

Rural Faith and Wills as Evidence of Popular Religion in France, 1500-1650

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

L'étude des croyances et attitudes religieuses des ruraux français du début de l'époque moderne n'est pas qu'utile aux chercheurs intéressés à la religion populaire; elle l'est aussi à ceux qui se préoccupent de retracer l'implantation et l'application des réformes tridentines. Certaines perceptions sont ici implicites. Ainsi, selon certains, la majorité des Français pré-tridentins auraient été à peine christianisés, leur foi ou croyance ayant été un curieux mélange de traditions médiévales et de superstitions païennes. Ils s'appuient pour ce dire sur les témoignages des prêtres tridentins qui, l'auteur nous le rappelle, avaient fréquenté les séminaires et étaient majoritairement des urbains. D'autres ont plutôt perçu la vie religieuse dans les campagnes françaises comme ayant été traditionnelle et étant restée inchangée jusqu'à l'imposition des nonnes tridentines par ce nouveau clergé issu de la réforme.

Les circonstances ayant été telles, il est évident que le clergé et le peuple de l'époque aient été fort divisés. Cependant, cette division ne fut peut-être pas tant le résultat de l'insuffisance de la christianisation du peuple que celui de la nouvelle orientation théologique d'un clergé paroissial mieux formé qu'avant et qui perçut l'état de la christianisation comme étant insuffisant. C'est là la théorie que l'auteur veut vérifier à travers l'étude de 539 testaments provenant des Archives départementales de l'Aube et s'échelonnant des années 1500 à 1650.

Après avoir décrit le corpus des testaments et souligné les problèmes inhérents à la source, l'auteur en analyse le contenu en faisant ressortir ce qui a trait à la pratique et à la croyance religieuse: dévotions, appartenance aux confréries, attachement aux chapelles de procession, dons à l'Eglise, à la paroisse et aux pauvres, demandes de prières et de messes, coutume de la "trentaine" et de "l'année", désir d'être enterré sous l'église et préoccupation du salut. Toutes ces manifestations varient évidemment dans l'espace et le temps mais elles n'en témoignent pas moins de croyances religieuses véritables et de pratiques qui étaient tout à fait orthodoxes à l'époque. Le clergé tridentin l'eût-il compris ainsi qu'il n'aurait pas mis fin à des traditions séculaires et amené la religion à être perçue comme étant imposée d'en haut plutôt qu'émanant d'une culture profondément ressentie. Voire, précise l'auteur, la foi qui a inspiré les testaments de 1500 à 1650 eût-elle survécue que la déchristianisation qui survint plus tard n'aurait été ni aussi facile ni aussi répandue.

Rural Faith and Wills as Evidence of Popular Religion in France, 1500-1650*

ALAN G. ARTHUR

Descriptions and explications of the religious beliefs and attitudes of rural Frenchmen in the early modern period must play an important part in any assessment of the effectiveness of the edicts of the Council of Trent. Implicit in many evaluations is the assumption that before the seventeenth century the majority of the French were only imperfectly Christian and that their faith was partly pagan and partly an unsophisticated amalgam of the most ritualistic components of medieval sacerdotalism and extra-Christian superstition. The witness of reforming ecclesiastics, including the often-horrified incomprehension of rural religious practices by the new cohort of mostly urban-born, seminary-trained parish priests, is regularly used to illustrate the gulf which is said to have divided a modern, theological Christianity from an operational, semi-magical cult masquerading under the forms of official religion.¹

Other assessments do not presume or imply a widespread unawareness of or indifference to official religion, but they do emphasize the non-parochial nature of much of late medieval religious practice, at least in the countryside. In their concern for conformity in behaviour and belief, the reformers of Trent radically recast the traditional religious life of most European peasants, insisting on the primacy of the services in the parish church, regardless of the dislocations which such reorientation entailed.² This interpretation, like the preceding one, implies a relatively homogeneous pre-Tridentine popular faith, with regional variations reflecting only differing local superstitions about magic wells and the like. Both analytical frames imply that village religion was traditionalist and slow to change until the imposition of externally defined norms by the post-conciliar clergy.

That a profound barrier divided many of the clergy from the rural laity cannot be denied, but it is not as certain that the division between the two was the result of an incomplete Christianisation of the countryside in the more than eleven centuries between the conversion of Clovis and the religious revival associated with François de Sales, Bérulle and others. Instead, it may be that the overly theological, doctrine-oriented training of many Counter-Reformation priests lies at the heart of their comments about the religiosity of their parishioners. The testing of this theory, however, requires a body of evidence less value-loaded than clerical memoirs and records of episcopal visitations. Ideally this evidence should span the period 1500 to

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1. For the most assertive and generalised statement of this view see J. Delumeau, *Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris, 1971), esp. pp. 237-48 and 256-62.
2. See, for example, J. Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the people of Catholic Europe", *Past and Present*, 47 (May 1970), pp. 51-70.

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

1650 in order that pre- and post-Counter-Reformation documentation can be compared.

Wills seem the only possible available source of such information. An analysis of more than five hundred testaments prepared by peasants of northern France in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries³ suggests that to assess rural religion with reference to a dichotomy between religion and magic is dramatically to oversimplify and misrepresent it. These wills also demonstrate important regional variations in Christian practice and faith and show that the beliefs of the peasants were neither static nor unchanging. Popular religion did not just respond to outside pressures from noble converts wishing to implement the Reform in their seigneuries or from zealots, theologically trained priests determined to extirpate "unchristian" practices. There were many long-term changes in expressions of devotion which preceded or operated independently of the institutionalisation of the Counter-Reformation in the countryside.

While urban wills survive in substantial numbers in relatively easily utilised notarial archives from the early to mid-sixteenth century,⁴ this is not the case with rural testaments, for relatively few notarial registers survive from the countryside and those which do are immensely difficult to use, since they are neither subdivided according to the nature of the acts recorded nor clearly labelled, act by act. The inordinate paleographical difficulties they pose further diminishes their usefulness as potential sources.⁵ Fortunately, many parishes kept copies of all wills in which donations were made to the church in return for anniversary services and prayers. It is on these copies that the present study is based.

Both their provenance and their purpose would seem to make such testaments unrepresentative sources of information about the faith of the majority of peasants, those who did not or were not able to leave endowments for the repose of their souls. Careful consideration of all the possible objections concerning their representativity and their autonomy from clerical influences, however, leads to the conclusion that, while not the ideal sources one might most want to have, the wills are, *in toto*, less biased and less likely to be misrepresentative than might first seem to be the case. Admittedly, a substantial number of the wills were prepared by people characterised as

3. The 539 wills on which this study is based are found in the *Archives départementales de l'Aube* (henceforth ADAube), 78G2, 101G1, 108G29, 274G2, 298G1, 313G12, 345G6 and 375G5; AD *Eure-et-Loir* (henceforth ADEL), G1476-8, 1676, 4046, 4048-50, 4073, 4076-81, 4083, 4095, 4113-4, 4122, 4168-9, 4203, 4218-9, 4396, 4423, 4619-20, 4704-5, 4767, 4775-9, 4987, 4989-91, 4995, 4997, 5000, 5031-2, 5049, 5054, 5142, 5213, 5218, 5248-53, 5255, 5262, 5427, 5613, 5641, 5697, 6029-31, 6048-50, 6052-5, 6061, 6218-9, 6222, 6306-9, 6311-8, 7120, 7124, 7129, 7132-3, 7668, 7681-3, 8171, 8173, 8201, 8203, 8220-1, 8328-9, 8330-8, 8340-4; AD *Indre-et-Loire* (henceforth ADIL), G686, 702, 774, 783-4, 786, 798, 802, 820, 822, 842-4, 886, 900, 928, 944, 959, 967, 971, 1032, 1036, 1040; AD *Loir-et-Cher* (henceforth ADLC), G1501-2, 1569, 1577; and AD *Yonne* (henceforth ADYonne), E467, G2441, 2471.

4. See P. Chaunu, *La mort à Paris* (Paris, 1978), pp. 288-9.

5. For example, ADEL, VE16-20.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

laboueurs or *vignerons*, who were thus among the economic and social élite of the village community, but more than half are the last wishes of *manouvriers*, *hommes de braz*, *hommes de peyne* and their spouses.⁶ For example, in 1601, Claudyne Philipès, an abandoned wife, ordered the sale of all her "furniture" to fund quarterly inclusion of her name in prayers for the dead at the parish church of Yèvres, south of Chartres, at the four main feasts. Any grain that was left after this bequest had been established was to be sold in order to finance what must have been an austere, minimal funeral.⁷ While in some instances these poorer villagers may have diminished the inheritance of their children because of an excessive and therefore unrepresentative piety or devotion, many seem to have been without direct heirs. It was this relative heirlessness which separated them from others of their rank, not any evident *bigotisme*.⁸ Furthermore, to argue that the wills of *laboueurs* and *vignerons* were not representative of the wider rural community is dramatically to recast the traditional picture of an imperfectly Christianised peasantry; in many instances it was the "natural leaders" of the villages, the *laboueurs* and their equivalents, who led the way in resisting many of the impositions of the seventeenth-century clergy. Had the economic élite of the villages been relatively more Christian and devout, the work of the Counter-Reformation would have been substantially easier. Differences between peasants were social and economic, not cultural or religious.

