



UNIVERSALITAS & PERVASIVITAS

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)

di A. Pisani

Schede autori In difesa

Louis Richeome

Fr. Louis Richeome, S.J. (1544-1625) French humanist and Jesuit. In his time, he was called the "French Cicero" played a crucial role in overcoming prohibitions, if not deep-seated prejudices, against the Jesuit order in 17th century France. Along with fellow-Jesuit Pierre Cotton and Cardinal Jacques-Davy Du Perron, Louis Richeome completed the trio of leading French Catholic controversialists of his age. All three writers drew heavily on [Roberto Bellarmino](#)'s exhaustive compendium of arguments against Protestant doctrine, *Disputationes de controversiis christianæ fidei* (Ingolstadt, 1586; numerous Parisian re-editions), yet each developed a distinctive style through which to rehearse these points.

Richeome's specialty lay in his appeal to visual media, a strategy he laid out in the 1601 *Tableaux sacrez des figures mystiques du tres-auguste sacrifice et sacrement de l'Eucharistie* printed by Laurent Sonnius, a well known publisher and founding member of the powerful counter-reformation editing cartel, the *Compagnie du navire*. Further editions in 1602, 1604, 1609, 1611, and 1613 attest to its success despite what must have been a fairly steep price, given its expensive illustration. In it, Richeome urges the reader to "cast his or her mind's eye on one or more of these venerable images...his contemplation will make the soul's eye more diligent and keen, and the heart more eager for heavenly sustenance, "jetter les yeux de son entendement, sur un ou plusieurs de ces anciens tableaux [...] ceste contemplation luy aura rendu l'œil de l'ame plus attentif et pénétrant, et le cœur plus désireux de la viande celeste".

Published ten years before the better-known *Peinture spirituelle*, Richeome's *Tableaux sacrés* coincided in France with engraving's definitive replacement of the cheaper woodcut illustrations of the preceding century, and this work set a new standard for the engraver's craft thanks to Léonard Gaultier's consummate artistry. The entire project also owes much to the renewed interest in Philostratus' *Images ou tableaux de la platte peinture*, triggered by Blaise de Vigenère's translation and commentary in 1578, substantially expanded in a second, posthumous edition by Abel L'Angelier in 1597. L'Angelier collaborated with Sonnius, and with particular frequency around the time that Sonnius was embarking upon the Richeome-Gaultier *Tableaux sacrés*, producing joint editions in 1594, 1599, 1600 [three different titles], 1601, 1615.¹ One copy of the *Tableaux sacrés* even survives in what appears to be a stylized binding associated with L'Angelier's shop, suggesting that L'Angelier might have acted as an outlet for Sonnius' edition.



Cfr.: *Good Jesuit bad Jesuit Blogspot.it* - <http://goodjesuitbadjesuit.blogspot.com/2009/02/fr-louis-richeome-sj-and-counter.html>



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Joining the Jesuits in 1565 in Paris, where he enjoyed the opportunity to study under Juan de Maldonado, Richeome went on to occupy teaching posts in Bordeaux, Pont-à-Mousson, and Dijon. He served as provincial at Lyon (1586-1592), Aquitaine, and again in Lyon in 1605, and as French assistant in Rome from 1606 to 1616. An exponent of "optimistic" spirituality, to use Henri Brémond's term (1: 37), Richeome played a crucial role in overcoming prohibitions, if not deep-seated prejudices, against the Jesuit order in France. [...]

Richeome extended Philostratus' technique of *ekphrasis* (the dramatic description of a visual work of art) by using his descriptions of Gaultier's engravings as the occasion to conduct exegesis using the four traditional senses of reading, literal-historical, tropological-moral, anagogical, and allegorical. Despite what might seem like a highly orchestrated, indeed programmatic, rhetorical intent, Judi Loach has intriguingly suggested that "by leaving linkages between different images tacit, such that the viewer or reader could believe that he or she was discovering them independently, they would become more memorable for that individual" (forthcoming, see bibliography below). Loach has further shown how the spiritual exercises and meditative guides that the Jesuits promoted targeted not individual readers who might peruse them in solitude, but a relatively structured communal environment which assimilated these works collaboratively. The Gordon copy offers some evidence of this, bearing the traces of two hands and the contribution of a least one friend who worked in partnership on the inscriptions made to the volume, if not in its actual reading. The carefulness of the calligraphy further suggests the volume was meant for display to others.

At the same time, it illustrates how Counter-Reformation books composed with an intent such as Richeome's could elicit very different responses and generate reactions hardly anticipated by their authors. Pierre Crozon, owner of the copy in question, had the volume sumptuously bounded in memory of his wife of ten years, Catherine Payen, who died in 1609 at the age of thirty-three. Using as a monogram the couple's interlaced initials, "PP" (Pierre and Payen) and "CC" (Crozon and Catherine), he added on the binding an anagram above a sequence of numbers which revealed the permutation of the letters in his wife's name:

C H A R I T É N' A P E I N E
1 . 4 . 2 . 6 . 7 . 3 . 5 . 14 . 11 . 10 . 13 . 12 . 8 . 9

"True love feels no pain": yet, for all the consolation that the post-Tridentine Church wished to bring through such words of wisdom, Crozon struggled to square his faith with the loss of the woman who had been "the sweetest of wives," "uxor suavissima" (2K4r).

Bereavement and responses to death posed perennial stumbling blocks to faith, and Crozon's "monument of pain," "monumenta doloris" (end flyleaf 2v), as he named the book, proved no exception. Thus, where Richeome advocates the conventional vision of Jesus taking the Church as his bride, in which readers were married only to their faith, "beloved of this Groom, invited to this wedding, avail yourself only of the nourishment he has prepared for you," Crozon persists in identifying himself as the groom, Catherine the bride, "Petrus Crozon unus Catharina Payen maritus, / Catharina Payen una uxor illius, una mulier, una costa," in the page facing this advice (518, 2K4r). Crozon further composed verse that proposes a second anagram, taking advantage of the fact that his wife's maiden name means "pagan" in French: "Neither the crowd of days / Nor the



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length of years / Nor the ceaseless spinning of centuries / Can wipe away from my soul / The vivid image of the name of my / P a g a n L o v e [...]" "Ny la multitude des jours / Ny la longitude des ans, / Ny la continuelle revolution des siecles / Ne pourront abolir de mon ame / Ny la vive image du nom de ma / C h a r i t é P a y e n n e [...]"(end flyleaf 3v).

Richeome and his beautifully illustrated works epitomize the Counter-Reformation creation of a new, "modern" Catholicism whose dynamism is only beginning to be fully appreciated by historians today (see Michael A. Mullett's *Catholic Reformation* [1999], Robert Bireley's *Refashioning of Catholicism* [1999], and R. Po-chia Hsia's *World of Catholic Renewal* [2005 (1998)]). This copy's annotations, in penmanship far too painstaking to suggest anything so spontaneous as reading notes, nevertheless demonstrate how lay devotional models such as the one that Richeome promoted could spark very different results among their audience. None would prove more unexpected than the "experimental science" pioneered by one of Richeome's students who went on to become the most notorious spiritual impresario of the century's middle, Jean-Joseph Surin, the infamous exorcist of Loudon.

Further Reading

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