

Philippe Denis

Edmond Richer and the Renewal of Conciliarism in the 17th century



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Edited by
Herman J. Selderhuis

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Edmond Richer and the Renewal of Conciliarism in the 17th century

Translated from the French by Carole Beckett

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Introduction

The story that is told in this book starts in Venice. On 25 December 1605, Pope Paul V's nuncio enjoined the Serenissima to transfer to the ecclesiastical tribunal, under threat of excommunication, two priests who had been found guilty of violation of the common law and to annul a law that restricted the sale of secular properties to the Church. Venice refused, finding the intervention of the Holy See in a matter that fell under civil jurisdiction to be improper. It also refused to accept that Rome, not so much as a spiritual power but rather as a landowner, deprive the city of economic resources which it needed for its subsistence. The pope refused to yield and, on 17 April 1606, excommunicated Venice. His argument was that, as the vicar of Christ, he held jurisdiction over Christian states regarding not only spiritual matters, but temporal matters as well. Two ecclesiologies clashed: one which was in favour of the absolute power of the pope, the other for a balance of powers within the Church and for the autonomy of the political realm.

At the time of this controversy, the theologian of the Republic of Venice, Paolo Sarpi, a Servite priest who had performed important functions within his order, published a treatise on Jean Gerson, the most important preacher at the Council of Constance, which dealt with the abuse of the power of the keys. In reply, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine questioned the credibility of the chancellor of the University of Paris. At the same time, a theologian from the Sorbonne, Edmond Richer, was in the process of re-editing the works of Gerson for a publishing company. A former Leaguer, he had been involved in the reform of the University of Paris and, on that occasion, had established close links with Gallican circles. Shocked by Bellarmine's attack on Gerson, he took up his pen in order to defend the ideas of the chancellor of Paris. He maintained, as had Gerson and the supporters of conciliarism, that the Council held greater power than did the pope. He stated his preference for a monarchy 'tempered' by the aristocracy, a regime which he judged to be more suitable for the Church than an 'absolute monarchy'. He did not want a 'republic of slaves'.

This first ecclesiological writing was not widely diffused. Meanwhile, Richer had been elected syndic of the Faculty of Theology in Paris and he set about reaffirming the authority, supposedly continuous, of the teachings of the Parisian doctors regarding the respective powers of the pope and the council. In 1611, whilst the confrontation between the advocates of the ‘liberties of the Gallican Church’ or the *bons Français* (good Frenchmen) and the *catholiques zélés* (zealous Catholics), also known as the *Ultramontains* (Ultramontanenes) was at its most acrimonious in the heated atmosphere caused by the assassination of Henry IV, he published a summary of the doctrine of the School of Paris under the title of *De ecclesiastica et politica potestate*, which was to be republished several times and which was translated into French, English and Dutch. This work met with strong opposition from Cardinal du Perron, some doctors from the Sorbonne as well as from the court of Marie de’ Medici. In March 1612 the bishops of the archdiocese of Sens, under which Paris fell, condemned the treatise and it was put in the index in Rome. More seriously for Richer, the queen’s chaplain informed him that he was no longer to publish anything on disputed topics. Should he do so, he would have to face penal sanctions. In September, he was dismissed from his position of syndic. He continued to write in defense of his ideas, but his most important works were not published during his lifetime. They were only to see the light of day during the second half of the seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century.

This book retraces Edmond Richer’s career and examines his ecclesiological and political thinking. Without taking all the syndic’s opinions at face value, it commits itself to taking seriously his declared intention which was to vindicate the teaching of the School of Paris and that of Gerson in particular. It places the heated, sometimes aggressive, debates between Richer and his adversaries in the context of a double progression: that of the doctrine of an absolute monarchy, a form of government which had been developing since the troubles of the League, and that of the Ultramontane ideas, often disputed but supported with growing vigour, in France and elsewhere, in the context of the reception of the Council of Trent.

Although his name is often cited in historical manuals, Richer is not well known. What is said about him depends for the greater part on the interpretation of his works by his Ultramontane adversaries. Indeed, as he was forbidden to publish, Richer did not have the opportunity to explain what he meant in the *De ecclesiastica et politica potestate* and when, several decades after his death the works which he had written during his retirement were finally published, it was too late to change the image which his opponents had created of him. It is possible to count on the fingers of one hand the writers who made the effort to read Richer’s entire works and not just the treatise which had resulted in him being condemned.