The comparison and analysis of hundreds of wills provide a relatively secure base from which to deny fears that they reflect only the vocabulary and notions of testamentary propriety of the parish priests who were involved, at least as witnesses, in the preparation of many of them. Although numerous individual components of the wills are completely formulaic, the many permutations and combinations of these formulae, found even in roughly contemporaneous wills from the same village, and the regional patterns of use of certain invocations or requests, all indicate considerable autonomy for the testator within regional conventions which were not ecclesiastically imposed. The occasional truly idiosyncratic and individualistic will may underline this conclusion, but it is less proof of the relative freedom with which testators composed them than are a few clusters of virtually programmed wills.⁹ More than anything else

6. One hundred and ten wills were produced by *laboueurs* and *vignerons*, 296 by peasants of lower status and eighty-one by artisans, "merchants" and others who defined themselves with nonagricultural labels, but many of whom were probably involved at least part of the time in the cultivation of crops.
7. ADEL, G8336, 20 janvier 1601. The four main feasts were Easter, Pentecost, All Saints' Day and Christmas.
8. Because the wills were primarily spiritual documents and property was transmitted according to the custom of the region to the nearest legitimate heirs many of them do not indicate whether the testator had children. Thus this comment is based on impressions developed during research and cannot be fully substantiated.
9. Cf. the wills from Coulangé, in Touraine, of Jehan Ledet, 5 octobre 1605, Toussaint Guillot, 24 décembre 1605, and Symonne Lardier, 31 mai 1614 (ADIL, G784), all of which embody an apparently common local set of formulas in a standard order. Even so, they are not word-for-word replicas of one another. At the other extreme are wills like that of Saine Gallou of Yèvres (ADEL, G8330, 23 avril 1601) in which a strong personality shines through all the formulaic patterns, as she identifies and comments on her heirs and their emotional attachments to her.

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

these demonstrate the extent to which most of the others are truly the personal products of their composers. As long as the contents of the wills were not glaringly heterodox or heretical, priests had no reason to concern themselves with details other than the size and nature of the bequest and the type of anniversary or memorial service that bequest was to support.

One cannot, of course, maintain that the wills are a complete indicator of all aspects of rural religion or even of all the peasants' beliefs about death, the dead, and the nature of the afterlife. They tell us about one end of the spectrum of village faith and behaviour, its most formal and ecclesiastical elements. These were, however, not separate categories, but part of a continuum. The particularly Christian devotion to saints, confraternities, charity to the poor and proper ecclesiastical burial which the people of the different regions emphasised in varying degrees did not coexist uneasily with other more magical elements. All were united in a single framework. Further, the care and expense which testators devoted to explicitly Christian elements of their final departure from the world demonstrate that these were not to them superficial elements maintained only because of church pressures; they were a central and crucial part of their faith.

While most of the wills examined date from the period after 1575, the slowness with which the Counter-Reformation was institutionalised in most of the dioceses of France means that a large proportion of them cannot be seen as products of a post-Tridentine environment. There was no noteworthy reforming activity in the three dioceses of Chartres, Troyes and Tours, from which nearly all the wills are drawn, before 1600. Very few rural priests anywhere in the country were touched in the sixteenth century by the new notions of parochial discipline and doctrinal instruction which Italians like Giberti and Borromeo were attempting to implement even before they were legislated at Trent. Both the Gallican reluctance of the French authorities to register the Edicts of Trent¹⁰ and the Wars of Religion helped to maintain in the kingdom a relatively traditional ecclesiastical structure until well into the seventeenth century.

Even a cleric with substantial Tridentine sympathies, like Nicholas De Thou, bishop of Chartres during the last quarter of the sixteenth century, could do little given this context.¹¹ The exigencies of war and advancing age limited his direct supervision of the parochial clergy; he was succeeded by Philippe Hurault, a nonresident with virtually no interest in his episcopal responsibilities. Thus, until after the national Assembly of Clergy of 1615 and the elevation of Léonor d'Estampes de Valençay in 1620,¹² the diocese of Chartres, like those of Tours and Troyes, cannot be said to have

10. See R. Doucet, *Les institutions de la France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1948), II, pp. 675-6.

11. M. Jusselin has published the "Instructions données par l'évêque de Thou aux prêtres du diocèse de Chartres, le 22 mai 1578" from an original in the Bibliothèque municipale de Chartres (Ms. 1016) in *La voix de Notre-Dame de Chartres* (1932), pp. 24-9. These instructions appear to have had very little effect in the rural parishes of his diocese.

12. See R. Sauzet, *Les visites pastorales dans le diocèse de Chartres pendant la première moitié du XVII^e siècle* (Rome, 1975), pp. 19-32.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

felt the imposition of the Counter-Reformation from above. On the other side, even the suspect religious beliefs of De Thou's predecessor, Charles Guillard, like the heresy of Antonio Caracciolo, his contemporary as bishop of Troyes, had no institutional consequences. Nor did they promote the spread of Calvinist or heterodox ideas outside the walls of the episcopal capital.¹³ In all three dioceses, the only effective agents of Reformation ideas in the countryside appear to have been a few rural seigneurs with connections to the Huguenot party during the Wars of Religion. Neal Galpern is quite right, given all this, to emphasize the late medieval nature and context of much of the religious belief and behaviour of the people of Champagne through the sixteenth century.¹⁴ New definitions and ideas were remarkably slow to penetrate to the popular level, despite the upheavals of the Reformation.

At the same time, in demonstrating that the religion of the people was not closely linked to the ideas of the reformers, Galpern, who focuses his study primarily on the urban population of Troyes and Reims and of *bourgs* like Chaource, tends to underemphasize the ways in which that faith did change or develop over the century. There were substantial static elements in both urban and rural religion, but if one does not define change primarily in terms suggested by a knowledge of the intentions and the ultimate successes of clerical reformers, whether Protestant or Catholic, evidence of growth and transformation can be found.

To categorise the collected wills in broad chronological categories is the most effective way to demonstrate the temporal shifts in invocations and testamentary piety which are obscured on the one hand by the formulaic character of many components of the wills and on the other by the unique personal touches imposed by some individual testators. Early in their wills most testators commended their souls to the mercy of God and the intercessions of one or more of the saints, but these calls changed over time. Invocations of the Virgin Mary rose steadily through the period between 1500 and 1650, while those of St. Michael, having risen dramatically after 1550, levelled off and then declined slightly after 1625. A similar pattern, incorporating a less pronounced rise, characterised calls for the assistance of both St. Peter and St. Paul.

13. E. Haye, "Notes historiques sur Chartres et le diocèse de Chartres pendant l'épiscopat de Louis et Charles Guillard", in *Mémoires de la Société Archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir*, X (1896), pp. 241-72 and 423-67; J. Roserot de Melin, *Le diocèse de Troyes des origines à nos jours (III^e s.-1955)* (Troyes, 1955), pp. 138-9.

14. A.N. Galpern, *The religions of the people in sixteenth-century Champagne* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), esp. pp. 181-200.

Only invocations of parish patrons, however, approached those of the Mother of God in numbers.¹⁵

A further breakdown of these trends, region by region, indicates substantial regional diversity. In the *pays chartrain*, the proportion of testators who invoked the Virgin's assistance, already over 90 per cent, changed very little after 1600, while in Touraine it rose marginally from 83.1 to 87.9 per cent. In Champagne a more dramatic rise from 76.9 per cent almost to the levels of the diocese of Chartres (93.5 per cent) may be in part a reflection of a relatively small sample.¹⁶ The fact that the cathedral at Chartres was devoted to Mary, while those at Tours and Troyes were dedicated to St. Gatien and St. Peter respectively, does not seem a part of any possible explanation of these regional variations, for St. Gatien evoked no attention in Touraine (nor, for that matter, did the more famous Tourangeois saint, Martin) and St. Peter was more honored in the diocese of Chartres than of Troyes.¹⁷ Nor was it a function of a dramatically different proportion of parish churches named in honour of the Virgin. Furthermore, because gifts to the cathedral and to the Hôtel-Dieu of the episcopal capital were much less common among the peasantry around Chartres than in the other dioceses,¹⁸ one cannot argue that diocesan connections or influences were stronger there than elsewhere. Apparently there was a pre-Reformation geography of popular mariolatry, at least partly unconnected to the ecclesiastical structure, which was slowly disappearing as veneration of Mary approached unanimity.

