the lessons contained in the Ritual about the respect parishioners should direct toward the sacraments, the ceremonies, and the clergy. These gestures implied that the priest must physically hold the Ritual. Having a Ritual in hand thus constituted one of the “external ceremonies” by means of which a priest enacted and modeled liturgical respect, along with other ceremonial expressions like wearing the surplice and stole, assembling a clerical entourage, and lighting candles.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, the Ritual's physical presence also functioned ceremonially to limit the individual charismatic authority a priest might obtain from an outstanding liturgical performance. Although pocket-sized editions and abbreviated versions of diocesan Rituals existed so that priests could always carry one, the standard editions were imposing books whose size and weight served as a reminder that the ceremonies, rites, and explanations proffered by the priest were not his own; he acted in the name of the church. Both Beuvelet's *Instructions sur le manuel* and the Ritual of Reims demonstrate this concern for directing respect toward the church's institutional heritage rather than its individual representatives by asserting that their own version of the Ritual reproduces exactly the church's unchanging ceremonial instructions. For Beuvelet, the “content and form” of the church's ceremonies “remain inviolable for all the Sacraments” since their origin sixteen hundred years before his handbook, whereas the Ritual of Reims asserts that “The church conserves so religiously the ancient ceremonies that she changes nothing in the words that one . . . uses in administering the sacraments, not even upon renewing from time to time the Ritual.”<sup>56</sup> Such claims regarding the Ritual's content established its physical presence as a sign of institutional rather than personal

authority.<sup>57</sup> Whatever respect or reputation would otherwise accrue to the priest thanks to a skillful performance was consequently redirected toward the church by means of the Ritual's constant display. Like the clerical robes that seminaries helped to enforce, the diocesan Ritual served as a signal that the priest acted not on his own authority but by means of the authority invested in his priestly office.

In reality, of course, liturgical ceremonies changed over time, no two priests performed them in exactly the same way, and on any given day a priest might face a situation in which he was not quite sure what to do. In the early 1640s, actors who requested sacraments presented priests with a dilemma that diocesan Rituals did not yet tell them how to resolve. On the one hand, France had inherited from Roman law the tradition of considering actors as infamous, while on the other hand Louis XIV's edict had at least provisionally lifted some players from infamy, namely those whose plays belonged to the neoclassical genres of tragedy and comedy rather than farce.<sup>58</sup> When confronted with ambiguous figures, priests had to decide whether to administer the sacrament in question. The choice to refuse the sacraments was not always an easy one. Despite the elevated language used by Catholic reformers to describe the priest's authority, early modern texts that taught priests how to do their jobs make it clear that many clergymen shied away from withholding the sacraments, especially in relation to a parishioner who enjoyed some form of secular power or authority. The prospect of saying no to a nobleman might fill a priest with trepidation. Professional actors, too, benefited from a modicum of authority based on the favor granted them by the king and by their audiences. To help priests in difficult sacramental situations, theologians composed whole tomes on situations in which it was not clear whether sacraments should be withheld or not.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, to boost the priest's courage, seminary tracts offered injunctions like the following from Charles Borromeo: "Do not fail to publicly reprimand and correct [public sins], whatever bad-mouthing, bullying, slander, or insults might come your way, as long as it is useful to the glory of God and the salvation of souls."<sup>60</sup> The admonishment that the priest should be willing to face loss of reputation and harassment suggests that clergymen needed strong resolve to follow through with a sacramental refusal.

Even in situations not explicitly covered by the diocesan Ritual's instructions, in its capacity as a ceremonial object the diocesan Ritual's physical presence helped bolster a priest's authority by lending the air of prescribed action to his decisions. Liturgical traditions, of course, placed a limit on the actions a priest could undertake during a sacramental refusal. Where the diocesan Ritual's content did not provide specific directives, the priest nonetheless possessed a margin of creativity in his response to a situation. For example, as I discuss below, during the second half of the seventeenth century priests adopted the practice of making actors refuse the stage in pen and ink, if possible before a notary. This was not altogether surprising given the church's long history of using scribes to record its affairs; in fact, before the fifteenth century all notaries in France were clerics.<sup>61</sup> Nothing in the diocesan Ritual, however, required public sinners to produce a written renunciation.<sup>62</sup> Rather, the Ritual's physical presence lent the air of prescribed action to the priest's decision to demand a renunciation in writing.

As the case of priestly demands for written renunciations demonstrates, analyses that overemphasize the Ritual's prescriptive function risk giving too much credence

to the church's own discourses about itself. Although seventeenth-century diocesan Rituals declare their perfect conformity to ancient customs and denounce as "reckless" any priestly action that did not exactly follow the Ritual's content, to at least some degree these statements served a performative function by instantiating the very authority the Ritual sought for itself.<sup>63</sup> Even the most detailed diocesan Rituals did not provide instructions for every scenario a priest might encounter while administering the sacraments, making it impossible for a priest to follow the Ritual mechanically. Furthermore, when a priest held a diocesan Ritual in his hands, its ceremonial aspect continued to shape what he could and could not do in liturgical encounters, especially in situations fraught with ambiguity. Consequently, the diocesan Ritual must be treated as a multifaceted entity—as both text and object—whose pages demanded prescriptive force and whose presence generated authority. The slippage between these two aspects of the diocesan Ritual—between its prescriptive and ceremonial functions—opened a narrow but nonnegligible space for the priest's own best judgment about how to handle a sacramental situation and, by extension, for cautious liturgical experimentation.

### Prudence and Liturgical Experimentation

Instructions in the diocesan Ritual acknowledged that a clergyman must think for himself, within the bounds established by the Ritual's instructions. In some cases, a Ritual might explicitly call for the priest's personalized contribution, as the Ritual of Reims does when it tells priests that they can add "that which they judge appropriate" to the ready-made lessons provided in the Ritual "according to their erudition and ability, as long as they do so in conformity with the Ritual's contents."<sup>64</sup> This creative margin had a name: the church called it "prudence." Diocesan Rituals specified that a clergyman must exercise prudence to determine which questions to ask during confession, whether to defer or refuse absolution, which forms of penance to impose, and how best to deal with the different types of people who requested a sacrament.<sup>65</sup> Prudence afforded priests a certain degree of liturgical flexibility. Classified by the church as one of four desirable but nonessential spiritual qualities recommended in priests who heard confessions—that is to say, qualities the lack of which would not nullify a sacrament—prudence created margin within the rites leading up to a sacrament so that clergymen could elaborate solutions they considered appropriate to a particular case or circumstance.<sup>66</sup> The ideal priest, in other words, followed all the instructions in the Ritual, but not by rote. Over time, this creative margin that the church afforded to priestly prudence facilitated a process through which one priest's ceremonial experiments, such as recourse to a notary during a confession, could enter the clergy's repertoire of accepted best practices and eventually find its way into the diocesan Ritual's explicit prescriptions.

A cardinal virtue, ecclesiastical texts treat prudence as a term even the least-skilled priestly readers already know and therefore do not define it.<sup>67</sup> Descriptions of ecclesiastical prudence, however, call for a type of action that theatre scholars would today understand as improvisational. An analogy between a sacramental exchange and early modern improvisational theatre clearly has limits. To begin with, diocesan Rituals do not acknowledge key features of theatrical improvisation, such as laughter and surprise, that seminary training explicitly

sought to prevent.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, some sacraments left more room for priestly prudence than others. A highly scripted sacrament like the Eucharist left few words and gestures to the priest's prudence, whereas confession required priests to make many impromptu decisions. Although a priest did not have the same leeway that France's early farce players or commedia dell'arte performers enjoyed, a priest who administered the sacraments had to assess a social situation quickly, classify the participants according to a standardized list of character types, and then act in accordance with the resulting scenario. According to Diana Taylor, in a scenario "all the elements are there: encounter, conflict, resolution, and dénouement. . . . But they are, ultimately, flexible and open to change."<sup>69</sup> Each confession presented clergymen with a scenario in Taylor's sense. On the part of the priest, this scenario involved deciding which questions to ask, whether to accord absolution, and which penance to assign based on a list of characteristics attributed to the penitent, including place of residence, social station, attitude, intelligence, and the length of time since his or her previous confession.<sup>70</sup> In Beuvelet's words, prudence expressed itself "in four principal ways, of which the first concerns the interrogations one must do before and after the confession; the second, when one must accord, defer, or refuse absolution; the third, the manner in which to require penance or satisfaction; and the fourth, the different ways to deal with penitents depending on their dispositions."<sup>71</sup> Consequently, the thinking and behavior that a sacramental encounter demanded of a priest shared many similarities with theatrical forms that combined "well-defined fixed characters and lively fixed situations."<sup>72</sup> In the "lively fixed situations" encountered by a priest while administering the sacraments, prudence referred to the interpretive acts by means of which he applied doctrine and edicts to specific circumstances.

Two seventeenth-century anecdotes about the refusal of sacraments to actors demonstrate how confession, to borrow a description of commedia dell'arte, was "simultaneously well-rehearsed *and* open to the inspiration of the moment, a meeting of structured control and spontaneous creativity."<sup>73</sup> These anecdotes further suggest how the diocesan Ritual in its dual status as prescriptive text and ceremonial object both shaped the scenarios priests enacted and legitimized their experimental departures from the script printed in the Ritual. Finally, the interplay between prudent experimentation and legitimization that was facilitated by both the content and physical presence of a diocesan Ritual during a sacrament shows how a practice, like refusing absolution or Communion to actors, could begin as a situationally specific innovation and then spread, becoming a prescriptive action.

The first anecdote shows how the refusal of sacraments to actors entered the confessional scenario. It recounts what I believe to be the confessional exchange between a priest and actor that inspired French bishops to begin listing actors as public sinners at the end of the 1640s. Recorded in a manuscript memoir written by Jean du Ferrier (1609–85), one of the first clergymen trained by Jean-Jacques Olier at the seminary he founded in 1642 in the parish of Saint-Sulpice in the Faubourg Saint-Germain just outside Paris, the anecdote describes a period just before the first antiactor Ritual's publication.<sup>74</sup> After entering holy orders, Ferrier served until 1649 as the superior of a community of priests, akin to the *prêtres habitués* discussed earlier, who helped the curate administer sacraments in the parish.<sup>75</sup> Ferrier reports that during this period, an actor who had been performing

farces at the Foire Saint-Germain, or seasonal fair near the church of Saint-Sulpice, found himself ill to the point of death and asked for a confessor and the sacraments.<sup>76</sup> Upon learning of the actor's condition, Ferrier instructed the priest who had responded to the actor's summons to "absolve him if he saw him repentant, but to forbid him the Communion of the holy Viaticum."<sup>77</sup> According to Ferrier's account, this sacramental refusal prompted two actors to leave their profession. The first was a young man who had "entered the company [troupe] only a month before in the belief that there was no wrong in it," and the second was the dying actor who "recognized himself as unworthy to participate in it [Communion]" and "avowed that he would renounce the theatre, and indeed when he had recovered his health, he abandoned it entirely."<sup>78</sup> These conversions, according to Ferrier, convinced other curates in Paris that withholding sacraments from actors was a fruitful strategy.<sup>79</sup> "Messieurs the curates of Paris, in the next monthly assembly, approved this refusal as very fitting," he writes.<sup>80</sup> Ferrier and other priests who worked at the parish level in Paris concluded that sacramental refusal was an effective way to counteract the theatre.

