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RURAL COMMUNITIES AND THE REFORMATION: SOCIAL
DISCIPLINE AND THE PROCESS OF CONFESSIONALIZATION
IN MONTBELIARD, 1524-1660

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*Rural Communities and the Reformation:
Social Discipline and the Process of Confessionalization in Montbéliard*

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Abstract

In the sixteenth century, the dukes of Württemberg, also sovereigns of Montbéliard, enforced Lutheranism as the new faith in the city and its surrounding dependent villages. The dukes sought to convert the French-speaking peasants there to the new religion but stumbled on ancestral traditions, old rituals, local identity and language, part of the peasants' mentalities, culture and set of social norms. In order to disseminate the new faith, the authorities relied on pastoral visits and teaching in order to convert the faithful, and also established a consistory to make sure social discipline and new moral norms were effectively respected.

This paper explores rural communities confronted by the process of conversion and confessionalization in Montbéliard from 1524 to 1660 and intends to demonstrate that peasants adapted somehow to the new faith but kept their own beliefs, rituals and social norms, refusing therefore an acculturation process.

Keywords

Reformation, peasants, confessionalization, social discipline, consistory.

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Introduction

The principle of *cuius regio eius regio* was officially proposed at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. It juridically recognized that the sovereign of a given territory could impose his will regarding faith and confession's choice upon his subjects. Martin Luther himself first theorized this idea. The disorders of the Peasants' War (1524-1525) convinced him to entrust the Christian princes with a divine mission: supervising preaching and more largely monitoring and managing the faith of the faithful. After 1555, the German princes, mainly Protestant, attempted therefore to impose firmly their religious choice by promulgating civil reforms and establishing institutions that would allow the diffusion and imposition of a new faith. For instance, the civil authorities promulgated decrees regarding liturgy and sacraments. But the most notable shift was undoubtedly the control and monitoring of the population in these territories, which historians have defined as social discipline. The consistory of Geneva established by John Calvin, with the support of the civil authorities, is perhaps the best example of a civil decision and cooperation with reformers for the enforcement of social discipline.¹ Many scholars have devoted their attention to this phenomenon of imposition of one's confession labeled as confessionalization.²

Confessionalization entails "social disciplining", and perhaps the most fascinating and main debate about this paradigm revolves around the relationship between the population (in our case the country dwellers) and the elites (here the ducal authorities), and by extension the impact of civil religious reforms supported by the elites and sometimes forced on the population.³ This aspect of social discipline and reception of the Reformation by the population has started to attract historians' attention, but most have focused so far on the urban population and German territories.⁴ There is also much to be done in the area of lay piety in order to see how much of the pastoral teaching ordinary people assimilated and how much of their old faith and rituals they retained in the sixteenth century and onwards.

Here, the question of "popular culture" needs to be raised because examining confessionalization and social discipline at the turn of the Reformation movement necessarily implies a focus on social behaviour and consequently on social and traditional norms. Authorities, elites, attempted to impose these two notions of social discipline and confessionalization – which had their own set of legal, social and moral rules – on a population less educated and submissive, and that already had its own social and moral codes, norms, and rituals usually labeled, perhaps too simply,

¹ See for instance William Monter, "The consistory of Geneva, 1559-1569," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 38 (1976). Robert M. Kingdon et al., *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2000).

² The literature dealing with confessionalization is rather large. Among the major works, one can cite Peter Blickle, "Communal Reformation and Peasant Piety: The Peasant Reformation and Its Late Medieval Origins," *Central European History* 20, no. 3/4 (1987): 216-228. C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1528-1603* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe, 1550-1750* (Routledge, 1989). Wolfgang Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State: A Reassessment," *The Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (July 1989): 383-404. Lyndal Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991). Heinrich Richard Schmidt, *Dorf und Religion: Reformierte Sittenzucht in Berner Landgemeinden der frühen Neuzeit (Quellen und Forschungen zur Agrargeschichte)* (G. Fischer, 1995). Robert Scribner, "Is There a Social History of the Reformation?," *Social History* 2, no. 4 (January 1, 1977): 483-505. Robert Scribner, "Is There a Social History of the Reformation?," *Social History* 2, no. 4 (January 1, 1977): 483-505. Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Jeffrey Watt, *The Long Reformation*, 1st ed. (Wadsworth Publishing, 2004).

³ Joel F. Harrington and Helmut Walser Smith, "Confessionalization, community, and state building in Germany, 1555-1870," *The Journal of Modern History* 69 (1983): 83

⁴ Among the studies about rural population and the Reformation see especially C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and rural society. The parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1528-1603* (New York, 1996), Thomas Robisheaux, *Rural Society and the Search for Order in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1989), Jeffrey Watt, "The Reception of the Reformation in Valangin, Switzerland, 1547-1588," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 20 (1989).

popular culture (in opposition to the so-called elite culture). This notion of popular culture has been theorized by several scholars but still remains vague if not applied to a specific group.⁵ I use this generic term only to point to the difference in cultural practices and beliefs between the peasants and their rulers.⁶

The popular set of beliefs, thoughts and rituals that made the core of popular culture was rooted in the life of the peasant community in Montbéliard and was an integrated part of their identity, conscious or not. It should be argued that each particular community at the time had its own codes, rules and norms depending on many factors such as geographical location or political regimes and so on. The peasants of Montbéliard, for instance, were by tradition Catholics before the Reformation, they believed in supernatural powers, in herbal medicine; spoke their own dialect; had their own regional festivities and the like. These common elements –often called popular culture(s) – that the whole community shared, reinforced not only the cohesion and unity of the group – even in a group with an established social hierarchy – but reinforced also the cultural identity and the notion of group belonging so important in a community of mutual aid. Therefore, any attempt to modify, alter, or change any of its codes, norms, traditions and rituals should meet the support of the entire community, or at least the majority of its members, to be valid.⁷ The weight of ancestral tradition helped to reinforce this common group identity and offers an impression of conservatism, usually well-observed by modern and contemporary rural historians. Consequently, when the authorities attempted to firmly impose their religious views on their subjects that greatly differed from their own, they not only imposed an elite will on a dominated group, highlighting the power relationship between the two groups, but they also attempted to alter, modify and change a set of community rules from the outside in trying to acculturate the population.

It can be suggested that popular culture is not an uniform notion and that a diversity of cultural practices can be found within a same group. However, the difference between the Lutheran German speaking ruling elite and the Catholic French speaking submissive class was too deep for community dissension to appear within their own groups. Only with time, patience, coercion and institutionalization of social discipline, would the authorities be able to impose and establish Lutheranism in Montbéliard. This case study offers a vantage point not only on confessionalization and social discipline but also, and perhaps more importantly, on mentalities and popular culture and practices.

The small county of Montbéliard constitutes a perfect ground for this analysis for several reasons. First, the sources from the beginning of the sixteenth century to 1793 are numerous, mostly unstudied, and are very well preserved (especially consistory reports, annual pastoral reports and witchcraft trials). Then, Montbéliard was the only French-speaking Lutheran territory and would, therefore, highlight many interesting features on acculturation and the notion of identity.⁸ Finally, the county of Montbéliard was above all a rural territory with most of its inhabitants being peasants. As

⁵ See among others Tommaso Astarita, *Village Justice: Community, Family, and Popular Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). William H. Beik, "Searching for Popular Culture in Early Modern France," *The Journal of Modern History* 49, no. 2 (June 1, 1977): 266-281. Peter Burke, *Popular culture in early modern Europe* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009). Josie P. Campbell, *Popular culture in the Middle Ages* (Popular Press, 1986). John Fiske and Henry (INT) Jenkins, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Taylor & Francis, 2010). Steven L. Kaplan, *Understanding popular culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century* (Walter de Gruyter, 1984). Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne* (Flammarion, 1978). Robert Scribner, *Popular culture and popular movements in reformation Germany* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1987).

⁶ Robert Muchembled's view on the culture of the elite and the culture of the low people seems compatible with my findings here. Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne* (Flammarion, 1978).

⁷ On social norms, see especially Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the mind: rationality and the emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Jon Elster, "Rationality, Emotions, and Social Norms," *Synthese* 98, no. 1 (n.d.): 21-49.