Extended speculation about the reasons the peasants called on Mary and the saints rather than simply commending their souls to God is likely to be unproductive, but it seems clear that relatively few of them were content, with Simonne Nouveau of Jussay, simply to ask the Creator to place (*colloquer*) their souls "directly in the kingdom of his elect".¹⁹ The assistance of others with more certain access to God's charity was, at the very least, an intelligent auxiliary of their own devotion.

15. Invocations of Mary rose from 81.8 per cent (eighteen of twenty-two) before 1550, to 94.5 per cent (120 of 127) in the period between 1626 and 1650; those of St. Michael from 22.7 per cent (five of twenty-two) to 62.7 per cent (128 of 204) between 1601 and 1625, then declined to 50.4 per cent (sixty-four of 127) between 1626 and 1650. Saints Peter and Paul, unmentioned in twenty-two wills from the period before 1550, rose respectively from 13.2 to 21.4 per cent and from 13.2 to 19.8 per cent in the next two quarter centuries. Between 1601 and 1625, Peter was mentioned by 39.7 per cent and Paul by 30.9 per cent; and between 1626 and 1650 the two appeared in 35.4 per cent and 21.3 per cent of wills. Commendations of souls to the protection of parish patrons rose from 36.4 per cent (eight of twenty-two) before 1550 to 73.5 per cent (150 of 204) between 1601 and 1625, then dropped to 67.7 per cent (eighty-six of 127) between 1626 and 1650.

16. Before 1600 91.7 per cent of Chartrain wills invoked Mary (ninety-nine of 108); this rose to 93.6 (219 of 234). In Touraine, the numbers rose from fifty-four of sixty-five to fifty-eight of sixty-six; in Champagne from ten of thirteen to twenty-nine of thirty-one.

17. In Champagne wills commending the testator's soul to St. Peter rose from 23.1 per cent (three of thirteen) before 1600 to 35.5 per cent (eleven of thirty-one) after; in the diocese of Chartres from 24.8 per cent (twenty-seven of 109) to 44.9 per cent (105 of 234). A part of this, however, resulted from the high proportion of post-1600 Chartrain wills from parishes of which Peter was patron.

18. See n.47 below.

19. ADIL, G.1577, 29 janvier 1599.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

While Latin words and phrases are absent from the bodies of nearly all non-clerical wills from this period, a great many begin with the completely formulaic and seemingly unthinking incipit, “*in nomine domine amen*”. Even here, however, there are substantial regional variations: 63.4 per cent from Champagne and 52.0 from Chartres begin in this way. In Touraine far greater variation typifies the beginning of wills; almost as many testators begin with an initial supplication to the Holy Trinity and an additional one-sixth begin, “Jesus Maria”.²⁰ Obviously the freedom with which testators along the Loire wrote was greater than that of their contemporaries elsewhere, but it is not clear that they were any less influenced by priestly conventions. The peasants of the other dioceses may equally have been following lay, rather than ecclesiastical, conventions, for nothing else in the wills suggests that the Tourangeois were less orthodox or more active in their resistance to or lack of connection with official religion. In all regions the proportion of people who did not begin their wills with some sort of pious formula declined over time, but regional variations tended to remain roughly the same; there was no apparent homogenising of testamentary styles.

Although the succeeding invocations exhibit considerable differences depending on the occupation and the place of residence of their author, male and female appeals for heavenly assistance show only one seemingly noteworthy distinguishing characteristic. Almost 65 per cent of women whose wills were drawn up during an illness called on the archangel Michael (126 of 194 cases) while only 55.2 per cent of men in similar circumstances did so (107 of 194), but this is the most extreme gender-connected difference and despite its apparent size it is not statistically significant.²¹ Interestingly peasant wills, unlike those from Paris studied by Pierre Chaunu and his students,²² survive in almost equal numbers from men and women in all three regions under consideration here. Given the traditional wisdom regarding the status and autonomy of women in the early modern period, it is hard to suggest a reason for this pattern.

Some of the most personalised wills do indeed give evidence of loving male-female relationships not fully consonant with some theories about the absence of affective relationships among members of most, if not all, social groups in the early modern period. Michelle Badufle, of Neuvy-en-Dunois, asserted the “earnest love and affection which she has always felt and borne towards her husband for the kind

20. Thirty-seven of 130 wills from Touraine (28.5 per cent) begin with the Latin phrase; thirty-five (26.9 per cent) start with the Trinity and sixteen (12.9 per cent) with “Jesus Maria”. In the Chartrain only ten of 348 mentioned the Trinity in their incipits; none used the latter formula. Even at later points in the wills from around Chartres, references to God’s triune nature are sufficiently unusual that they stand out. Cf. ADEL, G6317, 16 janvier 1612, will of Jehan Lemoyne, a tailor from Dangeau, in the context of more than ten other wills from that village in the decade 1609-19 (ADEL, G6306-09, G6311, G6315-18). In Champagne only one of forty-one wills began, “Jesus Maria”, and none called on the Trinity.

21. The corrected chi square is 3.48088 with one degree of freedom; its significance, 0.0621.

22. See Chaunu, *La mort*, pp. 289-90. Forty-two per cent of Parisian wills were composed by women.

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

treatment and supervision she has received from him",²³ underlining the ways in which conjugal relationships could mitigate the theoretical authority of husband over wife. Likewise, the desire of René Cave, a baker from Françay, for his wife's forgiveness for all his offenses during their years together,²⁴ may be in part a reflection of an almost rote deathbed clearing of accounts, but it also indicates a sense that a husband owed his wife more than discipline and regulation. Another perspective on female status is suggested by a dying young peasant who left his mother two *setiers* of grain and ten *livres* "for all she has done for her children, expecting nothing in return".²⁵ In most of the wills women's family names are explicitly indicated, but in the diocese of Troyes a woman was usually identified by her given or Christian name and her husband's full name. Whether this means that a wife's status was lower in Champagne than in Beauce, Dunois and Touraine is not clear; presumably her relationship with her husband was there presumed to have fully supplanted her connections with her own lineage. It did not, however, affect the proportion of female wills.

Beyond asking that their debts be paid, few testators were more than briefly concerned with their relationships with the living; they looked resolutely, if not assuredly, forward to their deaths, funerals and the afterlife. Presumably, for most of them, earthly settlements of accounts, unlike that of the baker of Françay, were personal and oral. Most of them were not content to leave their funeral arrangements to their survivors, but laid out their wishes in explicit and often extended detail, giving the reader a cumulative sense of the relatively narrow, but again regionally diverse, standards of funeral services.

As noted above, the Counter-Reformation was only very slowly felt by the rural laity of northern France. One community at least, however, provided an exception to this general statement. At Yèvres, a large parish of dispersed habitations southwest of Chartres (near Brou), the parish priest from 1600 was Nicholas Janvier, a devoted agent of Tridentine reform and, by 1604, a doctor of canon law.²⁶ Although he remained at Yèvres less than a decade, he left his mark on the parish in ways which set it apart from most other rural communities in the diocese. Fortunately (and perhaps consequently) a relatively large number of wills (seventy-eight) have survived from this single parish for the years 1600 to 1650, a fact which makes it possible to check patterns of testamentary devotion across the *pays chartrain* as a whole, and in Touraine and Champagne as well, against a sample known to have been influenced by Counter-Reformation ideals.

The exceptionally high proportion of invocations of Mary after 1600 at Yèvres (seventy-six of seventy-eight) in part reflects the fact that she was the parish patron there and thus did double duty for those who called on her. Even after 1600, however, 8.3 per cent of Yèvres' Beauceron and Dunois neighbours did not invoke her and 19.9

23. ADEL, G6039, 5 juin 1591.

24. ADIL, G1501, 10 mai 1646.

25. ADEL, G8335, 6 mai 1621, the will of Jacques Bouvier of Yèvres.

26. R. Sauzet, *Les visites pastorales*, pp. 48-56.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

per cent ignored their parish patron in preparing their wills. Janvier's influence clearly heightened explicit devotion to the Virgin. He seems likewise to have helped increase commendations to the archangel Michael to 82.1 per cent (sixty-four of seventy-eight), while elsewhere in the diocese they declined from 71.3 (seventy-seven of 108) to 61.5 per cent (ninety-six of 156) after 1600.²⁷ Janvier and his successors were not indiscriminate in their hagiolatry. Although invocations of St. Peter were higher at Yèvres (34.6 per cent; twenty-seven of seventy-eight) than they had been in the diocese as a whole before 1600 (24.8 per cent; twenty-seven of 109), wills from other parishes show a comparable increase.²⁸ In all areas St. Paul was closely linked with St. Peter and was regularly invoked immediately after him, except when Peter was called on as parish patron rather than as apostle and first bishop of Rome.²⁹

Nowhere did invocations of name saints, those whose names were borne by testators, surpass 16 per cent and there is no clear temporal development in their appearance in wills;³⁰ parish patrons seem to have been seen as more logical or more useful protectors. The peasants' faith thus seems to have been communally focused and, by extension, relatively nondoctrinal. They expected to be assisted at the Last Judgement as members of a Christian community, the parish — represented by its patron — not as individuals with a specific, personal heavenly intercessor. Even in this matter there were substantial and significant regional variations. In Touraine only 21.5 per cent of pre-1600 testators (fourteen of sixty-five) and 30.3 per cent after 1600 (twenty of sixty-six) called on their patron, when in Champagne one-half and in the

27. In Touraine invocations of Michael declined from 35.4 per cent (twenty-three of sixty-five) to 31.8 per cent (twenty-one of sixty-six) and in Champagne from 46.2 per cent (six of thirteen) to 35.5 per cent (eleven of thirty-one).