Ferrier's story demonstrates a priest's application of prudence to interpret and respond to a sacramental situation in a contextually specific way. Paris's own diocesan Ritual would not list actors as public sinners until 1654, and the bishop of Châlons had not yet excluded actors from the sacraments in his Ritual, either. Adherence to a prescription in the diocesan Ritual did not, therefore, dictate Ferrier's decision to refuse Communion to the actor. Rather, he relied on prudence to decide what to do. His first interpretive act consisted in assigning an identity to the dying individual, in keeping with the diocesan Ritual's instruction that priests use their prudence to determine the penitent's place in the social order.<sup>81</sup> At the beginning of the anecdote, Ferrier classifies the sick person as an *opérateur* who "went onstage where he represented farces to attract the people."<sup>82</sup> By choosing the term *opérateur*, Ferrier characterizes the dying man as suspicious. Furetière defines *opérateur* as a "Charlatan who sells his drugs and remedies in public and onstage."<sup>83</sup> Of the terms used to refer to performers in seventeenth-century France, *opérateur* was one of the most degrading—even more so than terms such as *farceur* and *bateleur* that churchmen would later use in diocesan Rituals. In fact, Ferrier reports that the head of the troupe later contested Ferrier's use of terms such as *opérateur* and insisted that he and his fellow actors were *comédiens*. Ferrier in turn rejects the word *comédien* as the stage player's effort to "elevate his profession above that of charlatans and puppeteers."<sup>84</sup> This negotiation about how to classify the performers foregrounds the interpretive work in which Ferrier engaged. As soon as Ferrier designated the performer an *opérateur* instead of, say, a *bourgeois de Paris*, Ferrier invoked a social category that necessitated additional prudence for its heightened ambiguity.

Indeed, ambiguity characterizes Ferrier's telling of the anecdote, highlighting the trial-and-error quality of prudence at work in a given scenario. An important sign that priests did not quite know what to do when confronted with a dying actor can be seen in their need to consult each other. When the priest who initially visited the ill performer does not know how to respond, he goes to Ferrier for advice. Once the situation becomes Ferrier's responsibility, he tries several tactics, including preaching. Ferrier describes how he gave a lecture about the evils of stage plays and the

excommunication of actors, in which he cited the Councils of Arles and of Constantinople, to a group of the ill performer's friends who "came during the night with several torches to demand that we take him the Blessed Sacrament."<sup>85</sup> Most of the troupe did not take kindly to Ferrier's diatribe. "I went out to speak with them," writes Ferrier, "but as they were actors and charlatans without piety or understanding, all that I told them against their profession, rather than persuading them, embittered them."<sup>86</sup> Although one young actor in the group was receptive to Ferrier's chastisements and requested an individual meeting, Ferrier views preaching as less effective than withholding the sacraments. Overall, the account narrates a situation for which Ferrier and his fellow priests understood the scenario but did not have a step-by-step plan. They lacked instructions to follow when it came to dealing with actors, which prompted them to try a range of responses in an effort to convince the performers to change their minds about the theatre's moral status and, by extension, their profession as theatre makers.

For the history of French antitheatrical sentiment, Ferrier's anecdote provides a possible solution to the unsolved question of what prompted the bishop of Châlons to list actors as public sinners in his diocesan Ritual more than a decade before the key antitheatrical texts of the 1660s and 1670s appeared. The anecdote shows an initial phase of clerical attitudes toward actors, prior to the first antiactor Ritual of 1649, in which priests at the parish level knew basic arguments against the theatre, such as the councils cited by Ferrier, and faced a growing number of actors in Paris as the theatre professionalized.<sup>87</sup> Bereft of specific instructions for how to treat actors, these priests used their prudence when confronted with a dying stage player to develop a course of action that would be in keeping with the church's methods for responding to other penitents engaged in potential sources of sin. Ferrier's decision to withhold the sacraments to try to push the actors to renounce their profession found favor with other parish priests and subsequently found its way into the prescriptive content of French diocesan Rituals. Prudence, ceremonial experimentation, and the sharing of information among priests through oral networks form the backbone of this story and show how they innovated within the accepted limits of the confessional scenario.

Ferrier's anecdote thus complements Dubu's assessment of France's early antiactor Rituals. Focused on the diocesan Ritual's prescriptive aspect, Dubu suggests that an ecclesiastical text published before 1649 inspired reform-minded bishops to list actors as public sinners. He identifies as the culprit a Latin edition of Charles Borromeo's works published in Paris in 1643 under the title *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis* [Acts of the Church of Milan].<sup>88</sup> Borromeo, the archbishop of Milan from 1564 to 1584, exerted tremendous influence among French clergymen, as did Olier and the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, to whose initiative Dubu attributes the publication.<sup>89</sup> According to Dubu, this 1643 edition of the *Acta* exaggerated passages from the Italian saint's Episcopal instructions that mentioned entertainments and entertainers. The first antiactor Rituals, Dubu implies, listed *comédiens* as public sinners in emulation of what Dubu considers a "tendentious" translation of Borromeo's *Acta*.<sup>90</sup>

Without attention to the ceremonial aspects of the diocesan Ritual and the confessional scenario, however, Dubu's argument breaks down. Although Dubu finds passages in the 1643 edition where the Latin translation figures actors as profane in

a way the Italian original does not, the 1643 edition did not list entertainers as public sinners, not even in a short passage titled “Of actors, mimes, traveling entertainers, hostels, and gamblers.”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, none of Borromeo’s instructions about the sacraments exclude *histrions* or mimes.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, even if Vialart de Herse’s Ritual drew on Borromeo’s instructions, the bishop of Châlons and the individuals who helped him pen his diocesan Ritual would have needed to do some innovating of their own to draw the conclusion that the Borromean model for a good bishop entailed listing actors as public sinners. They would have needed to rely on their prudence or to have observed other priests who, through the application of prudence, refused sacraments to actors.

Ferrier’s anecdote shows precisely such a process in which local priests applied their prudence and then encouraged other priests—including those who would later have responsibility for drafting diocesan Rituals—to follow their lead. Borromeo’s legacy in relation to the classification of actors as public sinners in France is therefore better understood as setting the constraints within which a churchman needed to enact his prudence. Priests who received seminary training would have thought of Borromeo in this way. Beuvelet cites Borromeo in the chapter of his handbook on penitence and recommends that priests read portions of Borromeo’s *Vie* every day.<sup>93</sup> Ferrier, too, positions Borromeo’s *Acta* as an influence that informed clerical perceptions of the confessional scenario. He discusses Borromeo’s text before the anecdote about the dying actor, so that the actor’s conversion serves as an example of the local clergy’s use of Borromeo. “The *Acts of the Church of Milan* that we had published in Paris,” writes Ferrier, “served as the guidelines to the priests, especially regarding the refusal and delay of absolution as we fruitfully practice it, making [false penitents] rather give up the proximate occasions of [sin] and engage in practices of penance against sins of habit.”<sup>94</sup> Here, Ferrier presents Borromeo’s text as a framework—a *règle* or rule rather than a set of case-by-case instructions—that made the refusal and deferral of absolution integral to the confessional scenario when dealing with Catholics whose behavior could lead others to sin. For Ferrier, attending plays constitutes one of these “proximate occasions” of moral downfall, or situations likely to entice someone to sin.<sup>95</sup> Thus, although Borromeo’s text did not explicitly target actors, it did make the withholding of absolution and, by extension, the refusal of the sacraments a standard part of the confessional scenario, regardless of whether the penitent in question was officially classified as a public sinner in the local diocesan Ritual.

A spirit of experimentation arose from the Borromean focus on eradicating proximate occasions of sin as French priests sought ways to follow Borromeo’s example. In relation to actors, Ferrier’s manuscript signals the link between the Borromean influence and confessional experiments quite clearly. In what seems to be 1647 but possibly as early as 1643 or 1644, the priests of Saint-Sulpice held a three-day conference to which they invited “a number of theologians [*docteurs*] from the Sorbonne and monks [*Religieux*] from each convent in the Faubourg Saint-Germain.”<sup>96</sup> For three days, they “conferred and came to an agreement about” Borromeo’s instructions before they began to hear Easter confessions.<sup>97</sup> Ferrier notes that the time spent discussing Borromeo “produced great good” because “among other things” it resulted in “chasing a band of actors that had come and established itself in the parish with the support of the Duke of

Orleans, calling themselves his actors.”<sup>98</sup> This appears to have been Molière’s *Illustre Théâtre*, established in 1643, which had rented a tennis court called the *Jeu de paume des Mestayers* until late 1644 in the suburb of Saint-Germain-des-Prés and thus in the parish of Saint-Sulpice.<sup>99</sup> In her biography of Molière, Virginia Scott indeed credits the *Illustre Théâtre*’s move to the other side of the Seine at the end of 1644 in part to the churchmen of Saint-Sulpice, noting that “Olier attacked the young company relentlessly, finally forbidding his parishioners to attend their theatre on pain of excommunication and damnation.”<sup>100</sup> What the actors experienced as persecution, Ferrier perceives as an experiment in sacramental practice justified by its results and similar to efforts he and his priests were trying during the same period on parishioners who partook in dueling.<sup>101</sup>

Experiments regarding the best way to put Borromeo’s guidelines into practice spread beyond the parish of Saint-Sulpice through priestly networks, enabling local innovations to enter the confessional scenario in other places. As mentioned by Ferrier, priests in Paris shared information with each other about local problems and successes via a monthly assembly. This assembly, over which Ferrier usually presided in his capacity as superior of the Community of Priests of Saint-Sulpice, likely provided the mechanism by which Ferrier’s method for handling actors spread. According to Ferrier’s account, the assembly “approved” as “very fitting” his refusal of Communion to the dying actor.<sup>102</sup> The assembly gathered all the curates, vicars, and “confrères” of the diocese, who brought with them written responses to between ten and twelve questions agreed upon at the end of the previous assembly.<sup>103</sup> Their written responses formed the basis of a discussion, led by the assembly’s president, who “interrogated” each participant and then “made them repeat the resolutions that Monsieur the Bishop had sent them on the other questions to which they had already responded, so that everyone agreed on the same moral.”<sup>104</sup> Ferrier continues: “The fruit of these conferences cannot be expressed. It produced knowledge [*science*] and discipline among the clergy, unity and vigilance too.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, when Ferrier states that the monthly assembly of curates had approved his practice, this means the question of whether or not to refuse absolution to actors had been among the ten or so questions addressed during an assembly meeting, to which Paris’s curates and vicars had responded in writing, and then upon which the bishop had issued a final decision—presumably to the effect that actors should be treated, like duelists, as those who should renounce a practice or profession before receiving the sacraments. Although not inscribed in a diocesan Ritual until 1649, this assembly decision would have informed the “prudence” exercised by a priest confronted with an actor and would have increased the likelihood that he would demand a renunciation of the stage *as if* this requirement were written in the copy of the diocesan Ritual he held in his hands.