⁸ On this issue see Jean Marc Debard, « Réforme et langue populaire. Le luthéranisme français de la principauté de Montbéliard au XVIe-XVIIe siècle », dans *La religion populaire. Actes du colloque du 17-19 octobre 1977* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1980).

there are few studies about the Reformation in rural areas in general, this research would not only be a contribution to religious history but also to rural history.

Here, I would like to discuss the most debated aspect of the paradigm of confessionalization: “social disciplining”, i.e. the attitudes of the population toward the imposition of Lutheranism. How did the population react to the new faith? How much of their old faith and rituals did they retain? Did the Reformation change many things (or any) in the practices and rituals of popular culture? An examination of the pastoral visit records of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries combined with an analysis of the consistory records from 1623 to 1660 for the rural *seigneurie* of Héricourt (composed of 7 villages) should inform us on the rural dwellers’ reaction and attitudes toward the Reformation, and also on mechanism of confessionalization and social discipline. First I provide the necessary information on the context of the Reformation in Montbéliard. I then focus specifically on social discipline in rural areas with particular attention to the examination of pastoral visits and consistory records.

I. The County of Montbéliard and the Reformation

Montbéliard before the Reformation

Montbéliard and its territory were located in northeast France, cramped between the Swiss cantons, Franche-Comté, and the powerful Catholic duchy of Lorraine. Its green grazing plains and its vast forests of oak trees, arbors, and fir trees along with several streams shaped the landscape. Montbéliard was blessed with only a few natural resources and only its fruitful grazing land lent the peasants a reputation for their good cows. Montbéliard livestock was exported outside the territory and a specific type of bovine bear, since then the name of the tiny place. Apart from livestock, the economy of the territory suffered much from the bloody and ravaging conflicts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, especially the Thirty Years’ War.⁹

The small city of Montbéliard and its dependant villages, less than 10,000 inhabitants in the fifteenth century – about 2,000 for the city of Montbéliard itself – passed through the hands of different families in the Middle Ages. But in 1407, thanks to a matrimonial alliance, Montbéliard and its dependent territory became part of the Holy Roman Empire. The major step for the city itself, however, was undoubtedly its freedom acquired in 1283 thanks to the signing of a charter with the lord Renaud de Bourgogne which made the city an enfranchised town. Indeed, in exchange for a tax (*la toisé*), the dwellers of Montbéliard could be represented by a magistrate enabled to take key economic and social decisions.¹⁰ This municipal council or *magistrat* grew powerful in the early modern period and opposed the Württemberg family on many occasions, especially over liturgical and theological issues.

We do not know much about Catholicism and its practices in this area before 1524. Pastor John Viénot, who had studied this period, in the introduction to his book mentions many cases of simony among the clerics, and cases of conjugal cohabitation and fornication among the priests and monks with female domestics, denouncing therefore a corrupt church.¹¹ Despite a few cases here and there, it does not seem that the medieval Catholic Church in Montbéliard was more corrupt than anywhere else at the time.¹² More interestingly are the reported cases of superstition. Adoration of relics was particularly spread and encouraged by the Church. Viénot highlights that the church of Saint Maimboeuf in the town of Montbéliard had a particularly extensive collection of relics, comprising

⁹ The Swedish soldiers entered the territory of Montbéliard in 1636 and brought enormous damages to the peasants and the local economy. Hugues Bois de Chêne, a chronicler baker, reported many causalities and troubles during this period. See Hugues Bois de Chêne, *Recueil mémorable de Hugues Bois-de-Chesne, chronique inédite du XVIIe siècle, suivie de la Relation du siège d’Héricourt, en 1637, par Charles Duverney* (Montbéliard: Charles Deckherr, 1856).

¹⁰ The Magistrat of Montbéliard was composed of a Conseil des XVIII represented by two men elected by each section of the city and nine powerful bourgeois.

¹¹ John Viénot, *Histoire de la Réforme dans le Pays de Montbéliard depuis les Origines jusqu’à la Mort de P. Toussaint 1524-1573* (Montbéliard: Imprimerie montbéliardaise, 1900).

¹² See for instance Jacques Sole, *Etre une femme en 1500. La vie quotidienne dans le diocèse de Troyes* (Paris, 2000).

among other things the body an Irish monk assassinated by brigands in the village of Froidefontaine and who became a saint. The canons of its collegiate wrote out an inventory of all its relics in 1522. Among the most notable and surprising things listed, one can find a little vial with some drops of milk of the Virgin Mary, some of hers and Mary Magdelene's hair, a fragment of the holy cross, and a small piece of bread from the Last Supper.¹³ Pagan festivities such as the “*représentation des mystères*” were enthusiastically celebrated both by urban and rural dwellers since the Middle Ages at least and were even sponsored by the city.¹⁴ Superstitious practices and rituals such as ringing bells to avoid a storm or the adoration of crosses were also well documented and widespread.¹⁵

Montbéliard and the Reformation

In the 1520s, the Dukes of Württemberg, also counts of Montbéliard, decided that the inhabitants of this little French-speaking territory, geographically apart from their main territory, should sympathize with the Lutheran ideology. As fervent defenders and admirers of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon, the dukes brought the renowned preacher William Farel – later a collaborator of John Calvin – to Montbéliard in 1524. But the Peasants' War compromised his stay and he had to leave the county precipitately only a few months after his arrival.¹⁶ In 1527, the archbishop of Besancon debarred the city of Montbéliard for its Lutheran sympathies. Prominent people within the city pressured the archbishop to revise this decision, which he did in 1529.¹⁷ A few years later, in 1535, another preacher, Pierre Toussain, was brought to the city to preach the new faith.¹⁸ The dukes quickly offered him the position of *superintendant* in charge of religious issues (1541-1573).¹⁹ He accomplished his duty with fervor until 1573 when he retired, and can be credited of being the major architect of the Reformation in Montbéliard.

Toussain and the Counts of Montbéliard frequently disagreed on the nature of the new confession they intended to establish in Montbéliard. The German counts were attached to Lutheranism, while Toussain who had stayed in Basel along with other theologians had Sacramentarian views. In any case, they settled their disagreement –Lutheranism was indeed implemented – and under Toussain's supervision, the Catholic Mass was banned in 1538, images were suppressed from the church of Saint Maimboeuf, formerly know as Saint Pierre, in 1539; the first preachers were brought to the county in 1540 from the duchy of Savoy and from the Swiss cantons to establish the new faith, and the monasteries were closed.²⁰ In 1544 the *regula*, or ordinance, a liturgical and theological code in Württemberg, was read publicly to all and applied by force in Montbéliard: from now on, the county would adopt Lutheran theology and liturgy. In 1559, the Ecclesiastical Ordinance (the *GroBe Kirchenordnung*) formalized the role of Lutheranism for good with the establishment, development

¹³ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 48.

¹⁴ The “*représentation des mystères*” seems to have been a mix between scenes from the Bible and farce that involved the devil, angels and other supernatural characters. Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 54-55

¹⁵ John Viénot mentions that the cross of Chenebier for instance “had the virtue of repulsing the devils”. John Viénot, *Histoire de la réforme dans le pays de Montbéliard depuis les origines jusqu'à la mort de P. Toussaint 1524-1573* (Montbéliard, 1900). 263

¹⁶ On the Peasants' War in the area see Jean Marc Debard, “La Guerre des Paysans dans les marges occidentales du monde germanique. 1525 dans la Porte de Bourgogne, le Comte de Montbéliard et le baillage d'Amont en Franche-Comté,” *Pays d'Alsace* III-IV (1976).

¹⁷ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 163.

¹⁸ Pierre Toussain was a friend of William Farel who he probably met in Basel. Toussain and Farel exchanged letters for quite a long time, from 1534 to probably around 1555. See Aimé-Louis Herminjard, *Correspondance Des Réformateurs Dans Les Pays De Langue Française, Recueillie Et Publ. Par A.L. Herminjard, 9 volumes* (Nabu Press, 2010).

¹⁹ *Superintendant* in charge of religious matters for the county.

²⁰ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 110.

and organization of essential practices: especially annual pastoral visits (established before the Interim) and the consistories (established with this ordinance and particularly important in rural areas).²¹ This *Große Kirchenordnung* was literally a new constitution for Württemberg, regulating many aspects of social and religious life for its inhabitants, including those of Montbéliard. Written in German, the *Kirchenordnung* was translated first into Latin and then into French. Pastors in Montbéliard attempted to object on a few points but their pleas fell on deaf ears, showing the inflexibility and authoritarian attitude of the authorities about religious issues.