28. In other parishes around Chartres the proportion of invocations of St. Peter rose from 24.8 to 50 per cent (seventy-eight of 156), but more than half of this increase is a result of the coincidental increase of the proportion of wills from parishes whose patron was St. Peter. Three of thirteen pre-1600 wills from Champagne (23.1 per cent) and eleven of thirty-one after (35.5 per cent) called on Peter; in Touraine the percentage rose from 3.1 to 15.2 per cent (two of sixty-five to ten of sixty-six).

29. In Paris (Chaunu, *La mort*, p. 310), and pre-1600 Champagne and Touraine, 100 per cent of invokers of Peter also called on Paul. At the same time 92.3 per cent did so in the diocese of Chartres. The proportions declined to 90.9 per cent in Champagne and 70 per cent in Touraine after 1600, but in the *pays chartrain*, excluding Yèvres, they decreased to only 61.6 per cent. In Yèvres they remained high (92.8 per cent). As noted in n. 28, the coincidental increase in wills from parishes in the diocese of Chartres dedicated to Peter underlay its seeming deviation.

30. In Champagne before 1600, two of thirteen wills (15.4 per cent) included name saint invocations, but overall only forty-three appeared in 518 wills (8.3 per cent) and almost half of these (twenty-one) were invocations of saints like Peter, Paul, Michael and Mary, who may not have been cited *because* they were name saints. Chaunu says 26.4 per cent of Parisians called on their name saint. *La mort*, p. 470.

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

diocese of Chartres more than four-fifths did so.³¹ The Tourangeois testator was far more likely than his peers elsewhere simply to commend his soul to God, “la glorieuse Vierge Marie et toute la cour céleste du paradis”. But invocations of name saints were no higher there than elsewhere, making it difficult, if not impossible, to suggest that in Touraine popular religion might have been more doctrinal and personal. Nor does the more spartan invocatory style seem to indicate a lower level of parochial devotion or attachment.

Pierre Chaunu has suggested that invocation of the celestial court may have reflected a more optimistic belief in the possibility that the intercessions and importunings of the collected saints and angels might truly melt God’s stern judgement of a sinner whose contrition and compensating deeds were less certainly sufficient. He suggests that it may have been a more ancient and traditional formula than the alternative “tous les saints et saintes du paradis”.³² This thesis does not accord well with the fact that in Janvier’s Yèvres, 92.3 per cent of wills employ the former expression and that no general temporal pattern emerges in a comparison of all the varying conclusions to the commendatory sections of the wills.³³

A trait which sets apart the parishes of the diocese of Chartres, Yèvres excepted, from Paris and the villages of Champagne and Touraine was their inhabitants’ greater eagerness to call on the assistance of numerous additional saints for the care of their souls. Only 14.7 per cent of Parisians, 14.1 per cent of post-1600 Yévrois, 20.5 per cent of Champenois, and 12.2 per cent of Tourangeois,³⁴ added any names to those already mentioned, while in the parishes around Chartres such devotion grew from 26.6 per cent (twenty-nine of 109) before 1600 to 46.8 per cent in later wills (seventy-three of 156). An average of 1.41 additional saints, drawn from a substantial list according to no obvious community or regional standards, was named by those

31. Changes in Champagne are least clear because of the small sample size, but before 1600, 53.8 per cent of wills invoke the parish patron (seven of thirteen) and after 48.4 per cent (fifteen of thirty-one) do so. In the diocese of Chartres, excluding Dunois (a region which includes Yèvres), invocations rose to 84.7 per cent (fifty of fifty-nine) between 1601 and 1625, then dropped back to 77.1 per cent (thirty-seven of forty-eight), and in Dunois to 89.5 per cent and then 90.0 per cent (seventy-seven of eighty-six and thirty-six of forty, but these figures are skewed by the seventy-eight wills from Yèvres). Thirty-four per cent of Chaunu’s Parisian wills invoke parish patrons, a fact which may reflect the reduced centrality of parish life in a large city.
32. Chaunu, *La mort*, p. 311.
33. Elsewhere in the diocese of Chartres, 27.6 per cent of post-1600 wills (forty-three of 156), use the form “all the saints”, up from 21.1 per cent (twenty-three of 109) in the earlier period, while commendations to the celestial court declined from 65.1 per cent (seventy-one of 109) to 56.4 per cent (eighty-eight of 156). In Touraine the saints rise from 38.5 per cent (twenty-five of sixty-five) to 69.2 per cent (forty-five of sixty-five) after 1600, while the celestial court declines from 43.1 per cent (twenty-eight of sixty-five) to 20 per cent (thirteen of sixty-five), and in Champagne the pattern is reversed (saints 38.5 per cent to 22.6 per cent and celestial court 38.5 per cent to 67.7 per cent).
34. The figures are 23.1 per cent (three of thirteen) Champenois before 1600 and 19.4 per cent (six of thirty-one) after; 10.8 per cent (seven of sixty-five) Tourangeois before and 13.6 (nine of sixty-six) after. For Paris, see Chaunu, *La mort*, p. 470.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

Chartrain testators not content with a more limited cast. Although one earnest woman named five, she was exceptional, and few people named more than two.³⁵

Further testamentary evidence of religious practices which distinguished the *pays chartrain* from Touraine and Champagne is provided by the small gifts for prayers which more than two-thirds of Chartrain peasants (245 of 355) gave to the churches of some or all of the parishes surrounding theirs.³⁶ Called “*églises circonvoisines*” or, more revealingly, “*églises processionnelles*”³⁷ these churches were clearly a part of rural interparochial religious activities which have left virtually no other evidence of their existence.³⁸ Exactly what the processions entailed, who was involved, and when they occurred cannot be known, but they appear to have been more important in some parts of the region than others. In the Dunois, the southernmost part of the sample area in the diocese, testators called on an average of only 1.71 neighbouring churches and their patrons, while in the southwest and west (Perche and Thimerais) the figure was 4.97. Yèvres, on the border between these two subregions, generated 3.26 such supplications on average.³⁹ *Laboureurs* and *vignerons* were likely to give to more of the processional churches (3.99) than their lower status agriculturalist neighbours (3.21) or than craftsmen or merchants (3.02), but this may reflect little more than their sense that they could better afford to give.⁴⁰ There is too little evidence to make possible any suggestions regarding the extent to which devotion to one’s neighbours’ churches and their patrons reflected intervillage solidarities which were more likely to be important to rural élites. It is noteworthy that there is no clear connection between

35. Twenty-four named two extra saints, six named three, and two, four. In Touraine, twelve wills mentioned one extra saint and three called on three; in Champagne eight invoked one and one, three. Among the additional saints were Anne, Apollonia, Barbara, Catherine, Christine, Genevieve, Mary Magdalene, Aignan, Ignatius, James, John the Baptist, Nicholas, Remy and “St. Stephen and all the martyrs”.

36. Only 8.5 per cent of Tourangeois wills (eleven of 119) and 8.2 per cent from Champagne (four of forty-nine) mention neighbouring parishes.

37. Cf. ADEL, G4396, 15 février 1603, the will of Jacqueline Labrier of Levainville, who gave two *sous* to each of four churches.

38. A brief discussion of such a procession at a time of agricultural depression in Champagne is found in the *Mémoires* of Claude Haton (Paris, 1857), II, p. 715, translated in Galpern, p. 85, but this seems to have been a more exceptional phenomenon than the regular devotion to processional churches in wills around Chartres suggests.