Vialart de Herse, the first French bishop to list actors as public sinners, had close ties to Paris’s seminaries and thus the milieu described by Ferrier, creating the distinct possibility that the Ritual he issued in 1649 drew on the decision arrived at by the monthly assembly of parish priests when they approved Ferrier’s withholding of sacraments to an actor. Vialart de Herse and Olier were cousins, had worked together in two missionary efforts in the provinces prior to Vialart’s appointment as bishop, and maintained close ties with leading figures of Catholic reform in

1640s Paris—such as Vincent de Paul (1580–1660), Adrien Bourdoise (1584–1655), and Jean Eudes (1601–80)—making them both part of a larger cohort of priests and prelates who shared ideas and practices with each other.<sup>106</sup> In fact, Cardinal Richelieu appointed Vialart de Herse to the Coadjutory and subsequently to the Episcopal seat at Châlons only after Olier turned the office down in 1639 in favor of starting his seminary.<sup>107</sup> Vialart had sufficiently close ties with Olier, as well as convergent interests since they both ran seminaries, so as to want to keep apprised of ceremonial innovations at Saint-Sulpice. Finally, a steady flow of seminary directors from Paris collaborated with Vialart de Herse in Châlons during the first ten years of his episcopacy. Among them were three priests from the Seminary of Saint-Nicholas du Chardonnet—home to Beuvelet and his *Manuel*—who helped Vialart de Herse found his seminary.<sup>108</sup> One of these priests, M. le Pelletier, became Vialart de Herse’s vicar general.<sup>109</sup> Finally, when it came time to issue a diocesan Ritual as part of his reform efforts, Vialart de Herse did not compose it himself but rather “charged several capable people, well instructed in good Theology, Christian morals, and ecclesiastical rites, to compose a Ritual.”<sup>110</sup> The author of Vialart de Herse’s *Vie* does not give the names of these delegates, but it would not be surprising if Pelletier were among them. All this evidence suggests that through priestly exchanges and interdiocesan collaboration, the types of experimental practice described in Ferrier’s anecdote found prescriptive form in Vialart de Herse’s diocesan Ritual.

A second anecdote, again from the parish of Saint-Sulpice but approximately forty years later, shows how the confessional scenario continued to evolve through ceremonial experimentation so as to include an actor’s written renunciation of the stage, transcribed in the presence of a notary. This second anecdote reinforces the above analysis of confession as a scenario at once “well-rehearsed *and* open to the inspiration of the moment, a meeting of structured control and spontaneous creativity.”<sup>111</sup> Here, the well-rehearsed quality can be seen in the way actors in 1680s Paris now occupied the clearly defined role of public sinners in the confessional scenario thanks to their inscription in the diocesan Ritual’s content after 1654. At the same time, the diocesan Ritual’s physical presence continued to facilitate subtle innovations in ceremonial practice, which gradually entered the ecclesiastical repertoire and acquired the status of prescribed action by the early eighteenth century. In this case, the anecdote demonstrates how the practice of demanding a written renunciation from actors moved from a liturgical experiment in the 1680s to a response scripted by ecclesiastical texts that comment on the diocesan Ritual, if not yet in diocesan Ritual itself, by the 1730s.

On a summer Sunday in 1684, an actor-playwright from the Comédie-Française named Guillaume Marcoureau, known as Brécourt, debuted a play at the Théâtre Guénégaud that was to be his last; a comedy titled *Timon*. The actors of the Troupe du Roi performed *Timon* seventeen times between its début and the end of December, performing it not only in Paris but also before Louis XIV’s Court at Fontainebleau and Versailles.<sup>112</sup> During one of the court performances, Brécourt exerted himself too much and, according to tradition, burst a blood vessel, which would lead within months to his demise.<sup>113</sup> By late February of 1685, he was feeling sufficiently unwell so as to fear for his life. Brécourt lived in the parish of Saint-Sulpice on the rue du Seine, not far from both the Théâtre Guénégaud and

the parish church. Suspecting that his days might be numbered, on 15 March 1685 Brécourt summoned his parish priest and expressed his desire to confess and receive the last rites.<sup>114</sup>

Sulpicians remember the priest who arrived at Brécourt's home, Claude Bottu de la Barmondière, as always ready to administer the last rites, which means always with a Ritual in hand.<sup>115</sup> One of Barmondière's contemporaries, Joseph Grandet (1646–1724)—the director of Saint-Sulpice's seminary in the diocese of Angers and the author of a manuscript compilation of short *Vies* about seventeenth-century priests with a reputation for holiness—described him in the following way:

He always carried in his pockets, when he went to visit his parish, a ritual, a stole, a surplice, some holy water, a crucifix, and a Bible so that if by chance he found himself in a neighborhood where there was a sick person in dire need, he could administer the sacraments without returning to his church.<sup>116</sup>

The Ritual Barmondière carried to Brécourt's home would have most likely been the edition issued by the archbishop of Paris, Jean-François de Gondy, in 1654, which was, as noted above, the first Ritual in Paris to list actors as public sinners.<sup>117</sup> Published the year before Barmondière entered seminary, Gondy's 1654 Ritual would have been the version with which Barmondière had become acquainted during the most critical years of his priestly formation.

In keeping with the passage in the 1654 edition of the Parisian Ritual that listed actors among the public sinners who must be excluded from Communion, Barmondière agreed to administer the sacraments to Brécourt upon one condition: that Brécourt publicly renounce his profession as an actor.<sup>118</sup> Thus far, the scenario presented by Brécourt's request for the last rites replicates in several dimensions the anecdote narrated by Ferrier, underscoring the “never for the first time” quality Taylor attributes to scenarios as a form of cultural transmission; what Taylor calls the “setup” that “lays out the range of possibilities” for a scenario's development includes the same cast of characters, the same location, and the same goals as those that characterized Ferrier's anecdote.<sup>119</sup> In fact, before he was installed as the parish priest of Saint-Sulpice in 1678, Barmondière held the same post as Ferrier, leading the parish's community of priests.<sup>120</sup> The setup thus bears the marks of a well-rehearsed and therefore predictable scenario.

Yet, a critical difference distinguishes the Brécourt scenario from the anecdote recounted by Ferrier, revealing the incremental liturgical innovations exercised through ecclesiastical prudence. Barmondière required Brécourt not only to state but also to pen his renunciation of the stage, thereby introducing writing into an interaction that would have otherwise consisted only of oral and ceremonial exchanges. To this end, the priest drew up an act that Brécourt signed in front of four witnesses.<sup>121</sup> In the context of Protestant conversions, written statements had a ceremonial precedent. Henri IV had handed to the archbishop of Bourges a summary of his submission to the Catholic Church as part of his public abjuration ceremony in 1593.<sup>122</sup> At the parish level, priests recorded abjurations in their registers and sometimes required the Protestant to sign a statement in the presence of a notary, a practice that became especially common after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the same year of Brécourt's renunciation.<sup>123</sup> Priestly

repertoires thus included the possibility of a written statement as part of the scenario for sacramental encounters with heretics.

The request for a written renunciation from an actor nonetheless constitutes an innovative gesture because neither the Ritual of Paris, nor Beuvelet's *Instructions sur le manuel*, nor the most detailed diocesan Rituals to which Barmondière would have had access explicitly stated that a priest should require public sinners to submit a written statement.<sup>124</sup> The statement signed by Brécourt reads:

In the presence of Claude Bottu de la Barmondière, priest, doctor of theology from the Sorbonne, parish priest of the Church and Parish of Saint-Sulpice in Paris, and the witnesses named hereafter, Guillaume Marcoureau de Brécourt has acknowledged that having up until now practiced the profession of actor, he renounces it entirely and promises with a true and sincere heart to no longer exercise [the profession of actor] nor take to the stage, even if he returns to a condition of full and entire health. Signed in Paris, in the house of the above-mentioned Marcoureau de Brécourt, in the presence of . . . , the 15th day of the month of March 1685.<sup>125</sup>

Through small innovations such as the introduction of writing, churchmen sought to enhance their authority in relation to stage players in periods when the theatre's cultural standing had improved in a way that challenged the church's designation of actors as sinners.

Upon first analysis, the renunciation text seems to showcase Barmondière's strength and, by extension, the strength of the church against Brécourt specifically and the theatre more generally. Indeed, once the act was signed, Barmondière stored it in the parish registers, where he and his vicars recorded all the parish's births, baptisms, marriages, and burials.<sup>126</sup> Reduced to a line of text, Brécourt's profession as an actor could now be enfolded into a document over which the parish priest had control. Furthermore, the text itself positions Saint-Sulpice's parish priest as the arbiter of linear time by bracketing Brécourt's identity as an actor in the past and attempting to eradicate it from the future. The profession he practiced "up until now" Brécourt promises to "no longer exercise . . . even if he returns to a condition of full and entire health." This statement, now in the priest's possession, could also circulate. An anonymous treatise on the sacraments from the early eighteenth century, for example, specifies that the Sunday after obtaining a renunciation from an actor the priest should "read this writing [aloud] during the time he gives the sermon."<sup>127</sup> Whereas ceremonies, as performances, occupy primarily the present, the written record of the renunciation represents a bid to extend the ceremonial action beyond its temporal limits.

Although the renunciation text represents a show of strength on the part of the church, the names and titles given to Barmondière and Brécourt in the document belie Brécourt's relative power and suggest that Barmondière's introduction of writing in fact represents a nonscripted response to the actor's perceived status. Whereas Ferrier derided the actor in his anecdote as an *opérateur*, the renunciation text addresses Brécourt by name, acknowledges that he exercised a profession, and names that profession using the word actors used for themselves, *comédien*. If Barmondière had wanted to disparage Brécourt's craft, he could have called him a *buffon*, *bateleur*, *histrion*, or *farceur*.<sup>128</sup> In another sign of respect, nor does the written statement use the phrase "public sinner" to explain the need for a

renunciation. These details, while small, attest to the degree to which Brécourt, as an actor in the 1680s rather than the 1640s, possessed his own claims to cultural legitimacy before the likes of Barmondière.