Of all Richer's opponents, the best informed as well as the most influential was his colleague in the Faculty of Theology, André Duval.¹ His opinion set a precedent. It was he who declared, after a somewhat tendentious study of the texts that, contrary to his claims, Richer betrayed the School of Paris. Convinced that the only form of government acceptable to the Church was an absolute monarchy, he suggested, without however openly stating it, that Richer was schismatic and that his doctrine had several points in common with that of the Protestants. The syndic, according to him, was an innovator. This opinion is shared, up to the current time, by almost all the biographers and commentators of Richer. It was also Duval who invented the term 'Richerist' in order to show that the syndic was speaking only for himself and not, as he would have one believe, for Gerson and the School of Paris. This term, which is more polemical than descriptive, became popular in the literature of controversy and, later, with historians.

If, when they were published and republished, Richer's works had an influence on Gallican and Jansenist writers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, very little trace of this is evident for his name was never quoted in their works. The master who was venerated and constantly remembered was Gerson. The former syndic was regularly mentioned, on the other hand, by the Ultramontanes, who made him the leader of the 'Richerists', people who were determined to undermine the power of the pope. Richer may have been harsh towards the sons of Saint Ignatius who were accused of compromising the integrity of the University of Paris, but they, for their part, did not treat him better. A succession of Jesuits and former Jesuits – Jacques Sirmond, René Rapin, Denis Pétau, Michel Le Tellier, Jacques La Fontaine, Pierre-François Lafitau, Giovanni Batista Faure, Aloysius Merz, Lorenz Veith, Augustin Barruel and François-Xavier de Feller – kept his dark legend alive up until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

More than Richer's theological work, it was the story of his life which had an impact on minds during the two centuries which preceded the French Revolution. The controversy which surrounded his enforced retraction as well as his last wishes resurfaced constantly. In 1692, a mere couple of years after the Declaration of the Assembly of the Clergy, the through-and-through Gallican Adrien Baillet wrote a *Vie d'Edmond Richer* which appeared in 1714² and which inspired several biographical texts, amongst which was that of Louis-Ellies Du Pin³ who had just republished Gerson. Baillet relied mainly on the *Histoire du syndicat d'Edmond Richer*, an autobiographical memoir which was only published several

1 André Duval, *Libelli de Ecclesiastica et Politica potestate Elenchus, pro suprema romani Pontificis in Ecclesiam autoritate*, Paris, [Jacquin], 1612.

2 Baillet, *La Vie d'Edmond Richer*, Liège, 1714.

3 Louis-Ellies Du Pin, *Histoire ecclésiastique du dix-septième siècle*, vol. 1, Paris, André Pralard, 1714, 377–452.

decades later in 1753.⁴ By giving a voice to the former syndic, these two works conveyed within Gallican and Jansenist circles the impression of a Richer persecuted by his adversaries and fighting to his last breath for the success of his ideas. An important link is the work by Gabriel-Nicolas Maultrot which was published in 1790 and 1791.⁵ It brought to the fore the fact that Richer had always taught and embodied the doctrine of the School of Paris and did not in any way participate, as many claimed, in the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. On the Protestant side, we may note a thesis on the *De ecclesiastica et politica potestate*, defended in the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Strasbourg in 1863,⁶ which presented Richer as a precursor of modernity.

But these are nothing more than marginal opinions. Richerian historiography is dominated by the two-volume biography of Abbé Edmond Puyol,⁷ one of the few authors who consulted almost all Richer's writings. Written in the aftermath of the First Vatican Council, it is a militant text: it undertakes to show the 'sectarian' nature – the word is repeated several times – of Richer's Gallicanism, a theological and political 'system' which was henceforth banned by the Church. The doctrine of the 'absolute monarchy of the Church' was declared ultimate truth. Because of its erudition and because there was no other important work on this subject, this book, in spite of its obvious ideological bias, had a decisive influence on research, far beyond the Ultramontane circles for which it was originally intended.

In his book Puyol defended three theses: on the historical importance of Richer, on his character and on the nature of his doctrine. The syndic was presented as the main instigator, if not the leader, of the Gallican movement in the seventeenth century. Richer and Richerism were declared to be responsible for the difficulties encountered in France by the Ultramontanes until such time as their doctrine was finally accepted in the nineteenth century. When the *Politiques* gained the upper hand after the aberrations of the League, Puyol wrote, Richer provided them with a doctrine which, until then, had been loosely defined and failed to coordinate its essential elements. 'It can be said without exaggeration that he showed the way and facilitated the triumph of Gallicanism.'⁸ Without him,

4 *Histoire du syndicat d'Edmond Richer par Edmond Richer lui-même*, Avignon, Alexandre Girard, 1753.