The nascent Reformation in Montbéliard – and also elsewhere in the Holy Roman Empire – was interrupted brutally with the defeat of the Schmalkaldic League at Mühlberg in 1547. Catholicism was reimposed as the official and only legal faith with, notably, the reintroduction of the Mass and the return of the priests. Over several years, Lutheranism was to be forgotten in theory, yet in practice, it seems that the authorities in Montbéliard were highly reluctant to make this shift. Visitations of parishes continued, only to find priests misbehaving and not doing their holy duty properly.²² The priest of Abevillers, for example, was accused having “une concubine qui est avec lui de piesça et est d’environ quarante d’ans d’âge et se nomme messier Jean Colombet” (a courtesan, about forty years old, whose name is Jean Colombet).²³ Many accusations of sexual deviance (having a mistress for instance), and not performing the holy duty well were made by the authorities, led by Toussain who still remained in place during the Interim. The tension was so palpable during this troubled period that a priest was savagely assassinated in 1555. Did the population support the authorities in their resistance to Catholicism? It seems that Lutheranism was still a novelty to most of the peasants and that the Catholic liturgy and theology were better known. We have very little information about the behaviour of peasants during the Interim but nothing indicates that they took active part in the contestation of Catholicism’s reintroduction during this short period.

In 1555, the peace of Augsburg put an end to the Interim and each prince in the Holy Roman Empire was able to decide which faith his territory would follow. In Montbéliard, Lutheranism was naturally reintroduced and the priests had to leave once again. Pastors were returned and the establishment of Lutheranism could continue.

In the 1580s, the dukes faced the problem of a massive immigration of French Huguenots to Montbéliard following their persecution in France, especially after the St Bartholomew’s Day massacre in 1572. The authorities’ concern appears mostly to have been political and religious: first, on a political level, this influx could infuriate the king of France; and then, on a religious level, this questioned the theological dissension between Calvinists (the French refugees) and Lutherans (the people of Montbéliard), especially over issues such as the Lord’s Supper.²⁴ Any discussion failed to reconcile the two opposing camps but probably nourished the debate among the pastors in Montbéliard and the reformers in Württemberg since much dissension broke out in the second half of the seventeenth century. The French speaking pastors, among them Pierre Toussain, a disciple of William Farel, had more sympathies for the Reformation as experienced in the Swiss cantons, while the Württemberg family required a strict application of Lutheran theology and principles. Some pastors

²¹ On the history of Montbéliard see among others: Jean-Marc Debard, “Le luthéranisme au Pays de Montbéliard: une église d’Etat, difficultés et réalités du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* (1984), Cl Duvernoy, *Montbéliard au dix-huitième siècle* (Montbéliard, 1891), Maurice Gresset, P. Gresser, and Jean Marc Debard, *Histoire de l’annexion de la Franche-Comté et du pays de Montbéliard* (Le Coteau, 1988), Société d’émulation de Montbéliard, and Georges Bouteiller, *Le Pays de Montbéliard : du Wurtemberg à la France, 1793* (Montbéliard, 1992), Société d’émulation de Montbéliard and Société jurassienne d’émulation, *Le Pays de Montbéliard et l’ancien évêché de Bâle dans l’histoire* (Montbéliard, Porrentruy, 1984), Jean Vartier, *Histoire de la Franche-Comté et du pays de Montbéliard* (Paris, 1975), Jean Claude Voisin, *Histoire de la ville de Montbéliard*, Collection Histoire des villes de France (Roanne, 1980).

²² Jean-Marc Debard, « Visites pastorales et vie paroissiale: un exemple luthérien montbéliardais: Abevillers du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle », *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, n°. 126 (1980): 347-413. 349

²³ Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon (hereafter BMB) Collection Duvernoy, Montbéliard sous Ulric, t. II, folio 84. Enquête sur la conduite des curés pendant l’Intérim, 1550.

²⁴ On this question see Jill Raitt, *The Colloquy of Montbéliard: Religion and Politics in the Sixteenth Century*, (Oxford University Press, USA, 1993).

were replaced along the way by new ones preaching a more Lutheran doctrine. In 1573, the signing of an agreement between the pastors, the bourgeois of Montbéliard – always prompt to oppose the Württemberg – and the authorities seemed to release tensions for a while.²⁵ Until the beginning of the seventeenth century, dissension and theological conflicts would remain strong in the county of Montbéliard.

Apart from political events, the authorities in Montbéliard had to manage and supervise the massive conversion of its own people and this necessarily occurred through education and literacy. The emphasis on education became quickly critical to the authorities, not only in order to establish the new faith but to instill a religious tradition for the population. Acculturation passed through a solid education and school system. Implementation of primary schools throughout the territory began in the mid-sixteenth century and schoolmasters had to teach boys and girls not only how to read but also solid notions of catechism, which would also reinforce and complement the teaching of the pastors. How much were the peasants of Montbéliard able to read in the sixteenth century? According to most of the sources I have been able to consult, probably not much. Education was a central concern of the authorities and reformers, not only in Württemberg or in the Holy Roman Empire but also in Montbéliard. In the *Große Kirchenordnung* of 1559 passed throughout the entire territory of Württemberg, half of the articles dealt with education, school system, and with details on the instruction of children and regulation of schools. In rural areas, schoolmasters taught boys and girls how to read, as it was critical that all of them could read the Scriptures for themselves and see the truth in them according to the teaching of Luther. Moreover, the reading pedagogy was based on religious texts to reinforce acculturative pressures. Natalie Zemon Davis argues that “for most peasants, the religion of the Book, the Psalm, and the Consistory gave too little leeway to the traditional oral and ritual culture of the countryside, to its existing forms of social life and social control”.²⁶

In addition, language was one of the biggest and most urgent matters for the authorities throughout the sixteenth century. Most of the population of Montbéliard did not speak any German at all, the language of the dukes of Württemberg and their officials, and most of the rural population spoke a regional dialect. In the sixteenth century, Lutheranism was a German faith. Luther and other less well-known German reformers wrote most of their books, pamphlets, and sermons in their mother tongue and translations were rather slow to follow. In order to remedy this problematic situation, the authorities set up a printing press in the county, located in the nearby village of Courcelles-les-Montbéliard, and entrusted it to Jacques Foillet.²⁷ The first book to be published was the proceedings of the theological discussion that took place in 1586 between Lutherans and Calvinists, which failed to reconcile the two main branches of Protestantism. The “*Actes du Colloque*” was also published in French so not only could the French-speaking people of Montbéliard understand it (especially through public readings) but the book would also attract the attention of the Huguenots. Many other books would come out of Foillet's printing press of, most of them in French. Most of those books dealt with theology and liturgy. Catechism books were popular and helped pastors and schoolmasters to perform their duty and spread better knowledge of Lutheran theology and liturgy.²⁸ From 1566 at least, schools

²⁵ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 20.

²⁶ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 1975). 203.

²⁷ See Albert Roux, *Recherches sur l'imprimerie à Montbéliard: depuis ses origines (1586) jusqu'à la réunion de Montbéliard à la France en 1793, suivies d'un catalogue des impressions montbéliardaises de 1587 à 1793* (Société anonyme d'imprimerie montbéliardaise, 1905). Jean Marc Debard, « Réforme et langue populaire. Le luthéranisme français de la principauté de Montbéliard au XVIe-XVIIe siècle », dans *La religion populaire. Actes du colloque du 17-19 octobre 1977* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1980), 25-33.

²⁸ Pierre Toussain even published his own catechism handbook: Pierre Toussain, *L'Ordre qu'on tient en l'église de Montbéliard en instruisant les enfans, et administrant les saints sacramens avec la forme du mariage et des prières* (Montbéliard, 1559). Bibliothèque Municipale de Montbéliard.

had on their shelves the *Petit Catéchisme* written by Brenz, translated into French.²⁹ Psalms in French were imported from Geneva but Lutheran French versions were quickly printed in Montbéliard.³⁰ There is little evidence about the level of command of peasant literacy. Even if some of the peasantry finally managed to learn to read, were they interested in religious literature? This is obviously difficult to say.