Brécourt's person and profession fell under the powerful, if somewhat arbitrary, protection of the king's house. As a member of the Comédie-Française, Brécourt, like his fellow actors, had an "almost official role" at the king's court.<sup>129</sup> The performances at Fontainebleau and Versailles just prior to Brécourt's illness figured among his responsibilities as an actor under the king's patronage.<sup>130</sup> As Blocker has noted, the "exclusivity accorded" to the Comédie-Française after its creation in 1680 "publicly made its members servants of the prince, to the point that some of them dared call themselves officers of the king."<sup>131</sup> The renunciation text does not afford Brécourt quite such an illustrious identity.<sup>132</sup> Nonetheless, given the king's patronage, Barmondière's refusal of sacraments to an actor from the Comédie-Française implied taking a stand, if only a modest one, against the king. The triple identity afforded Barmondière by the renunciation text—priest, doctor from the Sorbonne, and curate—seems designed in part to strengthen his position against potential challenges to his treatment of Brécourt as a public sinner.

Barmondière's insistence on a written renunciation likewise responds at least in part to Brécourt's association with sources of authority beyond the stage. As Maugras explains, early modern French actors "Almost always . . . gave in and accepted" the demand to renounce the stage. However, "If he returned to health, one of two things happened: either he forgot his promise and did not keep it, or an order from the First Gentleman [of the King's chamber] obliged him to reappear onstage without the slightest worry in the world about the commitment he had made in relation to the Church."<sup>133</sup> A written renunciation statement would give the church a document to which they could point in protest against a royal order that returned an actor to the stage who had previously renounced his or her profession.

Two factors related to the diocesan Ritual's prescriptive content and ceremonial presence opened the sacramental exchange to inscription. First, the classification earlier in the century of acting as a "public" sin introduced the possibility of inscription because certain kinds of writing—especially writing conducted in the presence of a notary or distributed in print—occupied and structured the notion of publicness. One example given for the term "public" in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel*, for example, noted that an author was said to "give his works to the *public* when he had them printed," adding that "Otherwise it would suffice to make them circulate as manuscripts."<sup>134</sup> Likewise, Furetière defined a notary as an "Officer-guardian of the *public* faith, who keeps the notes and minutes of contracts that parties have entered into in his presence and who produces authentic copies."<sup>135</sup> Writing in these two types of situation both constituted and defined a "public." By extension, to declare a type of sinner "public" implied that his or her actions already circulated like a printed text and had transgressed the "public faith" secured by the notary's archival storehouse. "Public" sin made "public" writing appropriate. Consequently, the designation of actors as "public" sinners served to broaden the ceremonial possibilities available to priests by making the demand for a written renunciation or the summoning of a notary a logical extension of the sacramental scenario.

Meanwhile, as a ceremonial object the diocesan Ritual enjoyed a direct relationship to the type of public writing already conducted by priests in sacramental situations, namely, the keeping of parish registers. As already mentioned, it was into these registers that parish priests inscribed Protestant abjurations and that Barmondière inserted Brécourt's renunciation. Furetière defines a register as "A public book that serves to keep records or acts or minutes for the justification of various facts that one might need in the future," and lists parish registers as an example of this kind of public text.<sup>136</sup> Although not registers themselves, diocesan Rituals typically contained instructions on how to keep these registers. Beuvelet's *Instructions sur le manuel* devotes an entire chapter to the proper way to maintain the registers of baptism, marriage, and burial.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, the Ritual of Bourges provides instructions for a register of "The State of Souls" in which the priest recorded who had or had not confessed and received Communion at Easter.<sup>138</sup> One can certainly imagine a scenario in which a priest might open his diocesan Ritual and refer to these instructions while filling out the appropriate parish register. In terms of the diocesan Ritual's ceremonial significance, its association with the church's public records increased the authority conveyed by the diocesan Ritual's presence. A priest with a diocesan Ritual in hand who demanded that an actor renounce his or her profession in writing before a notary evoked, whether intentionally or not, the church's role as record keeper in early modern France.

When Barmondière demanded a written renunciation in 1685, he engaged in a liturgically acceptable but nonscripted action. By the early eighteenth century—although not yet specified in the Parisian Rituals of 1697 or 1701<sup>139</sup>—the obligation to obtain a written renunciation of the stage from a dying actor had entered the priestly scenario in the form of ecclesiastical instructions intended to aid priests in improving their sacramental performance. A treatise titled *Theorie et pratique des sacremens* [Theory and practice of the sacraments], published in 1736, attests to the degree to which written renunciation had become standard practice. Structured as questions and answers, the treatise asks, "What measures must a parish priest take to make public the renunciation of the profession of actor that he would have received from an actor to whom he would have administered the sacraments at death?"<sup>140</sup> The treatise responds, "He would be obliged, before taking the Viaticum to this actor, to extract from him a written renunciation."<sup>141</sup> Before administering the sacrament, the instructions continue, the priest should "publicly read the [statement]" when the "Holy Viaticum is in the sick person's room" and afterward "on the following Sunday he should read the written statement again when he gives the sermon."<sup>142</sup> Through the interplay between liturgical experimentation and prescription that the physical presence of a diocesan Ritual facilitated, the church's treatment of actors in France thus evolved over a ninety-year period such that the previous generation of priests' impromptu solutions to the perceived threat of stage players became the next generation's scripted ceremonial behavior.

## Conclusion

Rather than an inert prescriptive text that directed French priests to enact their bishop's instructions mechanically, the diocesan Ritual enjoyed a hybrid status between rule book and ceremonial object. Animated by the priest's prudence, or

interpretive margin, the diocesan Ritual's hybrid nature enabled its physical presence to legitimize liturgical actions that corresponded to the spirit of the Ritual's prescriptive content but went beyond the behaviors explicitly called for in its pages. As a liturgical object, the diocesan Ritual therefore fostered ceremonial innovation. These innovations often occurred on a very small scale, such as the inclusion of a new category—like actors—in the list of public sinners or the use of writing to secure a renunciation. They nonetheless effected incremental change in the liturgical repertoire through which priests exerted influence over the nonliturgical cultural forms of production around them, such as the theatre.

For the larger story of antitheatrical sentiment, the ceremonial context that spurred the spread of diocesan Rituals that classified actors as public sinners helps reveal networks of priests whose religious performances shaped discourses about the theatre's role in public life. A focus on the use of diocesan Rituals serves as a reminder that ceremonial practices transmit ideas even when not distilled into a philosophical or theological discourse. Ceremonies transmit ideas in part by reinforcing human relationships. The circulation of diocesan Rituals shows this process at work. Their circulation helped forge and maintain the ties that bound seminary directors, bishops, and humble clergymen together into the institution of the church. These ties, as seen in Ferrier's references to the monthly assembly of Parisian curates or in the priests from Bourdoise's Seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet who traveled to the diocese of Châlons to help its bishop found his seminary, exerted tremendous influence over the way early modern French clergymen envisioned the ideal churchman and his prudence. It was through such networks that ideas about the theatre and strategies for responding to actors spread among priests in early modern France.

So great was the diocesan Ritual's network-building agency as a ceremonial object that in at least one instance a bishop sent his diocesan Ritual to another, anonymously, by sending it first to a seminary. In October of 1677, Louis Tronson, the seminary of Saint-Sulpice's Superior General, concluded a letter to the bishop of Arras, Guy de Sève de Rochechouart, by remarking, "I received a Ritual of Arras, which I imagine was sent on your behalf for the Monseigneur the bishop of Coutances."<sup>143</sup> That same day, Tronson passed the Ritual to a seminarian named Jullien de Lallier who, after six years at the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, was on his way back to his home diocese of Coutances to become the parish priest at Valognes.<sup>144</sup> After entrusting the Ritual to Lallier, Tronson wrote the following letter to Charles-François de Loménie, the bishop of Coutances: "I placed in his hands a Ritual of Arras that I received without any letter, but that I imagine must have been sent to me for you."<sup>145</sup> The unexplained arrival of a Ritual activated an interdiocesan network. The only existing copy of the Ritual, if it was the one issued by the bishop of Arras in 1675, was destroyed along with the municipal library in 1915.<sup>146</sup> Did it list actors as public sinners? We might never know. Nonetheless, passed from hand to hand to hand, the Ritual strengthened seminary ties stretching from the northernmost corners of the kingdom to its Western arm where, upon arrival, it would eventually bind hand to priestly hand at some sick person's bedside. When ill and calling for a priest, the actor's designation as public sinner depended not just on the diocesan Ritual's prescriptive content, but on its capacity as a ceremonial object to sustain relationships and generate affinity

among the priests responsible for carrying out its instructions. Without this ceremonial support, antitheatrical texts would remain dead letters.

## Endnotes

1 See, for example, how Laurent Thirouin conceptualizes a broad range of documents as part of a continuous debate in “Chronologie sommaire de la Querelle du théâtre,” in *L’Aveuglement salutaire: Le Réquisitoire contre le théâtre dans la France classique* (Paris: Champion, 2007), 265–7.

2 Key works on the materiality of early modern French theatre include S. Wilma Deierkauf-Holsboer, *Le Théâtre du Marais*, vol. 1 [of 2]: *La Période de gloire et de fortune, 1634 (1629)–1648* (Paris: Nizet, 1954); Deierkauf-Holsboer, *L’Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre français à Paris de 1600 à 1673* (Paris: Nizet, 1960); Deierkauf-Holsboer, *Le Théâtre de l’Hôtel de Bourgogne*, vol. 1 [of 2]: *1548–1635* (Paris: Nizet, 1968); Jan Clarke, *The Guénégaud Theatre in Paris (1673–1680)*, 3 vols. (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1998–2007); and Sabine Chaouche, *L’Art du comédien: Déclamation et jeu scénique en France à l’âge classique (1629–1680)* (Paris: Champion, 2001).

3 Moses Barras, *The Stage Controversy in France from Corneille to Rousseau* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1933); Marc Fumaroli, “La Querelle de la moralité du théâtre avant Nicole et Bossuet,” *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France* 70.5–6 (1970): 1007–30; Jonas Barish, “Variations sérieuses,” in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 191–220; Fumaroli, “La Querelle de la moralité du théâtre au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 84.3 (1990): 65–97; Fumaroli, “Sacerdos sive rhetor, orator sive histrio: Rhétorique, théologie, et ‘moralité du théâtre’ en France de Corneille à Molière,” in *Héros et orateurs: Rhétorique et dramaturgie cornéliennes* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990), 449–91; Fumaroli, “La Querelle du théâtre au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Les Cahiers de médiologie* 1.1 (1996): 29–37; Jean Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre (1550–1850)* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1997); Simone de Reyff, *L’Église et le théâtre: L’Exemple de la France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1998); Sylviane Léoni, *Le Poison et le remède: Théâtre, morale et rhétorique en France et en Italie, 1694–1758* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1998); Thirouin, *L’Aveuglement salutaire*.