39. These averages are derived from all peasant wills from the diocese, even those of testators who also made no donations to neighbouring churches. In the Islerois, southwest of Chartres, but nearer to it than the Percheron villages, the average was 4.64. The villages immediately around Chartres, those to the southeast and the north and northeast averaged around three donations per will (3.36, 3.28, and 2.84 respectively).

40. If one removes all those who did not give to processional churches from consideration, *laboureurs* and *vignerons* gave to an average of 5.61, other peasants to 4.34, and those who labelled themselves nonagriculturalists 4.57. F is 5.238, and the observed significance level 0.006.

the invocation of additional saints, the other striking characteristic of Chartrain wills, and gifts to other churches for prayers.⁴¹

Among the inhabitants of outlying hamlets of the parishes of the diocese of Chartres, only invocations of the Virgin's aid correlate closely with donations to processional churches; a call for the assistance even of his parish patron did not mean that a testator from a hamlet was more likely to give to neighbouring churches or, for that matter, that he was less likely. Among people living in the central village of a parish, invocations of both the Virgin and their parish patron were connected to a greater tendency to give to surrounding parish churches.⁴² The sense of neighbourhood was thus more fully attached to the parish for villagers than for hamlet-dwellers.

The existence of substantial local and village variations in types of invocations and donations for prayers underlines the relative autonomy with which individual peasants defined their own appropriate intercessory forms, employing a traditional but far from coercive vocabulary. A fully ritualised religion operates within a syntax which leaves both priest and believer little freedom of action, since correct performance of rituals and word-perfect recitation of formulae tend to become more and more a part of the ends of religion rather than means. There may be differing local variations of the cult, but within a local context, deviation from the collectively defined norm will be limited. Rural religion in northern France was not individual in focus, nonritualised and doctrinal in practice, but to see it as exclusively collectivist and adhering only to formulaic, semimagical notions of piety is to miss an important part of its structure and content.

Donations to processional churches around Chartres appear to have played the role that bequests to confraternities and to "boîtes des trépassés" filled in Touraine and Champagne. In Champagne 61.2 per cent and in Touraine 39.7 per cent of wills included gifts for prayers, either to "confraternities" or "boîtes", while only 16.7 per

41. To go through will by will, checking to see if the additional saints a testator invoked were patrons of neighbouring churches seemed excessive and unnecessary, given the fact that those who did not invoke the assistance of any but the traditional saintly intercessors gave to an average of 3.49 neighbouring churches, while those who extended their supplicatory list gave to only 3.22.
42. Of 185 hamleters 94.1 per cent (174) invoked the Virgin and 73.6 per cent (128) of these gave to processional churches; 98.5 per cent of those who gave to processional churches also invoked the Virgin (128 of 130). The corrected chi-square is 12.65394 with one degree of freedom and the significance 0.0004. While 73.4 per cent of hamleters who invoked their patron gave to neighbouring churches, only 78.5 per cent of givers invoked their patron (chi square significance 0.1547). Of 144 villagers 91.7 per cent (132) invoked Mary and 76.5 per cent of these (101) gave to processional churches; 95.3 per cent (101 of 106) of those who gave also invoked the Virgin. Of villager testators, 86.0 per cent (ninety-two of 107) who gave to neighbour churches also invoked their patron; the comparable percentage for St. Peter is 34.6 (thirty-seven of 107) but it is still significant (0.0486). Among major saints, then, only Michael, whom everyone identified as a specific helper of the dead was not invoked by villagers from the diocese of Chartres in a fashion correlated with gifts to neighbouring churches.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

cent from the diocese of Chartres did so. While the term “confraternity” was substantially more common than the less explicit “boîte” in Champenois wills, it was the vaguer term, or another, like “bassin”, which predominated in those testaments from other regions which left money for prayers from an extraparochial or nonsacramental agency or institution. Some lists of members and other indications that confraternities were functioning organisations can be found in the archives of Troyes and Auxerre,⁴³ but while, for example, the *procureur* of the *boîte des trépassés* at St. Martin-le-Beau, southeast of Tours along the Cher, was elected by the parishioners,⁴⁴ there appears to have been no special, separate organisation or group devoted to the dead of the parish. Likewise, at Marboué, north of Chartres, even though bequests were given to the “confréries du Saint Sacrement et de Notre Dame”, these gifts were managed by the churchwardens, not by agents of a separate organisation,⁴⁵ suggesting that around Chartres, and probably in Touraine too, a confraternity was not what our evidence from Champagne or even, closer, the Orléanais,⁴⁶ would lead us to expect. Indeed the term “confraternity” seems to have been used as no more than a synonym for *boîte*. This makes sense if we are correct in attributing a substantial role in the collective devotional life of Chartrain peasants to the ceremonies associated with processional churches. Only elsewhere did fully operating confraternities, alternative collectivities based on urban models, find enough open devotional space in which to grow. That they did not seem to have developed in Touraine suggests that we should look there for yet another form of extraparochial support for the souls of the departed.

43. See, for example, AD Aube, 108G10, 108G44, 108G45, 307G2; ADYonne, G2512, G2513.

44. ADIL, G959, 11 juillet 1552.

45. ADEL, G5697, 16 avril 1632, a donation from Charles Chedde. Although a confraternity dedicated to St. James was established at Châteaudun as early as the mid-thirteenth century (G. Le Bras, *Etudes de sociologie religieuse* [Paris, 1955-6], p. 429; ADEL, G5444-52) and a second one, devoted to the Virgin was founded in 1619 (ADEL, G5534), they seem not to have fostered rural imitations. In the city of Chartres, although occupational confraternities often served as the incubators of artisanal guilds during the Middle Ages, only the confraternity of the shoemakers was fully autonomous (G. Aclocque, *Les corporations, l'industrie et le commerce à Chartres du XI^e siècle à la Révolution* [Paris, 1917], pp. 54 and 57, cited in G. Le Bras, *Etudes*, pp. 433 and 437), suggesting that they did not take as firm root in the diocese of Chartres as they did in Normandy, Brittany or Champagne (cf. G. Le Bras, *Etudes* . . . , p. 434). In 1631, Louis de Havard, seigneur of Tousières du Thuillay, and four other members of his family, together with the priest of Faverolles, his curate, the churchwardens and seventeen named parishioners, together with other inhabitants of the village, finally received episcopal sanction for the establishment of a confraternity of the Holy Rosary (ADEL, G7883). A similar confraternity was founded at Varize with thirty *livres' rente* from the local seigneur as its initial income, but these two are the only village confraternities which have left records in the archives at Chartres. Whether episcopal reluctance, as suggested in the foundation records from Faverolles, was an important factor restraining the spread of the institution in the seventeenth century is not clear, but it is hard to argue that it was the major factor limiting its earlier growth.

46. ADLoiret, 95GG1, includes lists of members of three separate confraternities in the rural parish of Audeville in the early seventeenth century, one of which was restricted to females only.

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

Less common, but still regionally distinctive, bequests were made by approximately one-eighth of Champenois testators to the Hôtels-Dieu of Paris and their episcopal capital. Such grants were much rarer in the other regions.⁴⁷ Likewise, donations to the cathedral were made in 4.1 per cent of wills from Champagne, in contrast with 1.5 in Touraine and 0.8 around Chartres. These regional differences are not statistically significant, but together with the other patterns discussed they suggest a more cosmopolitan, episcopal- and urban-focused religion, at least among some of the peasants in the eastern part of northern France. That Champenois peasants shared the devotional practices of their urban contemporaries may help explain Galpern's tendency to talk of popular faith without specifying whether it is rural or urban patterns he is addressing.⁴⁸ In both Touraine and the diocese of Chartres rural testamentary faith was more distinct from urban patterns.

Tourangeois supplicatory bequests to the poor distinguish testators from this area from those elsewhere. While almost half of them asked that bread or small sums be distributed to the poor attending their services or to the poor of the village, little more than one-quarter of Champenois and one-seventh of *Chartrains* did so.⁴⁹ This pattern remained virtually unchanged over the period from 1500 to 1625 in Touraine, but after 1626 such bequests dropped to one-third.⁵⁰ Involvement of the poor in last rites was a traditional, "medieval" pattern of religiosity in which communal aid was invoked. The relative purity of the poor, uncorrupted by material possessions, meant that their prayers might most rapidly rise to the celestial throne; this, more than the merit which a charitable bequest might bring a testator, underlay requests for distribution of small loaves to the poor and demands for the active involvement of a corps of the poor in funeral services.⁵¹ Early in the sixteenth century, new attitudes towards work and poverty had given birth to a new urban structure of poor relief and had influenced reformers both among the Protestants and the Catholics to see poverty as a problem, not as a means to salvation for the well-to-do. While the new framework appears to have found relatively rapid acceptance in the cities, it was slower to work its way into

47. Six of forty-nine wills from Champagne gave to the Hôtel-Dieu at Paris and seven to that at Troyes or Auxerre. In Touraine the percentages were 3.8 (five of 131) and 1.5 (two of 131); in the diocese of Chartres 1.4 (five of 359) and 2.8 (ten of 359).