Finally, in order to ensure that the people of Montbéliard received a proper theological and liturgical education, duke Georges, in a codicil to his will of 1557, endowed six fellowships, for a total of 10,000 florins, aimed at young and talented students from Montbéliard to enable them to pursue their theological studies in Tübingen and return to preach in their hometown.³¹ Their training and religious views were thus directly sponsored by the authorities. Tübingen was the intellectual and theological centre of Württemberg and it is perhaps surprising to find that the decision to send students from Montbéliard to Tübingen was so late in the sixteenth century. After all, many stipends had been given away to German students since at least 1536, although many had been funded by the city council.³² This endowment of six fellowships was much needed as much theological dissension existed among the pastors of the county, at least until the beginning of the seventeenth century. The authorities attempted to reconcile discordant views with the signing of an agreement between themselves, the bourgeois and the pastors in 1573.³³

During the sixteenth century and onwards, the rural population in the county of Montbéliard seemed mostly passive to the establishment of a new faith. The dukes working with their *superintendant* used coercive means to muzzle rural dwellers, notably the moral court i.e. the consistory. The annual pastoral visits made by the *superintendant* himself allowed the authorities to monitor the population. Moreover, the charity system rewarded good parishioners while punishing the ones that did not behave properly. All of this contributed to the establishment of Lutheranism in Montbéliard with almost no resistance, especially on the part of the peasants. But how did rural dwellers perceive this change? How did they welcome Lutheranism? And finally how did they learn to become Lutherans?

II. Social discipline and the peasantry

In order to answer all these questions, it is essential first to underline that Montbéliard peasants did not see their lives turned upside down suddenly with the Reformation and its set of new rules. Under the pressure of political forces, social changes and the implementation of new social rules were slow to reach the lowest rungs of society. Breakdown and change proceeded rather by various stages across time. Therefore, I will not question the “failure” or the “success” of the Reformation as a whole but instead I will inquire into the shape of faith in peasants’ minds across the early modern period and propose a more nuanced view.³⁴ New moral and social norms appeared in the light of a normative quest in social life. To answer all the questions we have about confessionalization, acculturation and peasant’s traditions, it is necessary to cross reference two types of sources: the consistory records and the annual pastoral visits.

²⁹ Jean Marc Debard, « Réforme et langue populaire. Le luthéranisme français de la principauté de Montbéliard au XVIe-XVIIe siècle », dans *La religion populaire. Actes du colloque du 17-19 octobre 1977* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1980), 25-33. 29

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 114

³² Charlotte Methuen, « Securing the Reformation through education: the duke’s scholarship system of sixteenth-century Württemberg », *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 25, n° 4 (1994): 841-851. 843

³³ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 20.

³⁴ This question of success/failure was much debated in the past. See among others Christopher Haigh, « Success and Failure in the English Reformation », *Past & Present*, n° 173 (2001): 28-49. Geoffrey Parker, « Success and Failure during the First Century of the Reformation », *Past & Present*, n° 136 (1992): 43-82. Gerald Strauss, « Success and Failure in the German Reformation », *Past & Present*, n° 67 (1975): 30-63.

The sources

How can we measure the degree of involvement of the peasants in religious issues? While pastoral visits gave a general sense and temperature of the religious ambience in the county to the authorities, consistory cases were a little bit more prolific.³⁵ The sources of the consistory are a good indicator of country dweller's mentality and reactions toward the reception of the Reformation and acclimation to it. A word of caution however, these sources – both consistory reports and visit reports – deal mostly with what appeared then as improper behaviour, deviance, and moral issues, and necessarily emphasized the worst. In this section I seek to demonstrate that the theory and practice of confessionalization represented two different things, especially on the part of the peasants. Historians have often offered a historical representation of a coercive consistory or/and of a rebellious/enthusiastic faithful. I think that a more complex depiction should complement the existing historiography on the subject.

Given the lack of accounts and self-narratives coming directly from the peasants, the historian is bound to use other sources coming from the authorities, keeping in mind the limitation of such documentation. I have looked at the visit reports of the seventeenth century for the rural *seigneurie* of the county of Montbéliard, kept at the National Archives in Paris.³⁶ In addition, I have examined the consistory records from the parish of Héricourt, running from 1623 to 1660, when the Reformation had been set for at least two generations.³⁷ During this period, 286 individuals were sent before the consistory, among them 140 women, for a total of 136 cases in 37 years.³⁸ The consistory did not meet regularly and it seems that in some years it did not meet at all (we do not have evidence that the consistory met in 1628, 1629, 1631, 1635 and 1652-1655). It is possible that during times of conflict, the *Grand Consistoire* did meet in the city of Montbéliard in place of the rural areas. and people from the parish of Héricourt may have been tried there. In addition to these cases, and this argument corroborates the previous one, women from Héricourt accused of witchcraft appeared before the secular judge in Montbéliard.

An average of 3.6 people were tried each year before the local consistory of Héricourt, representing 1.2% of the total population. Some years were particularly busy, as in 1632 when the consistory met 22 times. The median average of meetings is 3.5 meetings per year. The parish of Héricourt was a small one and comprised only seven small villages; the number of its inhabitants approached no more than 300-400 in 1651.³⁹ In Valangin, in Switzerland, the consistory summoned 35 delinquents per year at the beginning of the seventeenth century, in a population of about 3,000 inhabitants.⁴⁰ In Montauban, in the South of France, the consistory summoned about 100 inhabitants

³⁵ On pastoral visits see Collectif, *Sensibilité religieuse et discipline ecclésiastique, les visites pastorales en territoires protestants (Pays Rhénans, Comté de Montbéliard, Pays de Vaud) XVIe-XVIIIe siècles. Actes des journées d'études, avril 1973*, Recherches et documents (Strasbourg: Publication de la société savante d'Alsace des régions de l'est, 1975). Jean-Marc Debard, « Visites pastorales et vie paroissiale: un exemple luthérien montbéliardais: Abbevillers du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle », *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, n°. 126 (1980): 347-413. Jean-Marc Debard, « Les visites ecclésiastiques dans l'église luthérienne de la principauté de Montbéliard du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle et leur utilisation comme source d'histoire religieuse, sociale et démographique », *Mémoires de la société d'émulation du Doubs* 16 (1974): 33-59.

³⁶ Archives Nationales (hereafter AN) K 2174

³⁷ Archives municipales de Montbéliard (AMM hereafter) HRC C2. The *seigneurie* of Héricourt was attached to the county of Montbéliard in 1561 therefore joining the Reformation movement a little bit later than the rest of the territory. See in particular Viénot, *Histoire de la réforme dans le pays de Montbéliard depuis les origines jusqu'à la mort de P. Toussaint 1524-1573*. 261-79

³⁸ Out of 286 people, 55 were called two or three times before the consistory (the occurrence rate is 2,34). Out of the 140 women summoned, 27 came twice for different matters.

³⁹ Archives Départementales de la Haute Saône (ADHS hereafter), E446, *Roole des bourgeois de la ville d'Héricourt fait pour leurs établir des armes*, 1651. The town had 61 bourgeois, 18 widows, 3 single women, 19 other inhabitants thus 101 "feux".

⁴⁰ Watt, "The Reception of the Reformation in Valangin, Switzerland, 1547-1588." 94

per year in a population of about 10,000.⁴¹ Both in Valangin and in Montauban, the rate of people tried before the consistory was about the same as in Montbéliard. William Monter estimates that the Calvinist consistory of Geneva, in the middle of the sixteenth century, summoned one in fifteen inhabitants, reaching the larger part of the population.⁴² One should not underestimate, however, the reach of the consistory of Héricourt within the community. Despite the low numbers of the population tried, rumours and news about the court's appearance spread within the community, helping the authorities to make public discussion of moral values. Punishment performed in the public eye, such as kneeling in the church and asking for forgiveness in front of the whole community, probably had a strong impact on the population.⁴³

The moral court of the parish of Héricourt summoned people for diverse reasons: disruption of church services, insults, battery, blasphemy, suspicion of witchcraft and malicious activities, sexual relationships out of wedlock and the like (see graph below for a typology). Six men of the community, for instance, were summoned to the consistory on 12 June 1636. They were accused of playing skittles on a holiday (“pour avoir iouer aux quilles les iours des poutrosses”). The men were sentenced each to a fine of 4 *batz*. In December 1638, Barbe Georges appeared before the consistory. The record indicates that she was accused of “pallairdise” (bawdiness) without any other explanation, as is often the case in such records. She was sentenced to a fine and had to kneel in the church in front of the whole community in order to ask forgiveness.