4 For a book-length treatment of priestly embodiment as performance, see Joy Palacios, *Ceremonial Splendor: Performing Priesthood in Early Modern France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

5 On the importance of the sacraments in parish life, see Bernard Hours, *L’Église et la vie religieuse dans la France moderne XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 4–5, 9–13, 19.

6 Although the Ritual did not contain the liturgy of the Mass—meaning it did not include all the words and ceremonies a priest performed from beginning to end of the Mass—it did have a chapter on the Eucharist with instructions about practical topics not covered in the Missal, such as how to administer Communion. See, for example, “De Sanctissimo Eucharistiæ Sacramento,” in *Rituale Romanum Pauli Quinti, pontificis maximi iussu editum* (Lugduni [Lyon]: Michaelis Chevalier, 1616), 68–82.

7 For more on the diocesan Ritual, see Adrian Fortescue, “Ritual,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1912), [www.newadvent.org/cathen/13088b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13088b.htm), accessed 3 April 2022. On the relationship between the Ritual as a liturgical book and the anthropological category of rituals as religious practice, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 55–79.

8 Matthieu Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel par forme de demandes & réponses familières pour servir à ceux qui dans les séminaires se préparent à l’administration des Sacrements. . .*, 4th ed., 2 vols. (Paris: Georges Josse, 1659), 1:201.

9 Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre*, 75. The earlier Rituals used the term *histrion* rather than *comédien*.

10 *Ibid.*, 88.

11 On Prynne’s *Histrion-Mastix*, see Lisa A. Freeman, *Antitheatricality and the Body Politic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 11–95. Although the title page reads 1633, according to Freeman (17) it was published at the end of 1632.

12 For the full edict, see Déborah Blocker, *Instituer un “art”: Politiques du théâtre dans la France du premier XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2009), 280–1: “actions malhonnêtes,” “paroles lascives ou à double entente.” For a detailed discussion of the edict, see *ibid.*, 279–363. All translations are mine unless otherwise

indicated. When providing the original French, I have preserved the early modern spelling and punctuation, except where I have rendered the long-s and u/v and i/j according to modern usage.

13 Henry Phillips, "Les Acteurs et les lois au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle en France," *Littératures classiques* 40 (2000): 87–101, at 93–4, <https://doi.org/10.3406/licla.2000.1488>; Blocker, *Instituer un "art,"* 294–5, 299.

14 Gaston Maugras, *Les Comédiens hors la loi*, 2d ed. (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1887), 160: "tout est in conséquence [sic]."

15 *Ibid.*, 158–60. For an example from the eighteenth century, see A. D., "Mariage des comédiens," *Intermédiaire des chercheurs et curieux*, 12.262, 10 April 1879, cols. 198–9.

16 Maugras, *Les Comédiens hors la loi*, 160.

17 Auguste Jal, s.v. "Molière," *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire, errata et supplément pour tous les dictionnaires historiques d'après des documents authentiques inédits* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1867), 871–5, at 875. The job of the valet de chambre was to help dress and undress the king, and since the time of François I could be held by those who were not nobles. See Mathieu Da Vinha, "Les Valets de chambre du Roi et le duc de Saint-Simon," *Cahiers Saint-Simon* 31 (2003): 38–49, at 38, <https://doi.org/10.3406/simon.2003.1360>. The term *écuyer* originally designated a young noble who carried a knight's sword and by the seventeenth century was an honorific title given to those who held high office. See "Écuyer," in Centre Nationale de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, n.d., *Ortolang*, s.v. "écuyer," [www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/écuyer/0](http://www.cnrtl.fr/lexicographie/écuyer/0), accessed 8 August 2022.

18 Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre*, 82.

19 For the names of the three *prêtres habitués* see the petition written by Molière's wife, Armande Béjart, to the Archbishop of Paris in Georges Mongrédien, comp., *Recueil des textes et documents du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle relatifs à Molière*, 2 vols. (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1965), 2:440; Annik Pardaillh-Galabrun, "L'Habitat et le cadre de vie des prêtres à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 94.4 (1987): 507–17, at 509, <https://doi.org/10.3406/abpo.1987.3274>: "véritable plèbe du clergé." For a detailed study of the ecclesiastical response to Molière's death, see Servane L'Hopital, "La Mort de Molière: L'Occasion bénie d'une damnation?" *La Haine de Molière: Actes de la journée d'études* (8 December 2016) (Paris: Université Paris-Sorbonne, Labex OBVIL, 2017), [https://obvil.sorbonne-universite.fr/corpus/\\_proceedings/haine-moliere/HDM\\_Servane-L-Hopital.html](https://obvil.sorbonne-universite.fr/corpus/_proceedings/haine-moliere/HDM_Servane-L-Hopital.html), accessed 7 January 2023.

20 Stéphane Gomis, "Les Communautés de prêtres sous l'Ancien Régime: Les Acquis d'une redécouverte," *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 86.217 (2000): 469–78, at 471–2, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rhef.2000.1426>. For an example of the house rules for *prêtres habitués* during the first half of the seventeenth century, see Georges Froger, [Règlement au sujet des prêtres habitués de l'église St-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet de Paris, daté du 26 juillet 1631, et commençant par ces mots: Nous, soussignés, Georges Froger. . .] (Paris, 1631). The rules can be found at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BN) under call number 4-LK7-7137 (A).

21 Jeanne Ferté, *La Vie religieuse dans les campagnes parisiennes (1622–1695)* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1962), 145–69. For the most complete study of the development of priestly training in early modern France, see Antoine Degert, *Histoire des séminaires français jusqu'à la Révolution*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1912).

22 For a detailed account of sacramental refusals to actors in the parish of Saint-Sulpice, see Joy Palacios, "Actors, Christian Burial, and Space in Early Modern Paris," *Past and Present*, no. 232 (August 2016): 127–63, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtw010>.

23 Conversely, the interplay between the Ritual's prescriptive and ceremonial functions also helped eliminate local practices that deviated too much from the norm.

24 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 56–8, quote at 58.

25 Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:2; Annik Aussedat-Minvielle, "Histoire et contenu des rituels diocésains et romains imprimés en France de 1476 à 1800: Inventaire descriptif des rituels des provinces de Paris, Reims et Rouen" (Ph.D. diss., completed under the direction of Jean Delumeau, Université de Paris I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France, 1987), 23–6.

26 Adrian Fortescue, "Liturgical Books," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 9 (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1910), [www.newadvent.org/cathen/09296a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09296a.htm), accessed 12 December 2017.

27 Hyppolite de Bethune, *Rituel de Verdun, renouvelé, et augmenté par Monseigneur l'Illustrissime et reverendissime messire Hyppolite de Bethune, . . .* (Verdun: Chez Michel Fanart, 1691), unpaginated page facing 1: "Agendes, parce-qu'il marque les fonctions, qui conviennent à ceux qui sont chargés de la conduite des ames."

28 Aussedat-Minvielle, "Histoire et contenu des rituels," 67.

- 29 Lists of public sinners varied from diocese to diocese and within a diocese over time. For the range of figures listed as public sinners, see the following examples: Anne de Levy de Vantadour, *Rituel de Bourges, fait par feu Monseigneur l'illustrissime & Reverendissime Messire Anne de Levy de Vantadour, Patriarche, Archevêque de Bourges, Primat des Aquitaines . . .*, 2 vols. (Bourges: Chez Jean Toubreau, 1666), 1:358; Charles Maurice le Tellier, *Rituel de la province de Reims, renouvelé et augmenté par Monseigneur l'illustrissime et reverendissime Messire Charles Maurice le Telliers, . . .* (Paris: Chez Frederic Leonard, 1677), 88–90, 119–20; Frederic Jerome de Roye de la Rochefoucauld, *Rituel du diocèse de Bourges, publié par l'autorité de Monseigneur Frederic Jerome de Roye de la Rochefoucauld, . . .* (Bourges: Chez Jean-Baptiste Cristo, 1746), 88.
- 30 Aussedat-Minvielle, “Histoire et contenu des rituels,” 67, 80–3.
- 31 Bethune, *Rituel de Verdun*, unpaginated page facing 1: “les Regles que les Pasteurs doivent observer dans leurs fonctions, y sont prescrites.”
- 32 Pope Paul V, “The Apostolic Constitution of Pope Paul V on the Roman Ritual,” 17 June 1614, in Congregation of Sacred Rites, *Rituale Romanum* (1964), 6–7, at 7; [https://www.sanctamissa.org/\\_files/ugd/c6f7dd\\_4ff0f5d827d24264a448bf986de11f7a.pdf](https://www.sanctamissa.org/_files/ugd/c6f7dd_4ff0f5d827d24264a448bf986de11f7a.pdf), accessed 4 February 2023.
- 33 Aussedat-Minvielle, “Histoire et contenu des rituels,” 126–42.
- 34 According to Aussedat-Minvielle (*ibid.*, 31), 168 Rituals were published in France during the seventeenth century, down from the 230 published during the sixteenth century.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 48–50. Aussedat-Minvielle notes a correlation between the use of vernacular in the diocesan Ritual and a “rigorist” tendency.
- 36 On the terms for actor used in Roman law, see Paul Olgner, *Les Incapacités des acteurs en droit romain et en droit canonique* (Paris: Armand Magnier, 1899), 8. On the negative connotation of the term in seventeenth-century France, see Antoine Furetière, comp., s.v. “Histrión,” in *Dictionnaire universel, contenant generalement tous les mots françois . . .*, 3 vols. (La Haye: Chez Arnout & Renier Leers, 1690).
- 37 For a discussion of these terms, see W. L. Wiley, *The Early Public Theatre in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 36–7, 57–69, 81.
- 38 Nicolas Pavillon, *Les Instructions du Rituel du diocese d'Alet*, 2d ed. (Paris: Chez la veuve Charles Savreux Libraire, 1670), 73–4, emphasis mine: “Qui sont ceux qui ne doivent pas estre admis à la sainte communion? Ce sont ceux qu'on sçait publiquement en estre indignes, comme sont les excommuniés, les interdits, les infames; par exemple ceux qui sont reconnus pour concubinaires, les usuriers, les magiciens, les sorciers, les blasphemateurs, les yvrognes, les comediens, les farceurs & basteleurs; les femmes de mauvaise vie; les duellistes, ceux qui sont dans des inimitiez, & les autres pecheurs publics.” For the date of the first edition, see Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre*, 89.
- 39 Pavillon, *Les Instructions du Rituel du diocese d'Alet*, 74: “Il faut refuser la communion à toutes ces personnes jusques à ce qu'ils se soient corrigez, qu'ils ayent fait une penitence convenable, & qu'ils ayent reparé le scandale qu'ils avoient causé.”
- 40 On the circulation of Rituals, see Aussedat-Minvielle, “Histoire et contenu des rituels,” 127–8.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 127.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 43 Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:aiiijr–aiiijv.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 1:220: “A qui peut-on donner le Viatique? A tous les Fideles qui le demandent, à l'exception de deux sortes de personnes. 1. Des pecheurs publics, comme des usuriers, concubinaires, comediens, nommément excommuniés ou denoncez, si auparavant ils n'ont satisfait. 2. De ceux qui pour quelque accident de maladie, comme phrenesie, foiblesse d'esprit, toux vehement & continue, vomissement, & semblables, ne peuvent recevoir le saint Sacrement, sans quelque irreverence.”
- 45 *Ibid.*, 1:2: “parce qu'on le doit quasi toujours avoir à la main, ou du moins s'en rendre l'usage si familier, que quand il s'agit de quelque chose, on le puisse trouver à l'ouverture du livre.”
- 46 Beuvelet's handbook served as an abridged Ritual. For a later example, see *Abrégé du rituel d'Auch* (Auch: J. P. Duprat, 1780).
- 47 Furetière, s.v. “Ceremonie,” in *Dictionnaire universel*: “Assemblage de plusieurs actions, pompes, & manieres d'agir, qui servent à rendre une chose plus magnifique & plus solemnelle”; “Ceremonie, se dit aussi en matiere ecclesiastique, des choses qui peuvent rendre le culte divin plus auguste & plus venerable.”
- 48 *Ibid.*: “Les entrées des Rois se font avec grande ceremonie.”
- 49 Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, 3d ed. (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Ritual Studies International, 2013), 42.