48. See Galpern, *The religions of the people*, *passim*.

49. Fifty-nine of 130 Tourangeois, fourteen of forty-nine Champenois, and fifty-two of 358 *Chartrains* left money for the poor.

50. While the proportion of donations to the poor drops steadily in Champenois wills between 1550 and 1650, the numbers involved are sufficiently small to make any statistical analysis inappropriate. Around Chartres such donations rose slowly to 18.6 per cent of wills between 1600 and 1625 (eleven of fifty-nine), then declined to 14.6 (seven of forty-eight). In Janvier's Yèvres only 6.4 per cent (five of seventy-eight) gave to the poor after 1600.

51. The place of the poor in the florid, almost baroque will of Demoiselle Guillemette Coquillart of Reims in 1542 underlines this traditional attitude (A.N. Galpern, *The religions*, pp. 21-2). In 1632, Jehan Godeau, a *vigneron* of Vernouillet, north of Chartres asked that three *minots* of wheat be baked into loaves prior to each of the three services he requested and that these loaves be given to the poor "pour les obliger à prier dieu pour le remède de son âme". (ADEL, G7133).

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

the traditionalist religion of smaller bourgs and villages.⁵² The relative absence of much attention to the poor in the wills from Champagne and the *pays chartrain* may be a result of their faster adaptation to modern standards, but the rise of bequests to the poor around Chartres between 1550 and 1625⁵³ suggests that this was not the case. Again, Champagne may have been a region where urban changes percolated more rapidly through the countryside.

Tourangeois testators, then, relied on the poor and on bequests to the *boîte des trépassés* for earthly support in their quest for God's forgiveness, while those in Dunois and Beauce placed most of their hopes in the regional community of their parish and its neighbours, and those in Champagne called on an artificial kin group, the confraternity, and on diocesan and even Parisian connections. These three very different patterns indicate that an analysis of popular religion even in so small a part of Europe as north central France requires great attention to local and regional variations of considerable significance.

While devotion to the saints and at least one earthly agency of support characterised a relatively high proportion of the wills, this attachment was heightened among those testators who drew them up during an illness. Roughly 10 per cent fewer healthy people than sick invoked the Virgin, St. Michael and their parish patron. The same proportion obtained for donations to processional churches and a slightly greater one for invocations of St. Peter and St. Paul. Oddly, the situation was reversed for requests for distribution of goods or money to the poor, but this seems to have been an aberration.⁵⁴ That the ill were more concerned with the niceties of appropriate testamentary piety reinforces the earlier suggestion that the wills are not the products of an atypically devout minority of peasants; the healthy too were concerned for their eternal souls, but in a reasonable and conventional way. It was the apparent imminence of their deaths rather than a habitual excess of devotion which underlay the greater attention to saintly intercessors by the sick.

52. See, among others, N.Z. Davis, "Poor relief, humanism and heresy", in her *Society and culture in early modern France* (Stanford, 1975), pp. 17-65; B. Pullan, *Rich and poor in Renaissance Venice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971); and R. Jütte, "Poor relief and social discipline in sixteenth century Europe", *European Studies Review*, XI (1981), pp. 25-52.

53. See n. 50.

54. The Virgin was invoked by 98.3 per cent of the ill (362 of 368) and 84.7 per cent of the well (105 of 124); St. Michael by 60.1 (233 of 388) and 51.6 per cent (sixty-four of 124); parish patrons by 64.5 (251 of 389) and 54.0 per cent (sixty-seven of 124); and St. Peter by 34.2 (133 of 389) and 20.2 per cent. Invocation of one's name saint was unconnected to health; 7.3 per cent of the well (nine of 124) and 8.5 (thirty-three of 389) of the sick did so. While 52.4 per cent of sick testators left bequests to processional or neighbouring churches (209 of 399) 41.6 per cent of the healthy (fifty-two of 125) did so. Donations to the poor, on the other hand, were given by only 21.4 per cent (eighty-six of 398) of the ill, but by 28.8 per cent of the well (thirty-six of 125). All these differences are statistically significant (with corrected chi-square significances of 0.0046 to 0.0466) except for those among invocations of St. Michael (0.1204) and donations to the poor (0.1242). St. Michael's special role as a guardian of the souls of the dead may help explain the relatively limited differences between sickbed and healthy invocations of his aid.

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

There were significant regional variations in the proportions of testators who invoked no divine or saintly assistance for their souls after death, beyond the prayers or services which they endowed in their wills. In Touraine 9.2 per cent (twelve of 131) did not even explicitly deliver their souls into God's care and a further 5.3 per cent (seven of 131), although they called on God, did not request the assistance of a single saint. This, coupled with the other evidence from this region, suggests a faith more focused on the religious belief and behavior of the individual, in which both community and church were seen as useful, but not as essential, aids to the souls of the dying and the dead. In the *pays chartrain* virtually everyone called on God to take his soul (195 of 199), but the proportion decreased further south in the diocese of Chartres (in Dunois, closer to Touraine) to 93.6 per cent (146 of 156), suggesting a slow gradation of attitudes rather than any abrupt behavioural boundary. In Champagne a smaller sample indicates a situation similar, but not identical to that in Touraine; while 10.2 per cent did not even call on God (five of forty-four), all of the remaining testators called on at least one saint in addition to placing their soul in God's hands.⁵⁵ Those who did not invoke the assistance of God or the saints were also substantially less likely to ask for the distribution of alms to the poor at or after their funerals.⁵⁶ Their religion was certainly not one which presumed a collectivity of the faithful either on earth or in the afterlife.

Almost half of testators who indicated their preferred burial spot asked that their bodies be placed under the floor of their church; most of the others mentioned the cemetery and relatively few left the disposition of their earthly remains to their heirs.⁵⁷ While intergenerational cooperation in the fulfilment of one's final wishes was neither absent nor unexpected in many of the wills,⁵⁸ the great majority of drafters clearly felt more comfortable about leaving explicit and extensive instructions. The place of burial

55. Those who placed their souls in God's care and also invoked the intercession of one or more saints comprised 95.5 per cent of the sample from the *pays chartrain* (190 of 199), 92.9 from Dunois (145 of 156), 89.8 from Champagne (forty-four of forty-nine), and 85.5 from Touraine (112 of 131). The corrected chi-square is 10.99528 with 3 degrees of freedom; the significance 0.0118.

56. While 24.5 per cent of those who called on God and at least one saint left at least token bequests to the poor (121 of 493) only 9.1 per cent (four of forty-four) of the more spartan wills mention them.

57. Two hundred and thirty wills specify burial in the church; 222 ask for the cemetery; and a mere fourteen explicitly leave inhumation to the wishes of the executors of the will. Seventy-three wills do not mention burial, some because the wills were incompletely transcribed for preservation in the parish *martyrologe* (the details of a funeral being seen as more transient than such matters as invocations or bequests), others because the wills themselves have been damaged in some way or are partially illegible. Most of these seventy-three, then, cannot be interpreted as indicators of the testators' willingness to leave their burials to others.

58. Wills frequently passed on land to relatives in return for their arranging for prayers or masses for the soul of the legator. In 1574, Marin Michaud of Neuvy-en-Dunois passed on land to his heirs, reminding them that it carried a kind of spiritual mortgage — six masses were owed for the repose of the soul of his late uncle, from whom he had received the property — which they must keep up (ADEL, G6049). Cooperation worked the other way, too. Many wills from Champagne ask for masses for the souls of the testators' late parents or spouses.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

chosen was not the clear indicator of social status or rank that one might expect; while a slightly higher proportion of *laboureurs* and *vignerons* than other peasants (48.5 to 42.4 per cent) asked for a place in the church, the difference is not statistically significant.⁵⁹

Often testators were quite specific in their instructions concerning their last resting place; Jehan Godeau, a *vigneron* from Vernouillet, in the diocese of Chartres, asked to be buried beneath the spot in the church where he usually sat on holy days, "beneath the first image, where people enter the said church".⁶⁰ Clerical and noble wills were equally specific. In 1626 François Foullon, the priest of Sandarville, southwest of Chartres, asked to be buried in his church, "under Marin and Martin Foullon, during their lives priests of the said church, his uncles".⁶¹ Indeed, in all matters relating to funerals and burials, popular religious standards seem to have been shared by the rural clergy and the local lesser nobility in all three regions.