The Lutheran consistories in the villages of the county of Montbéliard had the same moral code and expectations as elsewhere in Europe. Family values, household patriarchy, hard work, sexual boundaries were norms not only defended by the moral court but also promoted. But the majority of the cases in Héricourt dealt with the maintenance of peace and order in the community (42% of the total cases). Perhaps, more than any other Lutheran territory, the unity of Montbéliard county appeared vital. Surrounded by Catholic France and its bellicose king, Montbéliard's survival was conditional, among other things, on its unity. The memory of the Peasant's War was also still fresh, and the secular authorities were eager to avoid another peasant rebellion.⁴⁴ Although peace was a requirement to have access to communion, it appears to be also a means to keep the community together and avoid rebellion, disorder and a challenge to authority.⁴⁵

Another striking aspect in these records is the huge number of women involved. One should note that almost 50% of the parishioners coming before the consistory were women. This number indicates the willingness of the authorities to discipline women and reinforces the argument that moralization during the Reformation targeted especially women.⁴⁶

It is possible to observe an evolution in the nature of cases examined by the consistory. In the early years of the seventeenth century, a full range of various delinquents appeared before the moral court. Things began to change after the Thirty Years' War. Indeed, this small amount of cases at the

⁴¹ J. Estèbe et B. Vogler, « La genèse d'une société protestante: étude comparée de quelques registres consistoriaux languedociens et palatins vers 1600 », *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 31, n° 2 (mars 1, 1976): 362-388. 366

⁴² Monter, "The consistory of Geneva, 1559-1569." 484

⁴³ On publicity and courts see especially Daniel Lord Smail, *The Consumption of Justice: Emotions, Publicity, and Legal Culture in Marseille, 1264-1423* (Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ Württemberg and Montbéliard both experienced unrest and rural revolt in 1524-1525.

⁴⁵ Indeed, at the end of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth century, one notes that the crime of fornication and bawdiness was more widespread in the consistory records. Many Catholic soldiers sent by Louis XIV in the area, and called the *Dragons*, seemed to have had sexual intercourse with local women (forced or not). The Lutheran authorities appeared really worried about this and summoned many women before the consistory. In the course of the eighteenth century the consistory no longer delivered fines and even acknowledged its incapacity. Louis XIV restored Catholic worship in Héricourt in 1700 and this *simultaneum* left the Lutheran authorities powerless. In 1733, a handful of Lutherans went to the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and the consistory recognized that it could not prevent them from doing so. (HRC C2, sitting of 16 January 1733).

⁴⁶ See for instance, Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil : witchcraft, sexuality, and religion in early modern Europe* (London ; New York, 1994), Lyndal Roper, *The holy household : women and morals in Reformation Augsburg*, Oxford studies in social history (Oxford, 1989).

edge of the French kingdom became suddenly a bulge. Louis XIV's bellicose ambition to unify his territory pushed him to conquer first four rural *seigneurie* around Montbéliard. He then sent Catholic soldiers (*Dragons*) there to frighten the population. This is why our sample stops roughly in 1660, before too many interactions with the French.

Crossing the consistory records with the pastoral visits enables us to draw a picture of the effects of social discipline and confessionalization on the population, highlighting the elements that help us to question peasant's adhesion to the Reformation and acculturation.

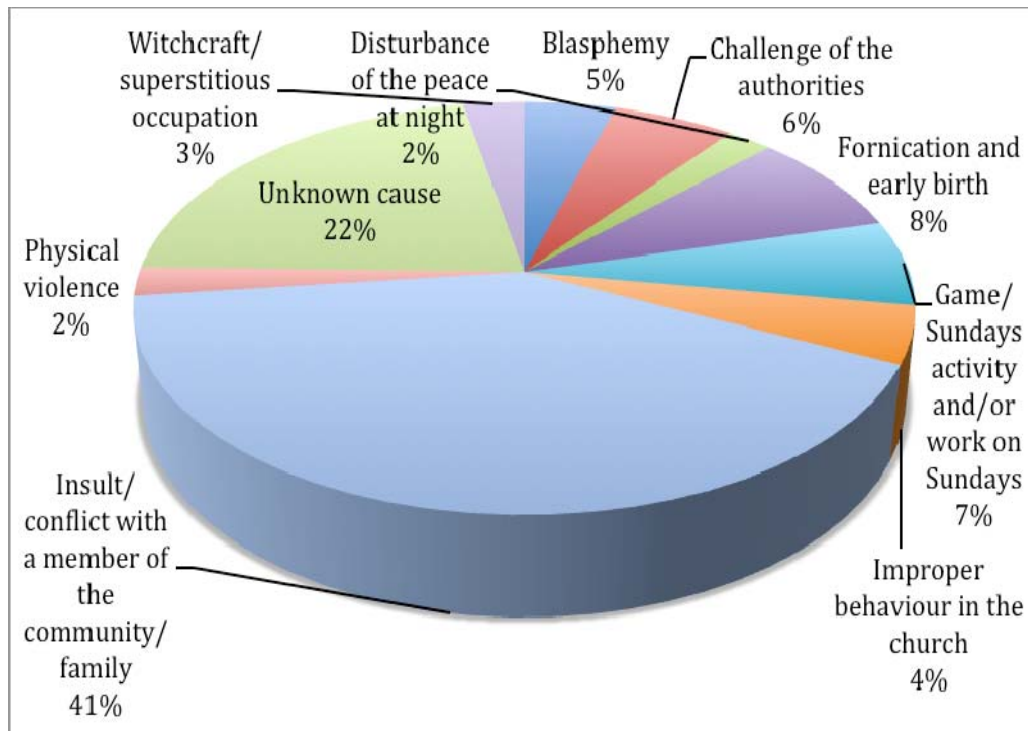


Figure 1: The consistory of the parish of Héricourt, 1623-1660

Peasants and the Authorities

It is not possible to examine the process of confessionalization and the effects of social discipline on the population without dissecting the complex relationship between the authorities and the rural population. It seems that the dukes of Württemberg had a difficult time managing and muzzling the peasants and they were frequently under the attack of their parishioners (improper behaviour in the church and challenge of the authorities accounted for 10% of the consistory cases). On 18 May 1639, Jehan Frederich was summoned before the consistory because he insulted and defamed the pastor. He refused to admit it. We do not know what happened next but it is more than likely that the case was handed over to secular and criminal justice. A couple of weeks later, Jehan Podrillot appeared before the consistory for the same reason and was fined 6 *gros*. On 28 June 1663, Barbe Parin and her sister appeared before the consistory because they had insulted the schoolmaster. These isolated cases did not necessarily reflect the rejection of Lutheranism per se, but might suggest the disenchantment of peasants with a particular individual or perhaps with the notion of authority itself. Amy Nelson Burnett has observed the same phenomena in the neighbouring Swiss town of Basel where the clergy often complained about the disrespect shown by rural dwellers.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Amy Nelson Burnett, « Basel's Rural Pastors as Mediators of Confessional and Social Discipline », *Central European History* 33, n° 1 (2000): 67-85. 69

Several peasants did not hesitate to complain to the *superintendant* about the minister or the schoolmaster during his visits. In 1611, the *superintendant* Bonsen reported the following in his notes:

En outre, dit et declare que les habitas de Blussanjeaux et Chastelot se coplaingnent de ce qu'ils not un mrs d'eschole qui puisse venir vers eux quelques jours de la sepmaine pour inptuire leurs enfans⁴⁸

[In addition, say and declare that the inhabitants of Blussanjeaux and Châtelot are both complaining that they do not have a schoolmaster that can come some days of the week to teach their children]⁴⁹

The mayor of Lougres complained in 1611 that the schoolmaster is “fort negligent” (very negligent) and that the minister does not catechize very often.⁵⁰ In these cases, one might suggest that such conflict between individuals often happened in any society in any historical period and had nothing to do with confessionalization. But these cases also emphasize power relations between the authorities and the population. Burnett suggests that the pastors had to “accommodate themselves to villages norms”.⁵¹ In the case of Montbéliard, pastors were often brought from abroad and were not born in the county, at least in the sixteenth century; they were French speaking pastors but it is possible they had a difficult time understanding the local peasant dialect of Montbéliard. An outsider might have difficulty imposing his authority and discipline upon the parishioners who had their own social and behavioural norms. In addition, the codicil of the duke Georges in 1558 provided a stipend for six young male citizens of Montbéliard in order to study theology in Tübingen; consequently the pastors of Montbéliard were educated in the main town of Württemberg, hundreds of kilometers away from their native city. Perhaps these people, after many years away getting a solid education, felt disconnected from the peasants of Montbéliard once they came back. A cultural shock between the uneducated and the educated, between strangers and natives, may have occurred. The village’s social norms, traditions, and cultural codes were necessarily different from those experienced by pastors and schoolmasters in an urban environment during their studies for instance.