- 50 On the high view of the priesthood that characterized post-Tridentine Catholicism, see Nicole Lemaître, “Le Prêtre mis à part ou le triomphe d’une idéologie sacerdotale au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France* 85.215 (1999): 275–89, <https://doi.org/10.3406/rhef.1999.1371>.
- 51 Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:265.
- 52 For the Viaticum, the Ritual of Bourges recommends placing the Ritual in a purse along with a corporal—the white linen cloth that covers the altar—and a white purificator, or piece of linen used to clean the chalice. See Levy de Vantadour, *Rituel de Bourges*, 1:436.
- 53 Courtly ceremonial under Louis XIV epitomized the correlation between the possession of an entourage and power. See Norbert Elias, *La Société de cour* [1969], trans. Pierre Kamnitzer (Paris: Flammarion, 1985), 63–114.
- 54 Tellier, *Rituel de la province de Reims*, 4: “font paroître au dehors.”
- 55 *Ibid.*: “ceremonies exterieures.”
- 56 Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:aiiijr: “Pour la matière & la forme, qui depuis seize cens ans demeure inviolable pour tous les Sacremens”; Tellier, *Rituel de la province de Reims*, 5: “L’Église conserve si religieusement les anciennes ceremonies, qu’elle ne change rien aux paroles dont on a coutûme de se servir dans l’administration des Sacremens, non pas même lorsqu’on renouvelle de temps en temps les Rituels.”
- 57 In Roy A. Rappaport’s terms, the diocesan Ritual’s physical presence conveys the liturgy’s “canonical” message while simultaneously serving as an index of the priest’s acceptance of the liturgy’s authority, such that the diocesan Ritual functions performatively, instituting the authority it asserts. In Rappaport’s words, “The performance of a liturgical order realizes or establishes the conventions that the liturgical order embodies.” See Rappaport, “The Obvious Aspects of Ritual,” in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 173–221, at 194.
- 58 Olagnier, *Les Incapacités des acteurs*, 14–21; Blocker, *Instituer un “art,”* 294–9.
- 59 For an example of this type of ecclesiastical text, see *Resolutions de plusieurs cas importants pour la morale, et pour la discipline ecclesiastique, par un grand nombre de docteurs en Theologie de la Faculté de Paris* (Paris: Chez Charles Savreux, 1666). Note that Pierre Marlin, the curate of Molière’s parish, is among the signees of this volume.
- 60 *Reglemens pour l’instruction du clergé, tirez des constitutions & decrets synodaux de S. Charles Borromée, au titre des advertissemens que l’on doit lire au synode* (Paris: Chez Pierre Trichard, 1663), 30–1: “N’abandonnez point le devoir de reprendre & corriger ainsi publiquement [les pechez publics], quelque mesdisance, vexation, calomnie & injure qui vous en puisse arriver, pourveu [sic] que cela soit utile à la gloire de Dieu & au salut des ames.”
- 61 W[illiam] W. Smithers, “History of the French Notarial System,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review and American Law Register* 60.1 (1911): 19–38, at 22–3.
- 62 Even the very rigorist Rituals of Alet and Bourges do not mention the involvement of a notary as part of the public reparation of scandal required of a public sinner. See Pavillon, *Les Instructions du Rituel du diocese d’Alet*, 74; Levy de Vantadour, *Rituel de Bourges*, 264–6.
- 63 Tellier, *Rituel de la province de Reims*, 5: “une tres-grande temerité.”
- 64 *Ibid.*, 5: “ils se serviront des instructions du present Rituel, ausquelles ils pourront selon leur erudition & leur capacité, ajouter ce qu’ils jugeront à propos, pourvûque ce soit conformément aux matieres qui y sont contenuës.”
- 65 Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:138.
- 66 The other three desirable qualities were goodness (*bonté*), discretion (*discretion*), and knowledge (*science*). See *ibid.*, 1:137.
- 67 Antoine Furetière identifies prudence as a cardinal virtue, which suggests the status of this classification as general knowledge for early modern French Catholics. See Furetière, s.v. “Prudence,” *Dictionnaire universel*.
- 68 The ceremonial training at the Seminary of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet, for example, emphasized modesty and seriousness. See “Livre dans lequel sont escrits tous les Reglemens de chaque office, et Exercice du Seminaire desquels le Prestre doit avoir une parfaite connoissance” (n.d.), fol. 105r, AN MM 475; see also Palacios, *Ceremonial Splendor*, 61–86.
- 69 Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 28–9.
- 70 Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:139–40.

71 Ibid., 1:138: “En quatre choses principales, dont la première regarde les interrogations qu’il faut faire devant & après la Confession. La seconde, quand il faut accorder, differer ou refuser l’Absolution. La troisième, la manière d’enjoindre les Penitences ou satisfactions. Et la quatrième, la manière différente de traiter avec les Penitens qui se presentent conformement aux dispositions qui se rencontrent en eux.”

72 Eugene Joseph Blackman, “The Influence of the French Farce and the Commedia dell’Arte upon Molière” (Master’s thesis, College of Liberal Arts, Boston University, Boston, MA, 1947), 1, <https://archive.org/details/influenceoffrenc00blac/page/n1/mode/2up>, accessed 8 May 2022.

73 Eric Weitz, *The Cambridge Introduction to Comedy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 104. Emphasis in original.

74 On the seminary’s foundation, see Gwénola Hervouët, “Le Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice, 1642–1700: Étude sociologique et religieuse” (Master’s thesis, under the direction of M. le Professeur [Lucien] Bely, Université de Paris IV–Sorbonne, Paris, 1999), 5–6.

75 Ferrier withdrew from the Society of Saint-Sulpice in 1649 and became the vicar general of the diocese of Alby. Ferrier’s memoirs, which were probably written in the 1680s, cover the years 1630–83. Copies are conserved at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève (hereafter MS 1480, BSG); at the Archives nationales de France among the papers for the Oratorians rather than the Sulpicians (M 215, n. 11); at the Bibliothèque nationale de France; and in the library of the city of Carpentras. See L[ouis] Bertrand, *Bibliothèque sulpicienne ou Histoire littéraire de la Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice*, 3 vols. (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1900), 3:62.

76 Jean du Ferrier, “Memoires [ecclésiastiques] de feu Mr [Jean] du Ferrier” (n.d.), fol. 116r, MS 1480, BSG.

77 Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116r: “de l’absoudre s’il le voyois [repentant], mais de luy interdire la communion du St. Viatique.” (Words between brackets here are those that are difficult to read in the manuscript.) An abbreviated version of the same anecdote, based on the manuscript I consulted, can also be found in Étienne-Michel Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier, fondateur du séminaire de Saint-Sulpice*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Poussielgue frères, 1873), 2:373–4, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6559669n#>, accessed 18 February 2023.

78 Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116v: “estant entré dans cette Compagnie depuis seulem[en]t un [mois] dans la Croyance qu’il ny avoit point de mal”; “Il se reconnut indigne d’y [au tres s. sacrement] participer, protesta qu’il renonçoit au theatre, et en effect lorsqu’il eut recouvert sa santé, il l’abandonna [entierem].”

79 The anecdote also includes the indirect conversion of a third actor who hears a sermon given by Ferrier on the evils of the theatre following the incident with the sick actor. See Ibid., fols. 116v–117r.

80 Ibid., fol. 116v: “Mrs les curés de Paris dans l’assemblée du mois suivant approuverent ce refus comme tres convenable.”

81 Beuvelet uses the term “condition,” which combines the idea of profession (judge, merchant, laborer, artisan, married or single, churchman, etc.) and intrinsic identity. See Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:139.

82 Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116r: “un operateur qui montoit sur le theatre ou il faisoit représenter des farces affin d’attirer le peuple.”

83 Furetière, s.v. “Operateur,” in *Dictionnaire universel*: “Charlatan qui vend ses drogues, & ses remedes en public & sur le theatre.” See also Wiley, *Early Public Theatre*, 70–1.

84 Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116v: “relev[er] sa profession au dessus de celle des charlatans, et des joueurs de marionnettes.”

85 Ibid., fol. 116r: “le mal augmenta et les compagnons du malade le voyans fort bas vinrent la nuit avec plusi[eur]s flambeaux demander qu’on luy portât le St. Sacrement.”

86 Ibid., “Memoires,” fol. 116r: “Je fus parler à eux, mais comme c’estoient des comediens et des charlatans sans pieté ni lumiere, tout ce que je leur disois contre leur profession au lieu de les persuader, les aigrissoit.”

87 Ferrier may have read Rivet’s treatise against the theatre, which cites the council of Constantinople. See André Rivet, *Instruction chrestienne, touchant les spectacles publics . . .* (La Haye: Theodore Maire, 1639), 63, [www.google.ca/books/edition/Instruction\\_chrestienne\\_touchant\\_les\\_spe/\\_ab2\\_DVOPBEC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA63](http://www.google.ca/books/edition/Instruction_chrestienne_touchant_les_spe/_ab2_DVOPBEC?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA63), accessed 25 August 2022.

88 Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre*, 95–106.

89 In attributing the 1643 edition of Borromeo’s *Acta* to Olier’s initiative, Dubu follows a Sulpician tradition that can be traced to Ferrier’s memoirs (see note 94) via Michel-Étienne Faillon. See Faillon, *Vie de*

*M. Olier*, 2:26–7. It should be noted, however, that the 1643 edition itself does not make any mention of Sulpician involvement.