There were noteworthy regional differences in choices of burial place. In sixteenth-century Touraine people were less concerned to have their bodies inhumed in the church, although the proportion increased after 1600. That testators in Janvier's Yèvres were much more likely than those from anywhere else to ask for a place within the church walls confirms that at the very least it was a form of devotion not at odds with official Counter-Reformation piety.⁶² Cumulatively, the wills suggest that regional patterns were gradually modified and became more homogeneous. There was no such temporal change in the choice of burial partner. Roughly the same proportion of testators in each region asked to be buried with close relatives, usually their parents, but twice as many Tourangeois asked to be inhumed with their spouses. In the other regions friends or specific locations were more likely to be mentioned.⁶³

Even the kinds and numbers of services requested showed substantial regional differences. The basic funeral service requested — the number of high and low masses to be said, whether they were to be said "à diacre et sousdiacre" and with or without "vigiles et recommandaces", and how many and how large the candles were to be — varied according to the personal wishes and wealth of the individual, but the other,

59. Forty-eight *laboureurs* and *vignerons* wanted church burial, forty-seven in the cemetery, and four left the matter to heirs. Among other peasants, the numbers were 106, 136 and eight; among those testators who labelled themselves nonagriculturalists, they were thirty-five, thirty-three and two.

60. ADEL, G7133, 4 juin 1632.

61. ADEL, G4778, 17 novembre 1626.

62. Before 1600, 46.6 per cent of wills from around Chartres (forty-eight of 103), 41.8 from Touraine (twenty-three of fifty-five) and 55.6 from Champagne (five of nine) asked for burial in the church. After 1600, 45.8 per cent from around Chartres (excluding Yèvres) (sixty-five of 142), 64.9 from Yèvres (forty-eight of seventy-four), 47.3 from Touraine (twenty-six of fifty-five) and 53.6 from Champagne (fifteen of twenty-eight) did so.

63. Touraine: relatives, 64.5 per cent (forty-nine of seventy-six); spouses, 26.3 (twenty of seventy-six); others, 9.2 (seven of seventy-six). Chartres: 65.1 (188 of 289), 12.8 (thirty-seven of 289), and 22.1 (sixty-four of 289). Champagne: 68.8 (twenty-two of thirty-two), 12.5 (four of thirty-two), and 18.8 (six of thirty-two).

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

ancillary funeral aids were obviously popular to differing degrees in the various regions. More than four-fifths of testators from the diocese of Chartres requested a service at the octave of their funeral or death (some called the service a "sepme"), that is, one week later. Only one-half of Tourangeois wills and less than one-quarter of those from Champagne did this. In the latter region, however, a service one month after clearly was an analog of the octave service. Then, while around Chartres almost the same number of people wanted a third service at the end of one year's mourning as wanted an octave, among Champenois it was substantially greater (83.9 per cent). In Touraine the rise was less dramatic (to 58.8 per cent).⁶⁴

Demands for *trentaines* (daily services — usually one low mass — every day for one month following the funeral) were considerably more common in Touraine than in Champagne and the diocese of Chartres before 1600, and declined thereafter in all three regions to comparable levels, with one striking exception. In Yèvres Counter-Reformation sentiments coexisted with and, one assumes, reinforced continued desires for *trentaines* at pre-1600 levels.⁶⁵ The cost of these programs of services was sufficiently great, however, that there was a substantial correlation of occupational status with requests for them. *Laboureurs* and *vignerons* were more than twice as likely as other peasants to ask for them and they were definitely a part of post-mortem rituals for a minority of the population.⁶⁶

Because of the additional expense, relatively few of those who asked for a *trentaine* also requested an *année* (a daily or weekly service for one year). Oddly, the desire for *années* did not correlate closely with a testator's occupation.⁶⁷ In this matter, location, much more than status, seems to have influenced decisions to order the additional services. Before 1600 the three regions evidenced roughly comparable

64. Octave: Chartres, 80.8 per cent (236 of 292); Touraine, 50.6 (forty of seventy-nine); Champagne, 22.6 (seven of thirty-one). *Bout* (end of year): Chartres, 81.4 per cent (237 of 291); Touraine, 58.8 (forty-seven of eighty); Champagne 83.9 (twenty-six of thirty-one). Around Auxerre (southwest Champagne), the scheduling of post-mortem services was most individualistic, suggesting few regional norms.

65. Around Chartres before 1600, 13.8 per cent of testators (seventeen of 123) requested *trentaines*. In Champagne 16.7 per cent (three of eighteen), and in Touraine 23.1 per cent (fifteen of sixty-five) did so. After 1600 the proportions dropped to 5.1 (eight of 156), 5.1 (three of sixty-five), and 9.7 (three of thirty-one) per cent, respectively. In Yèvres, the percentage remained at 12.8 (ten of seventy-eight).

66. *Laboureurs* and *vignerons*, 16.5 per cent (eighteen of 109); other peasants, 6.8 per cent (twenty of 296); and those who gave themselves nonagricultural occupational labels, 9.9 per cent (eight of eighty-one). That *laboureurs* and *vignerons* comprised a smaller proportion of the Tourangeois sample than of that from Chartres underlines the substantially greater devotion to *trentaines* in the southwestern region.

67. Only ten of the fifty-nine wills which request *trentaines* also ask for *années*. While almost as many *laboureurs* and *vignerons* (15.5 per cent, seventeen of 109) requested *années* as requested *trentaines*, the percentage of other peasants rose to 8.8 (twenty-six of 296). Fewer nonagriculturalists (6.2 per cent, five of eighty-one) asked for *années*. Thus, while the chi square significance for cross-tabulation of occupation and *trentaine* is 0.0119, it is 0.0639 for occupation and *année*.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

levels of attachment to a year of services but, although these were maintained in Touraine and Champagne, they then dropped off dramatically in the diocese of Chartres.⁶⁸ Why *trentaines* declined in popularity everywhere except in Yèvres after 1600, while *années* became less common only in the diocese of Chartres (including Yèvres), is difficult to explain with reference to Counter-Reformation standards. Clearly regional forces, not ecclesiastical ones, must be invoked as causes. Janvier's support may have saved the *trentaine* at Yèvres, but it is hard to connect its disappearance elsewhere and the very different career of the *année* with either the Counter-Reformation or resistance to it.

Regional differences, particularly the distinctive Tourangeois tendency to diminished concern with institutionalised aids to personal salvation, are also underlined by a comparison of the extent to which testators in the different regions laid out their funeral services. While their Chartrain and Champenois contemporaries devoted considerable attention to the kinds and numbers of services they wanted or needed, a relatively large proportion of Tourangeois peasants discussed their funeral requirements in a brief and seemingly unconcerned fashion. Whether this testamentary indifference reflected a real lack of interest in the ceremonies or, more likely, an implicit or oral arrangement with the heirs or executors for a traditional and conventional funeral cannot be known, but in either case it indicates a quite different sense of the level of personal concern which one's mortal remains aroused. Trusting to one's family for an appropriate service accords reasonably well with a piety in which parochial and extraparochial aids to salvation are given relatively shorter shrift.

There were status- or occupation-related differences in the kinds of bequests testators left to establish perpetual anniversary services for the repose of their souls, but once more these were less dramatic than the regional trends. Ordinary peasants were more likely to give land to the parish church than were *laboueurs*. Artisans, merchants and higher-status peasants were more likely to have acquired money through trade. As a result, it is not surprising to find that more of them were able to avoid permanent alienation of land; for them a single lump sum donation or a *rente* — a perpetual annual charge or levy against a piece of property which remained in the family's possession — ensured the necessary prayers without substantially diminishing the family's patrimony. Even so, more than three quarters of testators from every occupational group still gave land.⁶⁹

Variations in types of endowments for services or prayers, like most other differences, are more substantial when one compares regions rather than status-groups.

68. *Années* declined from 16.1 per cent (twenty of 124) of pre-1600 wills from around Chartres to 6.4 per cent (fifteen of 234) after. In Touraine they remained absolutely level (14.5 per cent or nine of sixty-five in each period) and in Champagne increased slightly, from 16.7 (three of eighteen) to 19.4 per cent (six of thirty-one).
69. While 88.6 per cent of lower status peasants left land for perpetual annual post-mortem services (217 of 245), only 9.8 per cent left *rentes* (twenty-four) and 1.6 per cent, money or a combination of money and *rentes* (four). Among *laboueurs* and *vignerons* the percentages were 83.2 (seventy-nine of ninety-five), 12.6 (twelve) and 4.3 (four); among "merchants" and artisans, 78.4 (fifty-eight of seventy-four), 12.2 (nine) and 9.5 (seven).