One can also question the ability – and will – of pastors to adapt themselves to rural dwellers. In 1584, pastor Arquerius stated the following about his parishioners:

ils jurent toujours par le nom de Dieu, et penser que Jesus Christ fasse bien a un tel people, est une betise. Touchant la chanterie des psaumes, elle est en grand mepris a Hericourt; ils n’y veulent assister ni au commencement ni a la fin, et les enfans suivent l’exemple des grands. Ils savent bien des chansons du diable, mais des bonnes ils n’en veulent point savoir.⁵²

[They often swear by the name of God, and thinking that Jesus Christ does good to these people is stupid. The singing of the Psalms is greatly despised in Hericourt; they [the parishioners] do not want to attend the singing either at the beginning or at the end, and the children follow the example of the adults. They all know very well the songs of the devil, but they do not want to learn the good songs.]⁵³

It seems that after the Thirty Years’ War these concerns disappeared. Is it because of the war that ravaged the area or because of the internalization of a new kind of authority and of discipline by the peasants? It is difficult to say as the sources lack with which to formulate a solid answer.

⁴⁸ AN K 2174 Liasse 1, Longeville et Beutal, 1611

⁴⁹ Author’s translation

⁵⁰ AN K 2174 Liasse 2, Seloncourt 1616

⁵¹ Amy Nelson Burnett, « Basel’s Rural Pastors as Mediators of Confessional and Social Discipline », *Central European History* 33, n° 1 (2000): 67-85. 69

⁵² Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 52-53.

⁵³ Author’s translation.

On the other hand, some people seemed satisfied with their minister's services. On 28 June 1616, the mayor of Seloncourt Guimin Ronton testified that "the minister does his duty well and he is bona-fides, but his wife sometimes got into dispute in the village".⁵⁴ In 1619, the *superintendant* noted the following concerning the village of Coisevaux:

Perrin Tournier maire a Coisevaux rent for bon tesmoignage a leur ministre, et singulierement dit qu'il binit fort diligemment les maladies, [...] ne sachant aucun desordre en leur village la discipline ecclesiastique estant bien observee

Nicolas Lois et Jean Lois anciens a Coisevaux dissent qu'ils ne scavoient rien qui se commettent en leur lieu contre la disciplines ecclesiastique, [...] leur ministres et paroissiens faisant tous leur devoir.⁵⁵

[Perrin Tournier, mayor of Coisevaux, pays homage enthusiastically to their minister, and says that he blesses illis diligently, (...) there is no disorder in the village, as the ecclesiastic discipline is well observed.]

[Nicolas Lois and Jean Lois, elders in Coisevaux ,say that they do not know anything about disorders against ecclesiastic discipline within their village, (...) their ministers and parishioners do their duty].⁵⁶

As the example above shows, some peasants were satisfied with the work of their minister and schoolmaster. One can wonder what their expectations were. What were the peasants looking for? Did they, like Jean Tournier, look primarily for someone able to conform to their own culture, norms and practices? "Blessing" illis did not seem to conform with the Lutheran doctrine. This question would need further comparative study.

Peasants and Catholic rituals and superstitions

Through the different reports and investigations led by the religious and secular authorities, it appears evident that there was a huge gap between the will and culture of the elites and the popular culture of the peasants. Many sources indeed attest to the survival of superstitions and pagan practices.⁵⁷ It does not seem that people understood that these superstitions were contrary to the new Lutheran liturgy, which therefore proves that both the educational and catechism system established by the counts failed.⁵⁸

Schmidt argues that rural communities near Bern in Switzerland understood Christian beliefs their own way and did not really conform to regulations from above.⁵⁹ Did the peasants of Montbéliard do the same and invent their own religious beliefs mixed with their own practices? It seems that popular culture resisted the imposition of Lutheranism from above because of the survival of superstitious beliefs and practices. For instance, during one pastoral visit, Antoine Megnin le Jeune of Hérimoncourt explained to Toussain, the *superintendant*, how to cure horses and cows with an incantation prayer, even quoting the Virgin Mary and other saints.⁶⁰ This incident was not isolated and many occurred throughout the period until the eighteenth century. In 1544, three years after the

⁵⁴ AN K 2174 Liasse 2, Seloncourt, 1616

⁵⁵ AN K 2174 Liasse 2, Coisevaux 1619

⁵⁶ Author's translation

⁵⁷ It is also the argument of Gerald Strauss that peasants felt threatened by the new faith in their own popular culture. Gerald Strauss, *Luther's house of learning : indoctrination of the young in the German reformation* (Baltimore, 1978). 302-308. Strauss' argument has been challenged many times in recent historiography but I still think it is pertinent in the case of Montbéliard.

⁵⁸ The schoolmaster was also supposed to teach about religion along with reading and a little writing.

⁵⁹ Schmidt, *Dorf und religion*, 351-376.

⁶⁰ ADD EPM 328 Bavans and AN K 2174 (1/4) 1560

Reformation was established, the pastors of the *seigneurie* of Blamont, part of the county of Montbéliard, wrote a letter to the Count. In this missive, they expressed their deep concern over peasant superstitions. Indeed, many of the peasants were still attached to former Catholic (or superstitious) customs such as “ringing the bell for the Ave Maria and praying for the dead [...] as they did when the priests were still in place.” They even spread out boxwood branches on their manured land to protect the next harvest.⁶¹ Jeannette Voitot, wife of Pierre Nardin, was accused of going on pilgrimages outside the territory, as she seemed often absent for long periods of time.⁶² There was still a strong belief that illness could be cured thanks to superstitions but also thanks to Catholic rituals such as the Mass. On 7 April 1642, for instance, Marie Boucherot wife of Jehan Boillon was summoned before the consistory as she was accused of inciting her neighbours to solicit Mass in order to be cured. The limit between superstition and practices of the old faith was sometimes very thin. In 1560, during the visit of Abevillers, the *superintendent* was told that some people in the village had recourse to a female healer in Montjoie who asked them for money to sing Mass on their behalf in order to cure them.⁶³

The proximity with Catholic neighbours (the Duchy of Lorraine, Spanish Franche-Comté and Belfort) provoked encounters between Catholics and Lutherans that the authorities tried to prevent in vain. On 3 June 1647, Thiebaud and Henri Dormoy were accused by the consistory of having attended the wedding of one of their neighbours, Edir Soder, who married a Catholic woman. As they probably shared a meal with other Catholics and most likely attended a religious ceremony, the authorities saw this as a sin. It is interesting to note that a Lutheran peasant married a Catholic woman. It probably suggests that economic necessity was more important than faith. Jean-Marc Debarb has noted that Lutheran inhabitants of Montbéliard had trouble finding suitable Lutheran matches without marrying a blood relative.⁶⁴ As a result, Montbéliard was nicknamed the land of the cousins. Jeffrey Watt found similar cases of mixed union between Protestants and Catholics.⁶⁵

Fear of Catholicism was still prevalent in the seventeenth century. On 10 September 1646, Barbe Georges was accused of having “a dissolute and lubricious life with a priest”. On 24 May 1646, Nicolas Tournier, mayor of the village of Aibre, and Catherine Paris, wife of Pidr Barbaud, were summoned before the consistory as they went to Belfort on Whit Monday. It is not exactly clear whether they were reproached with having worked on a holiday or because they went into Catholic territory. Five women also appeared before the consistory for the same reason on the same day. Peasants of Montbéliard traded and dealt with their Catholic neighbours in Belfort. Economic necessity pushed them to do so as they could not live in total autarky. Bernard Vogler and Janine Estèbe found a similar preoccupation in the South of France and in the Palatin region, where confessional compartmentalization was also difficult.⁶⁶ There too, traditions and social norms resisted acculturative pressures.