**90** Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre*, 98–9: “tendancieux.”

**91** Caroli Borromæi, *Acta ecclesie mediolanensis, sive Sancti Caroli Borromæi instructiones et decreta* . . . (Paris: Apud Joannem Jost, 1643), 291: “De Histrionibus, Mimis, Circulatoribus, Tabernis meritoriis, & aleatoribus.”

**92** *Ibid.*, 84–6 (Extreme Unction), 214–16 (burial), 335–6 (ecclesiastical censures), 396 (Communion).

**93** Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 1:149; Matthieu Beuvelet, *Conduites pour les exercices principaux qui se font dans les seminaires ecclesiastiques, dressées en faveur des clerics demeurans dans le Seminaire de S. Nicolas du Chardonnet* (Lyon: Chez Hierosme De La Garde, 1660), 255.

**94** Ferrier, “Memoires,” fols. 113r–113v: “Les actes de l’Eglise de Milan que nous fimes imprimer à Paris servirent de règles aux prêtres spécialement sur le refus et le delay de l’absolution comme on le pratique avec fruit faisant quitter plutôt les occasions prochaines et faire des pratiques de penitence contre les pechez d’habitude.” The subject of the verb “quitter” seems to be “assistans” in the first instance, referring possibly to seminarians but also to those who confess in the parish. The end of the passage uses the term “faux penitens.” Since this captures the meaning of the quotation, I have used this term in the English translation.

**95** Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 113v. On proximate occasions of sin, see Joseph Delany, “Occasions of Sin,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1911), [www.newadvent.org/cathen/11196a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11196a.htm).

**96** See Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116r: “nous assemblâmes pour nous ayder aux confessions paschales un nombre de docteurs de Sorbonne, et des Religieux de chaque couvent du fauxbourg St. Germain que nous priâmes de nous venir aider.” Several folios earlier (fol. 111v), in the context of a different anecdote, the manuscript gives the date as 1647. The anecdote regarding Borromeo’s example begins with the statement “Comme c’estoit un temps de paix et d’union que les [convient?] survenües depuis la mort du Roy Louis XIII ont troublé” [As it was a time of peace and union that the [events?] that occurred after the death of Louis XIII had troubled], which suggests a period between 1643 and the beginning of the Fronde in 1648.

**97** Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116r: “durant trois jours nous conferâmes et convîmes avec eux des Instructions que St. Charles donne aux confesseurs.”

**98** Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 116r: “ce qui produisit de grands biens, et parmy les autres celui de chasser une bande de comediens qui s’estoit venus etablir dans la parroisse sous l’appuy de Mr. Le duc d’Orleans se qualifiant ses comediens.”

**99** Virginia Scott, *Molière: A Theatrical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49, 52.

**100** *Ibid.*, 59. Unfortunately, Scott does not provide a source for this information, but it certainly corresponds to Ferrier’s story.

**101** On dueling, see Ferrier, “Memoires,” fols. 114r–115v.

**102** *Ibid.*, fol. 116v; see note 80.

**103** *Ibid.*, fol. 235r: “Voicy une autre difficulté qui reuscit enfin à la gloire de Dieu aprez un peu de peine, ce fut pour établir les conferences chaque mois entre les curez et ecclesiastiques vicaires et confrs [confrères] du diocese, ou tous se rendoient et portoient par escrit signé de leur nom les reponses à dix ou 12 questions qu’on leurs avoit baillées à la precedente conference.”

**104** *Ibid.*, fol. 235r: “celuy qui y presidoit, les interrogeoit, et leurs faisoit repeter les resolutions que M. l’Evêque leur avoit envoyées sur les autres questions qu’ils avoient déjà repondues afin que tous convinsent dans une même morale.” Ferrier explains that the diocese was divided into 18 to 20 “cantons et conferences” which met on different days, so he could follow them all, whereas a vicar presided when he was absent.

**105** Ferrier, “Memoires,” fol. 235v: “Le fruit de ces conferences ne se peut exprimer, il produit la science, et la discipline entre les eccliques [sic], l’union et la vigilance aussy.”

**106** On Vialart de Herse’s kinship with Olier and his relationship with Vincent de Paul and Bourdoise, see Jean Matet and Robert Pannet, “Vialart de Herse, évêque de Châlons-sur-Marne (1640–1680): Le Sens et les limites d’une ‘réformation,’” in *Le Christianisme populaire: Les Dossiers de l’histoire*, ed. Bernard Plongeron and Robert Pannet ([Paris]: Le Centurion, 1976), 147–70, at 148 n. 2. The missions were to Bretagne in 1638 and another in the diocese of Chartre at the château owned by Vialart’s mother. See Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier*, 1:219, 226–7, 231. On Vialart de Herse’s participation in ecclesiastical conferences given by Eudes at the Seminary of Saint-Magloire, see Claude-Pierre Goujet, *La Vie de messire Felix Vialart*

de Herse, évêque & comte de Châlons en Champagne, Pair de France (Cologne: Aux Dépens de la Compagnie, 1738), 15. Saint-Magloire was run by the French Oratory, thus Goujet here refers to Saint-Magloire as the “maison de l’Oratoire” (house of the Oratory). According to Julien Martine, Eudes’s conferences took place in November and December 1642 and attracted a large audience of “prêtres, d’ecclésiastiques, de docteurs et mêmes de prélats” (priests, churchmen, doctors [of theology] and even of prelates) who listened to Eudes preach on “les questions les plus épineuses et les plus difficiles de la morale” (the thorniest and most difficult questions of morality) and “de la grandeur et de l’excellence du sacerdoce, de la sublimité de ses fonctions, des grands devoirs de ceux qui y sont engagés” (on the grandeur and excellence of the priesthood, on the sublimity of its functions, on the great responsibility of those who are therein engaged [as priests])—all of which were the same themes that motivated Olier’s efforts at Saint-Sulpice. See Julien Martine, *Vie du R. P. Jean Eudes, instituteur de la Congrégation de Jésus et Marie et de l’Ordre de Notre-Dame de Charité*, ed. L’Abbé Le Cointe, 2 vols. (Caen: Imprimerie de F. Le Blanc-Hardel, 1880), 1:123–6, quotes at 126, [https://books.google.com/books?id=aLOxAAAAMAAJ&newbks=1&newbks\\_redir=0&pg=PA126](https://books.google.com/books?id=aLOxAAAAMAAJ&newbks=1&newbks_redir=0&pg=PA126), accessed 20 February 2023. On Vialart de Herse’s connection to Paris’s priestly network, see also L’Hopital, “La Mort de Molière.”

**107** M. [Henri] Baudrand, “Mémoire sur la vie de M. Olier et sur le séminaire de Saint-Sulpice” [1682], in *Bibliothèque sulpicienne*, ed. Bertrand, 3:369–462, at 381–3; Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier*, 1:231.

**108** The three priests arrived in Châlons in 1642, thus before the incident described by Ferrier, but would nonetheless have been in close communication with the priests of the Seminary of Saint-Nicholas du Chardonnet who, in turn, belonged to the same circle of Catholic reformers as those at Saint-Sulpice. Paul Broutin, *La Réforme pastorale en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Recherches sur la tradition pastorale après le Concile de Trente*, 2 vols. (Tournai, Belgium: Desclée & Cie., 1956), 1:216–18.

**109** *Ibid.*, 1:218.

**110** Goujet, *La Vie de messire Felix Vialart de Herse*, 82: “il chargea plusieurs personnes habiles, & très instruites de la bonne Théologie, de la Morale chrétienne & des Rits ecclésiastiques de composer un Rituel.”

**111** Weitz, *Cambridge Introduction to Comedy*, 104.

**112** Charles Varlet de La Grange, *Archives de la Comédie-Française: Registre de La Grange (1658–1685), précédé d’une notice biographique* (Paris: J. Claye, 1876), 337–42.

**113** Pierre David Lemazurier, *Galerie historique des acteurs du Théâtre Français, depuis 1600 jusqu’à nos jours*, vol. 1 (Paris: Joseph Chaumerot, Libraire, 1810), 162; La Grange, *Archives de la Comédie-Française: Registre*, 346.

**114** Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d’histoire*, 279; E. Révérend du Mesnil, *La famille de Molière et ses représentants actuels d’après les documents authentiques* (Paris: Isidore Liseux, 1879), 91.

**115** Barmondière entered the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice in 1655, two years before the death of its founder, Jean-Jacques Olier, and remained there until obtaining a doctorate from the Sorbonne in 1661. In 1664, he joined the Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice, the ecclesiastical body that ran the seminary. In 1665, he became the seminary’s assistant director. For the basic details of Barmondière’s life and career, see Bertrand, *Bibliothèque sulpicienne*, 1:103–5; see also Charles Hamel, *Histoire de l’Église Saint-Sulpice*, 2d ed. (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre; J. Gabalda & Cie., 1909), 142–3. For the act naming Barmondière to the Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice, see “Registre des Assemblées du Supérieur du Seminaire de Saint Sulpice et de ses quatre Consultants” (n.d.), fol. 44, Ms. 21, Archives de la Compagnie des Prêtres de Saint-Sulpice, Paris.

**116** Joseph Grandet, *Les Saints prêtres français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ouvrage publié pour la première fois, d’après le manuscrit original*, ed. G. Letourneau, 3 vols. (Angers: Germain & G. Grassin; Paris: A. Roger & F. Chernoviz, 1897), 2:382: “Il portait toujours dans ses poches, lorsqu’il allait visiter sa paroisse, un rituel, une étole, un surplis, de l’eau bénite, un crucifix et une bible, afin que, si par hasard il se fût trouvé dans les quartiers où il allait un malade pressé, il pût lui administrer les sacrements sans retourner à son église.” See also Hamel, *Histoire de l’Église Saint-Sulpice*, 150, who almost certainly relies on Grandet.

**117** Copies of the Roman Ritual issued by Pope Paul V in 1614 were published in Paris in 1664, 1665, and 1679. It is possible that Barmondière would have carried one of these. However, these subsequent editions, at least one of which did not even bear the archbishop’s name, did not undo the 1654 edition’s status as the official diocesan Ritual for Paris. See Dubu, *Les Églises chrétiennes et le théâtre*, 86–94. According to Annik Aussedat-Minvielle, none of Gondy’s successors issued a new Ritual until 1697, with the exception of a small Ritual printed in 1671 that contained only the instructions for administering Communion to the sick, excerpted from the Ritual of 1654. See Aussedat-Minvielle, “Histoire et contenu des rituels,” 255;

for basic information about the excerpted Ritual published in 1671, see Jean-Baptiste Molin and Annik Ausseidat-Minvielle, *Répertoire des rituels et processionnaires imprimés conservés en France* (Paris: CNRS, 1984), 208–9.