HISTORICAL PAPERS 1983 COMMUNICATIONS HISTORIQUES

The diocese of Chartres stands out as the most obviously homogeneous region. Even before 1600, 90.2 per cent of testators there gave land; the proportion increased only marginally thereafter, except in Janvier's Yèvres where 97.3 per cent did so. It seems reasonable to suggest that Counter-Reforming priests, aware that money bequests rapidly disappeared while the obligations they entailed continued, and perhaps that inflation diminished the worth of *rentes* over the years, preferred land bequests. In Touraine, however, the pattern was reversed; land endowments diminished from 63 to 54 per cent.⁷⁰ It is not clear whether this reflected the continuation of a long-term trend in lay bequests, unsuccessfully resisted by the priests, or whether it was a relatively new phenomenon with which the rural clergy of the region did not concern itself. In either case, the secular motivations which presumably underlay Tourangeois reluctance to alienate land permanently for otherworldly ends reinforces one's impression of popular religion in this area as less ecclesiastical and more self-reliant than elsewhere.

This piety cannot be equated with some of the sentiments underlying late eighteenth-century *déchristianisation*. To make such a connection would be possible if one presumed a straightforward framework for analysis in which "late medieval" piety — ritualistic, semimagical and traditionalist — was followed by Counter-Reformation evangelisation and an increase of doctrinal understanding and then by a process of demystification and anticlericalism. Then any apparent emphasis of an individual's autonomy from the assistance of the Church and its patterns of devotion would seem a sign of *déchristianisation*. The wills offer evidence of a more complex context, of a pre-Counter-Reformation piety more diverse and multiform, in which ritualist, doctrinal and individualist elements intermingled and changed. Popular religion was not unconnected with official teachings, but it had a life of its own as well, a life that changed as the circumstances of the rural environment were altered by market forces, the increasing claims of the central government and spreading literacy. To separate these forces out and contrast them fully with ecclesiastical pressures is impossible, but one must remember their existence.

The period under consideration, particularly its latter third, from 1600 to 1650, certainly saw an increase in contact between parochial religious life and the standards of a more doctrinally concerned, book-based episcopal faith, but the consequences of that interrelationship were not sudden or dramatic at least as far as the rural laity was concerned. The church at Meslay-le-Vidâme had only four books in 1559 and seven in

70. In the diocese of Chartres before 1600, 90.2 per cent of testators (101 of 112) left land, 6.3 (seven of 112) *rentes*, 0.9 (one) money and 2.7 (three) a combination of these. After 1600 (excluding Yèvres from consideration) the percentages were 90.5 (134 of 148), 5.4 (eight), 2.0 (three) and 2.0 (three). In Yèvres they were 97.3 (seventy-one of seventy three), 1.4 (one), 1.4 (one) and 0. In Touraine before 1600, twenty-nine wills gave land, sixteen (34.8 per cent) *rentes*, and one left a mixed bequest; after 1600, twenty-seven gave land, eighteen (36.0 per cent) *rentes*, and five (10 per cent) money. In Champagne the numbers are too small for statistical comparison before and after 1600, but sixteen of twenty-three wills (69.6 per cent) in which an endowment is clearly indicated gave land.

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

1626,⁷¹ but one cannot use this as evidence that peasants were being catechised or that their services were more doctrinal in content. Indeed the most notable differences between the two inventories from Meslay are increases in the numbers of ceremonial objects like candlesticks, small bells, banners, holy water vessels, censers and patens, which would have added to the material impression made by traditional ritual. Much Counter-Reformation piety was ritualised, and it may be that one of the results of its institutionalisation was the replacement of some traditional, village religious practices which were not fully orthodox with officially sanctioned rituals. If this was the case, however, it would have been less traumatising for the rural laity than a recast definition of true religion, which emphasised catechisation and correct understanding of church doctrine at the expense of actions and modes of behaviour embodying, without explicitly defining, that doctrine.

Gradually, the Counter-Reformers went on to impose more homogenous, uniform standards of religious behaviour on the countryside and tried to diminish beliefs in what they saw as magical or unchristian ideas and practices. Many of their preoccupations and concerns led them unnecessarily to constrain vibrant parts of the religious life of the rural laity. Their fear, of course, was rural paganism or impiety, but the wills indicate a substantial body of peasants whose faith, whatever its local and traditional idiosyncracies, was not in conflict with the teachings of the Church. One can cite much evidence of widespread popular belief in what can at best be labelled extra-Christian ideas right through the seventeenth century.⁷² Still, although these notions may have been a central part of some peasants' religion, one must ask whether, for most, they were really much more than accretions to a faith which, while it was not intellectually nuanced, nonetheless embodied at its core the fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy. The wills certainly suggest such an interpretation.

The absence of substantial occupational or status-related testamentary behaviour, beyond those which reflect greater disposable wealth, clearly indicates a rural community in which local religious homogeneity was the norm. Most parishioners in a given region, subregion or community shared common beliefs and habits which

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71. ADEL, G5968, contains both inventories, that of 1559 drawn up by G. Rousseau and T. Lotures and that of 1626 by F. Pinagot and M. Vollant, the wardens. In 1559 "deux manuelz" and "deux livres d'église, l'un a des vespres, l'autre a contenu la messe à notte" were listed; in 1626 the books were listed first: "un grand livre de veslin, deux grandz misselz, un psaultier, un processional, un manuel, un petit missel. . . ." At Neuvy-en-Dunois an inventory drawn up by the wardens in 1578 lists eighteen "lettres" by date and name, with no indication of their contents, but not a single book (ADEL, G6033); at about the same time the nearby church at Jallans had "trois gros livres de parchemin à chanter devant l'autel, deux messe[s] [misselz?], deux manuelz, [et] un processional" (ADEL, G5617).
72. Indeed, two of Delumeau's major sources of information concerning the extent to which popular beliefs were not consonant with official, doctrinal Christianity, J.-B. Thiers' *Traité des superstitions selon l'Écriture sainte les décrets des conciles et les sentimens des Saints Pères et des Théologiens* (Paris, 1679) and his *Traité des superstitions qui regardent tous les sacremens*, 3 vol. (Paris, 1703-1704) are based in large part on information their author gathered in the diocese of Chartres.

variations in wealth, occupation and rank modified but little. Their piety seems much more to have been shaped by regional traditions of veneration and behaviour. Although these may often have shaded gradually one into another, they gave to the various regions of northern France (and, one presumes, elsewhere) specific characteristics of religiosity which set them apart from their neighbours.

These regional varieties of religion and their apparently partially autonomous processes of change are the most surprising of the elements illumined by cross-tabulation of various components of the wills. Clearly, it would be startling in an age of relatively limited communication and considerable provincialist sentiment, if not xenophobia, not to find specifically regional elements in popular faith, but these could easily have been no more than increased devotion to one or several special saints. To discover substantially different regional styles of religion in the dioceses of Chartres, Touraine and Champagne is to be presented with a picture of popular religion more complicated than most histories of the implementation of the Counter-Reformation suggest. The hagiolatry and devotion to processional churches which gave a distinctive ritualist, and in some ways post-Tridentine, cast to religion in the diocese of Chartres were quite different from the more austere, individualist and less invocatory style of Touraine. One might characterise the latter as more "modern" were it not for the preoccupation with bequests to the poor which made it the most "medieval" of the devotional styles. Here the insufficiency of chronological categories and labels dependent on or drawn from the history of official religion becomes most apparent. The religion of rural Champagne, with its tighter links to urban religious styles, confraternities and pious charity, provides a third distinct model, which reinforces the picture of diversity already becoming apparent.

Finally, all the wills embody a fully orthodox piety and devotion rather at odds with much that traditional presentations of the rural implementation of the Counter-Reformation tell us. More than half the wills were prepared by ordinary peasants and their testamentary behaviour was virtually identical to that of their neighbours of higher status. It seems unlikely that all these testators were aberrations, that they were united less by their greater ability to leave money for perpetual annual prayers or services than by an undemonstrable excess of religious zeal.

Why then did the Counter-Reformers impose themselves so severely on the various rural Christian cultures they encountered? Quite likely the gap which divided priests from people was primarily a consequence of the seminary. Seminary-trained priests were much less likely than their predecessors to be rural men, aware of the traditional religion of the countryside. Educated rather than trained for their positions, they were shocked by the extra-ecclesiastical beliefs and behaviour of their "primitive" parishioners. Instead of simply reinforcing the orthodox elements in rural faith and tolerating the nonthreatening semireligious customs of their flocks, they felt obliged to remake the religious life of the parish in the image of the seminary. In doing this, despite considerable long-term success, they weakened centuries-old local traditions and made religion more something imposed from above than a part of a participatory, deeply felt culture. That later generations in the countryside, particularly

RURAL FAITH AND WILLS

among the male rural élite, felt little attachment to an externally defined and imposed ecclesiastical culture made *déchristianisation* relatively easy. Had the faith which infuses the wills been allowed to survive, despite its local idiosyncracies and variations, such a development might well have been less widespread.