⁶¹ AN, K 2192, ‘Remonstrances des ministres de la seigneurie de Blamont au sujet des sonneries pour les Ave Maria et les trépassés et de la celebration de la fête-Dieu’ 1544. “Tres chers seigneurs, les ministres de la seigneurie de Blammont remontrant a voz reverences que a la dicte seigneurie y a grand scandale et superstition a cause des sonneries. Car le peuple dit que c’est pour les Ave Maria et pour prier les mortz, et les sonnent a plusieurs lieux comme a Villers, Seloncourt et Herimoncourt, ainsi qu’on faisoit du temps des prebstres. Davantage a raison de cesdites sonneries, ilz ont solemnize leur feste Dieu plus superstitieusement que jamais, ornant leurs fumiers de rameaux comme ilz souilloient, singulierement a Bevillers sonnand du tabourin depuis le matin jusque au neuf heures, tellement que les estrangers passans ont este fort offenses voyant de telles choses [...]”

⁶² AN K 2174 liasse 2, 20 Juillet 1615, paroisse de Desandans. “Jeannette Voitot femme de Pierre Nardin sort souvent du pays demeurant long temps absente, ce qu’on presume qu’elle va a des pellorinages : mais estant mande au consistoire qu’elle le nie”.

⁶³ An investigation was made in 1561. ADD EPM 324, *enquête sur la superstition a Bavans*, 1561

⁶⁴ Jean Marc Debarb, « Le luthéranisme au Pays de Montbéliard: une Eglise d’Etat, difficultés et réalités du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle », *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* (s. d.): 1984.

⁶⁵ Watt, “The Reception of the Reformation in Valangin, Switzerland, 1547-1588.” 101

⁶⁶ Estèbe et Vogler, *La gènèse d’une société protestante*, 371-372

Indications of superstitious rituals and beliefs can be found throughout the period until the eighteenth century. On 7 August 1642, Antoinette Gillet, wife of Buchin Fondot, was summoned before the consistory accused of singing magical songs in order to cure her illness. She was sentenced to a fine and had to kneel in the church in front of the entire community in order to ask for forgiveness. She also had to recognize “l’horreur et abominations de son action” (horror and abomination of her action). In 1601, the *sainte fontaine* (holy fountain) also called the *plongeniere* in the village of Longres attracted many pilgrims who thought they could be cured by its water. It seems that their number was so large that the duke Frederic ordered a report just to denounce this superstitious practice.⁶⁷ Supernatural superstitions were still common and attested to throughout the early modern period. Estèbe and Vogler noted the same thing; it was difficult to erase entirely the superstitious practices in the South of France and in the Palatin region.⁶⁸ The consistory, the pastor and the authorities had a difficult time suppressing superstitious beliefs and rituals, mostly because they were well anchored in village traditions but also because, by the sixteenth century, they had become social norms and part of a strong peasant identity, transmitted orally from one generation to another.

Indifferent peasants?

The visit reports also stated on occasion the indifference of the population regarding religious matters. In 1560, the annual report reads that the “mayor and jurymen along with all the villagers are quite negligent in regard to prayer and sometimes a third of them miss religious service and prayer on Sundays.”⁶⁹ The *superintendant* also reports that Abevillers inhabitants liked wine and blasphemed too much, which was intolerable to the authorities. A century later still in Abevillers, in 1673, the *superintendant* remarked that only a few responded correctly to liturgical and theological questions:⁷⁰

[...] nous y sommes entrez et la le sieur minister a faict entendre au people le sujet de nostre arrivèe et particulièrement le grand soing que S.A.S. prend pour l’avancement de la felicitèe et temporelle et spirituelle de ses sujets et après la prière faite, a commencé a les examiner sur les principaux articles de la foy chrestienne suivant l’ordre du catechism ; Mais il y en a bien peu qui ayent pertinement respond aux demandes qui leur on testes faites. Lesquelles, a defaut de response, ledit sieur ministre leur a doctement, quoy qu’un peu trop au long expliquées.

[we entered and then the pastor informed the people that we had arrived and that the duke was greatly concerned about the spiritual and temporal bliss of his subjects. After prayer, the pastor began to examine the people on the main Christian articles of the faith according to the order of the catechism . But there were too few of them that responded correctly to the question asked. The pastor then supplied – in rather too lengthy a manner – the missing answers].⁷¹

During the same visit, the pastor and schoolmaster complained about a celebration organized the first Sunday before the harvest and called *la caresse*, literally the caress, a ritual which had a superstitious source. Young adults behaved improperly as they danced, sang, drank – and probably fought afterwards – during this pagan celebration.⁷² In 1560, a judicial case was opened against all the inhabitants of Grand-Charmont because many of them frequented the tavern, which the authorities restricted.⁷³ Pastoral visit reports are full of examples illustrating the disengagement of peasants from Lutheran theology and liturgy. Superstitions and memories of the Catholic liturgy remained well

⁶⁷ Charles Duvernoy, *Ephémérides du comté de Montbéliard: avec une introduction historique et la série des comtes de Montbéliard* (Ch. Deis, 1832). 155.

⁶⁸ Estèbe and Vogler, 374-375

⁶⁹ AN K 2174 (1/4) 1560

⁷⁰ AN K 2174 (2/11) 1673

⁷¹ Author’s translation.

⁷² Jean-Marc Debard, « Visites pastorales et vie paroissiale: un exemple luthérien montbéliardais: Abevillers du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle », *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, n° 126 (1980): 347-413. 366

⁷³ ADD EPM 691, (1560).

anchored in the peasant mind until the French Revolution. It seems that the consistory failed to punish the culprits or that the punishment was inefficient when pitted against popular culture. No improvement appears throughout the period; popular beliefs and practices seemed to win over the Lutheran code of behaviour and morality. In 1731, almost two centuries after the establishment of Lutheranism in Montbéliard, an investigation referred to the “great impiety that reigns in Bavans”.⁷⁴

Peasants were sometimes reluctant to apply the Lutheran moral code. The consistory was a participatory institution that worked locally with the support of some members of the community such as the mayor and the elders. These people were sometimes at odds with the new moral codes as this example shows:

Guillaume Betram ministre a Longevelle et Beutal [...] declare que les maires et anciens sont fort negligens a luy rapporter les scandals qui se commettent en la paroisse, et quand quelqu'un est condamne au consistoire sont fort contris a relever les amender de ceux qui y sont condamnés⁷⁵

[Guillaume Betram, minister in Longevelle and Beutal, declares that the mayor and elders are very negligent in reporting scandals that take place in the parish, and that when someone is condemned by the consistory they are reluctant to claim the fines from the condemned].⁷⁶

Still in 1619, the schoolmaster in Longevelle reported that blasphemy was widespread in his community.⁷⁷ Yet some people seemed to conform diligently to the new liturgy. In Coisevaux, in 1619, the *superintendent* reported that “(les) auditeurs sont bien fondé pour la plupart oz principaux points de la religion chrestienne” (parishioners are quite knowledgeable about the main liturgical points of the Christian religion”).⁷⁸ The elders in Longevelle stated in 1619 that everybody diligently attended religious services and sermons.⁷⁹ Did they report such things so as to be left in peace by the authorities? We need to emphasize that such testimonies in the visits were quite rare. Indeed, it is my belief that the *superintendent* pushed the inhabitants to denounce their neighbours.