**118** The instructions regarding those who could and could not receive Communion read as follows: “Fideles omnes ad Sacram Communionem admittendi sunt, exceptis iis qui justâ ratione prohibentur. Arcendi autem sunt publicè indigni, quales sunt notoriè excommunicati, interdicti, manifestè que infames, ut meretrices, concubinarii, comœdi [comédiens, or actors], fœneratores, magi, sortilegi, blasphemii, & alii eius generis peccatores, ni si de eorum pœnitentia & emendatione constet; & publico scandalo priùs satisfecerint.” See Joannis Francisci de Gondy, *Rituaire parisienne ad romani formam expressum: Auctoritate illustrissimi & reverendissimi in Christo Patris D.D. Joannis Francisci de Gondy, parisiensis archiepiscopi editum* (Paris: Apud Sebastianum & Gabrielem Cramoisy, 1654), 108.

**119** Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 28.

**120** Bertrand, *Bibliothèque sulpicienne*, 1:104.

**121** Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d'histoire*, 279.

**122** Mark Greengrass, *France in the Age of Henri IV: The Struggle for Stability*, 2d ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 81.

**123** These written records of Protestant abjurations occurred even before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, although they did not always require the penitent to sign, and often simply stated that the abjuration had been “fait . . . entre les mains” (entrusted to/done in the hands of) the priest. For examples of abjurations from as early as 1668, see “Abjurations.—Baptêmes et mariages au désert. Registres de Saint-Maurice de Casevieille. 1650–1789,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 12.4–5 (1863): 155–7. For an example of a longer statement of abjuration, also from before the Revocation, but conducted in the presence of a notary, see “Registres du curé de Bernis, de 1677 à 1682.—Extraits relatifs à l’histoire des protestants de cette église.—Abjuration de la demoiselle Diane de Vérot, en 1678,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 8.8–9 (1859): 374–7, at 375. From as early as 1646, the diocesan Ritual in Paris included a template for priests to use when helping parishioners draw up a final will and testament. Although the template says nothing about public sinners, it provided another precedent for summoning a notary for an actor’s renunciation of their profession: to be considered valid the will had to be produced in the presence of two notaries, or the curate/vicar and a notary, or three witnesses. See Joannis Francisci de Gondy, *Rituaire parisienne ad romani formam expressum* (Paris: Apud Petrum Targa, 1646), 504–8.

**124** From as early as 1713, clergymen would use a similar tactic with Jansenists. See Julian Swann, “The Parti Janséniste and the Refusal of the Sacraments Crisis, 1754–1756,” in *Politics and the Parlement of Paris under Louis XV, 1754–1774* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 87–121, at 90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511661013>.

**125** Frédéric Hillemacher and Révérend du Mesnil, “L’Acte de renonciation de Brécourt,” ed. Georges Monval, *Le Moliériste* 5.57 (1883): 277–8, at 278: “En présence de monsieur Claude Bottu de la Barondière [sic], prestre, docteur en théologie de la maison de Sorbonne, curé de l’Eglise et Paroisse de S<sup>t</sup>-Sulpice à Paris, et des tesmoins aprez nommez, Guillaume Marcoureau de Brécourt a reconnu qu’ayant cy-devant fait la profession de comedien, il y renonce entièrement et promet d’un cœur véritable et sincere de ne la plus exercer ny monter sur le theatre, quoy qu’il revint dans une pleine et entière santé. Fait à Paris, dans la maison d’habitation dud. Marcoureau de Brécourt, en présence de . . . , le 15<sup>e</sup> jour du mois de mars 1685.”

**126** Presumably in the register of burials, but the transcription of the act published by Monval simply indicates “Registres de Saint-Sulpice”; see *ibid.*, 278.

**127** [Gaspard Juénin?], *Theorie et pratique des sacremens, des censures, des monitoires, et des irregularités, tome second* [of 3]: *Contenant le sacrement de pénitence, avec un traité des indulgences, & le sacrement de l’extrême-onction* (Paris: Chez Ganeau, 1736), 2:422: “le Dimanche suivant faire encore la lecture de cet écrit dans le tems [sic] qu’il fait le Prône.” I have placed “aloud” in brackets in my translation because it is implied but not explicit in the French text.

**128** For an example of the efforts by theatre apologists to differentiate “comédiens” from other types of performers, see the chapter titled “Que les acteurs des poèmes dramatiques étoient distinguez des histrions & basteleurs des jeux sceniques” in François Hédelin d’Aubignac abbé, *Dissertation sur la condamnation des theatres* (Paris: Chez N. Pepingué, 1666), 144–63.

**129** Pierre Mélése, *Le Théâtre et le public à Paris sous Louis XIV, 1659–1715* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1934), 71: “le rôle presque officiel des Comédiens.”

**130** Mélése explains that the theatres of Paris, “more or less patronized by the King or the great . . . were regularly summoned to the Court or to the homes of their protectors to give private performances.” These semiofficial shows were known as “visits.” See Mélése, *Le Théâtre et le public à Paris*, 68: “Les théâtres de Paris, plus ou moins patronnés par le Roi ou les grands . . . étaient régulièrement conviées à la Cour ou chez leur protecteurs pour donner des représentations. . . .”

**131** Blocker, *Instituer un “art,”* 337: “L’exclusivité accordée aux trois théâtre parisiens [the Comédie-Française, the Comédie Italienne, and the Opéra] . . . faisait publiquement de leurs membres des serviteurs du prince, au point que certains d’entre eux osèrent se dire officiers du roi.”

**132** Two years after Brécourt’s death, however, his widow, Estienne des Urlis, referred to him as an officer of the king. According to Jal, Estienne served as godmother at the baptism of an infant named François Baron, the son of Michel Baron, one of the Comédie-Française’s great actors. The entry inscribed in the parish register by Saint-Sulpice’s vicar gives her name and title as “veuve de feu Guillaume Marcoureau, vivant officier du Roy,” or “widow of the deceased Guillaume Marcoureau, officer of the king during his lifetime.” If she had avowed Marcoureau’s profession as actor and his stage identity as Brécourt, she might not have been allowed to serve as godmother. See Jal, *Dictionnaire critique de biographie et d’histoire*, 113: “les comédiens de Sa Majesté prenaient ce titre, quand ils voulaient pas décliner leur qualité de comédiens.” On this matter, see also André Blanc, *Histoire de la Comédie-Française: De Molière à Talma* (Paris: Perrin, 2007), 252–3; and Blocker, *Instituer un “art,”* 337.

**133** Maugras, *Les Comédiens hors la loi*, 203: “Presque toujours le mourant cédait et acceptait ce qu’on exigeait de lui. S’il revenait à la santé, de deux choses l’une: ou il oubliait sa promesse et n’en tenait aucun compte, ou un ordre du premier Gentilhomme l’obligeait à réparaître sur la scène sans se soucier le moins du monde de l’engagement qu’il avait pris vis-à-vis de l’Église.”

**134** Furetière, s.v. “Public,” *Dictionnaire universel*: “On dit aussi, qu’un Auteur donne ses ouvrages au public, quand il les fait imprimer. Autrefois il suffisoit de les faire courir en manuscrit.” Emphasis in original.

**135** *Ibid.*, s.v. “Notaire”: “Notaire. subst. male. Officier depositaire de la foy *publique*, qui garde les nottes & minutes des contracts que les parties ont passé devant luy, & qui en delivre des expeditions qui sont authentiques. . . .” Emphasis mine.

**136** *Ibid.*, s.v. “Registre”: “Livre public qui sert à garder des mémoires, ou des actes ou minutes pour la justification de plusieurs faits dont on a besoin dans la suite.”

**137** Beuvelet, *Instruction sur le manuel*, 2:252–6.

**138** Levy de Vantadour, *Rituel de Bourges*, 2:512: “l’état des Ames.”

**139** See Louis Antoine de Noailles, *Rituale parisiense . . .* (Paris: Apud Ludovicum Josse, 1697), 67–68, 516–17, 576–79. The Parisian Ritual of 1701 reproduces that of 1697. See Aussedat-Minvielle, “Histoire et contenu des rituels,” 260. Two Rituals were published in Paris in 1725 without Episcopal approval. I have not been able to consult these.

**140** [Juénin?], *Theorie et pratique des sacremens*, 2:422: “Quelles mesures un Curé doit-il prendre pour rendre publique la renonciation à la profession de Comédien, qu’il auroit reçue d’un Comédien à qui il auroit administré les Sacremens à la mort?”

**141** *Ibid.*: “Il seroit obligé avant que de porter le Viatique à ce Comédien, de tirer de lui un écrit de renonciation.”

**142** *Ibid.*: “Ensuite, lorsque le S. Viatique seroit dans la chambre du malade, il doit en faire publiquement la lecture, avant que de lui administrer le tres-saint Sacrement, & le Dimanche suivant faire encore la lecture de cet écrit dans le tems [*sic*] qu’il fait le Prône.”

**143** Louis Tronson, *Correspondance de M. Louis Tronson, troisième supérieur de la Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice: Lettres choisies, annotées et publiées par L. Bertrand*, ed. Louis Bertrand, 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1904), 3:63: “J’ai reçu un Rituel d’Arras que je me suis imaginé m’être venu de votre part pour Monseigneur l’évêque de Coutances.”

**144** Lallier entered the seminary on 7 December 1671, was ordained a priest on 30 May 1676, and was named curé of Valognes in October of 1677, shortly before Tronson’s letter, which is dated 9 October. See Tronson, *Correspondance de M. Louis Tronson*, 3:66 n. 2.

**145** *Ibid.*, 3:66: “Je lui ai mis entre les mains un Rituel d’Arras que j’ai reçu sans aucune lettre, mais que je m’imagine ne m’avoir été rendu que pour vous.”

**146** Molin and Aussedat-Minvielle, *Répertoire des rituels et processionaux*, 68.

**Joy Palacios** is an assistant professor of religious studies in the Department of Classics and Religion at the University of Calgary. She holds a Ph.D. in Performance Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, and her research focuses on the way large organizations use performance and ritual to generate authority, maintain institutions, and forge communities. Her book, *Ceremonial Splendor: Performing Priesthood in Early Modern France* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), examines the way seminary-trained clergymen used representational strategies such as rehearsals, ceremonies, and framing to construct themselves in the image of the *parfait ecclésiastique*, or perfect churchman. Her articles have appeared in *Liminalities: Performance Matters*; *Performance, Religion, and Spirituality*; and *Past and Present*, as well as in a number of edited collections.

---

**Cite this article:** Joy Palacios, “Antitheatrical Prejudice: From Parish Priests to Diocesan Rituals in Early Modern France,” *Theatre Survey* 64.2 (2023): 117–149. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040557423000121>.