Therefore, establishing a picture of rural adherence to Lutheranism is quite complex. On the one hand, peasants seemed indifferent to the new liturgy as they kept their ritual habits such as blasphemy, supersititious practices and beliefs for instance. But on the other, some peasants diligently conformed to the new Lutheran moral code and expectation. An examination of sources across time, especially visit reports, does not show that peasants assimilated the new faith any better later in the period. Contrary to the findings of Amy Burnett who has observed that parishioners in Basel came more diligently to religious services and that catechism and sermons seemed to be more efficient in the last third of the sixteenth century.⁸⁰ As Thomas Robisheaux has underlined for Hohenhole, church discipline only worked when an increase in the village population supported such ideas and moral norms, which did not appear to be the case in Montbéliard.⁸¹

⁷⁴ ADD EPM 328, (1731).

⁷⁵ AN K 2174, Liasse 2, Beutal and Longevelle, 1619

⁷⁶ Author's translation

⁷⁷ AN K 2174 Liasse 2, Beutal and Longevelle, 1619

⁷⁸ AN K 2174, Liasse 2, Coisevaux, 1619

⁷⁹ AN K 2174, Liasse 2, Beutal and Longevelle, 1619. “Pierre Tourot dit Parot et Jean Courant dit l'alliman anciens di Longevelle, dissent que Pierre Canin est un yvrogne qui dissipe son bien[...] et que les paroissiens vont diligemment aux prische, catechisme et a la cene”.

⁸⁰ Amy Nelson Burnett, « Basel's Rural Pastors as Mediators of Confessional and Social Discipline », *Central European History* 33, n° 1 (2000): 67-85. 77

⁸¹ Thomas Robisheaux, « Peasants and Pastors: Rural Youth Control and the Reformation in Hohenlohe, 1540-1680 », *Social History* 6, n° 3 (1981): 281-300.

Peasants and Witchcraft

Following pastoral visit reports and consistory litigations, the consistory or civic justice led many further investigations into morals and behaviour. Witches were often denounced in these reports. Those who did not fit Lutheran moral and cultural values were punished or removed, and this shows that peasants had found a tool that allowed them to ostracize those who disrupted their community.

Social discipline indeed reached its extreme peak with the witch-hunts starting in 1554.⁸² Over 200 people, among them a majority of rural women, were investigated for witchcraft. It is interesting to note that many of the investigations concerned people living outside of the walls of Montbéliard, therefore peasants.⁸³ Many women were burnt as witches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and their neighbours who believed in the devil, the witching hour and other demoniacal superstitions denounced most of these women. People were prompt to denounce their neighbours for witchcraft. The schoolmaster in Longeville reported in 1619 that Pierre Rossel liked to blaspheme and that he called his wife a witch.⁸⁴ The mayor of Presentvillers denounced Esibe Polrman, widow of Estienne Coulomb as a witch. He accused her of poisoning a child who had become sick since she touched his head.⁸⁵ The mayor of Lougres, still in 1619, reported that his neighbours “Jacques Poignot et Claude Disynonsir sa femme [...] sont fort soupconnez di sortilege” (Jacques Poignot and Claude Disynonsir his wife are strongly suspected of sorcery).⁸⁶ Cases like these were common but seem to decrease after 1630, perhaps because of the war ravaging the area which directed people's attention elsewhere.

The last witch of Montbéliard was executed in the 1660s. But, in 1750, despite the fact that the authorities had renounced trying women for witchcraft, the wife of David Candel of Exincourt was kidnapped by a group of men living in her village in the middle of the night in her own house. The men wanted to take her to prison. On their way, however, they beat her so hard that she died. Their only motivation was their suspicion that she was a witch, and that she had poisoned the child of the village's shepherd.⁸⁷ At the time, the last witch having been burned a long time before, superstitious fears, rituals and practices resisted the teaching of the pastor.⁸⁸ And peasants were still ready to regulate the community themselves, as Schmidt has shown for Bern. Many cases like this one have been reported, even after the end of the witch-hunt in the area.

The moralization of this society did not mean the end of violence, societal self-regulation and self-discipline, and reflects the flop of the authorities to acculturate the population and impose its will on the peasants. Many investigations were conducted within the territory to bring to light cases of violence, fights, murders, robbery and so on. Indeed, from the sixteenth century to 1789, the efforts of secular authorities in regards to moral and religious education did not seem to pay off. Many reports

⁸² It is interesting to note that the pastoral visits started in 1544. Although they were supposed to be interrupted during the Interim, the Counts used the existing system to investigate priests. The results of these Interim pastoral visits show that priests were ignorant and stupid. Of courses, that was a means to discredit the Catholic religion and liturgy. See Jean-Marc Debard, “Visites pastorales et vie paroissiale : un exemple luthérien Montbéliardais: Abbevillers du XVIIe au XVIIIe siècle”. *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* (1980). 347-413. 349.

⁸³ See Alexandre Tuetey, *La Sorcellerie dans le pays de Montbéliard*, 1898.

⁸⁴ AN K 2175, Liasse 2, Longeville 1619. “Pierre Georges maistre deschole a Longeville declare que les blasphemes sont bien frequents en leurs village, mesme qu'un Pierre Rossel dit Simonin son voisin y est fort addonne , iurant, blasphemant et guerellant avec sa femme, l'appelant souvent sorciere [...]”

⁸⁵ AN K 2174, Liasse 2, Presentvillers. “Antoine Monoz maire a Presentvillers [...] Avertit qu'une Esibe Polrman native de Bavans et veuve defeu Estienne Coulomb est une femme qui non soulmain a este fort dissola la plupart de sa vie , ayant par plusieurs annes soring (?) des personnes, mais aussy fort soupconne par tout le baillage destre une sorciere, y ayant enviroin trois que saddressant a Bietrix Barbier de Presentvillers qui estoit en gesine, elle linterpella que si elle vouloit aller avec elle , elle la meneroit en son lieu ou il y auroit un grand banquet , auquel elle seroit assise au dissus de la table [...] (elle) mit la main sur la teste d'un petit enfans de Nicolas Jodry aussy audit Bavans , lequel depuis seroit fort malade”

⁸⁶ AN K 2174, liasse 2, Langres , 1619

⁸⁷ ADD EPM 665

⁸⁸ On superstition see for instance Keith Thomas, *Religion and the decline of magic: studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century England* (London,, 1971).

confirmed the bad behaviour of peasants. We need to understand that it is rather hard to estimate the rate of criminality for the sixteenth century, but the archives tend to indicate that it was no lower than elsewhere.

Conclusion

Overall, the consistory cases mostly reflect the disengagement of peasants from the Lutheran moral code and values. The authorities attempted to acculturate the rural population but mostly failed; the reaction to it tends to show that peasants remained attached to their own traditional values and norms where traditional rituals, practices and beliefs prevailed. Montbéliard peasants were not the only ones to remain attached to their popular culture, as Jeffrey Watt has shown with the Swiss peasants of Valangin; he states “if a Lutheran prince attempted to impose his faith on his Catholic subjects, popular resistance to this change would be predictable”.⁸⁹ In the case of Montbéliard, the fact that the dukes of Württemberg were German-speaking landlords probably did not help the process of confessionalization.

What we see therefore is a theoretical process of confessionalization based on strong key institutional and local mechanisms, such as the pastoral visits and the consistory, which took control of a small area; and a popular practice of the faith with many superstitious reminiscences and almost unaltered popular practices and beliefs (dance, communitarian conflicts, pagan rites and so on). It seems that the authorities failed to establish and invent the pure society that they had imagined. The rural population had been mostly passive to the implementation of the new liturgy and came to express its resistance to it only by maintaining their own culture, beliefs, norms and rituals, refusing an acculturation process but molding their own religious norms.⁹⁰

I should add that the expectations about peasant ability was certainly too high. Indeed, many pastoral visits indicate the difficulty peasants had in remembering by heart long prayers or parts of the Scriptures. And even if they did repeat monotonously the sentences diligently learned, their comprehension of them was certainly low. The Counts understood early on the necessity of establishing schoolmasters in the countryside along with having a local printing press. It seemed that peasants appreciated the presence of a schoolmaster for their children but if their sons and daughters finally manage to learn to read, we should question their interest in religious matters. They imposed their own limits and only took what they needed, as they kept rituals from their former Catholic religion. Yet they did not rebel ferociously against the imposition of a new confession, perhaps because they lacked the means to do so.

⁸⁹ Strauss, *Luther's house of learning: indoctrination of the young in the German reformation*. 91

⁹⁰ Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne : XVe-XVIIIe siècles : essai* (Paris, 1977).