5 [Gabriel-Nicolas Maultrot], *Défense de Richer, chimère du Richérisme, ou Réfutation de la brochure intitulée: Découverte importante sur le vrai système de la constitution du Clergé, décrétée par l'Assemblée Nationale*, 2 vols., Paris, Le Clere, 1797–1791.

6 E.J. Laromiguière-Lafon, *Étude critique du traité De ecclesiastica et politica potestate d'Edmond Richer*, thesis presented at the Faculty of Protestant Theology of Strasbourg and publicly defended, Strasbourg, G. Silbermann, 1863.

7 Pierre-Edmond Puyol, *Edmond Richer. Étude historique et critique sur la rénovation du gallicanisme au commencement du XVII^e siècle*, 2 vols., Paris, Olmer, 1876.

8 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 37.

this pernicious doctrine would doubtless have disappeared. 'It is quite possible that the last representatives of a lost past would have vanished without trace if Richer had not appeared at the precise moment to resuscitate the traditions of the old Sorbonne. [...] Richer did not retreat from the battle against the general convictions of the clergy but engaged in it with as much determination as skill.'⁹

Secondly, Puyol expressed a moral judgment about Richer the man. That a priest in the Catholic Church and a theologian at the Sorbonne could have close ties with the Gallican party and could become its leader could only be explained, according to him, by a flaw in his character. For this reason he supplied a litany of moral appreciations. Richer was a 'violent, impassioned and vindictive' man.¹⁰ 'His austerity and his authoritative nature, his knowledge and his character had well equipped him to become the leader of the sect'.¹¹ Against the Jesuits he showed a 'truly fierce animosity'.¹² 'Solitary studies, success and authority made him an arrogant man. Consequently he truly believed that he was almost the only person to grasp the truth. [...] He became more and more deeply rooted in the conviction that everybody else was mistaken and that he alone was right. He believed that he was enlightened by God'.¹³ 'Richer was not only enamoured of himself, he was not only obstinate but he [...] was imbued with a spirit of dissent'.¹⁴

Thirdly, Puyol characterised Richer's doctrine. According to him, the main feature of his ecclesiology was episcopatism. 'The central point of Richer's system, and consequently the most defective of his hierarchical theories, was the exaggerated role he conferred on the episcopacy in ecclesiastical power'.¹⁵ Here, Puyol was referring to the claims of a national episcopacy as they had been stated, in 1682, in the Declaration of the Assembly of the Clergy. If he was aware of the fact that Richer took his inspiration from Gerson and other Parisian masters, he had not read these authors and paid little attention to the similarities between their works and those of Richer. Significantly, the doctrine of the Council of Constance was presented as being Gallican and not conciliarist. Richer was described as being the prime motivator of the Gallicans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and not as successor of fifteenth century conciliarism, a movement, as shown by Brian Tierney, which was deeply rooted in a much more ancient canonical tradition.

9 Ibid., vol. 1, 130.

10 Ibid., vol. 1, 42.

11 Ibid., vol. 1, 100.

12 Ibid., vol. 1, 141.

13 Ibid., vol. 1, 362–363.

14 Ibid., vol. 1, 365.

15 Ibid., vol. 1, 467.

Linked to Richer's episcopalism was a doctrine which Puyol defined as presbyterianism. He took care to show that the author of the *De ecclesiastica et politica potestate* could not be compared with Calvin's disciples because he recognised the primacy of the pope. However, he found that he distanced himself from Catholic doctrine by assigning to priests powers in the government of the Church which were far too great. 'Richer exaggerated the powers of the priests by establishing a form of similarity between the priesthood and the episcopacy regarding the origin of their authority'.¹⁶

As for Richer's political Gallicanism, according to Puyol, it took the form of a 'doctrine of the divine right of kings', which implied that 'the sovereigns who had been declared irresponsible and independent from the pope could protect the Church when they wished without being obliged to grant it everything to which it laid claim according to ancient principles'.¹⁷ Puyol described this 'system' as a 'regalism' or rather as a new combination, expressed in an erudite fashion, between episcopalism and regalism. 'What guarantees him a place in the history of ideas is less his work of mitigation of Gersonism than the concept in which he united in a single system both episcopalism and regalism'.¹⁸

Fifty years later, the Catholic historian Edmond Préclin, professor at the University of Besançon, gave academic backing to Puyol's work in an article which appeared in two parts in the *Revue d'histoire moderne*.¹⁹ Thanks to better access to archival resources and to a more systematic usage of Richer's unpublished manuscripts in the Bibliothèque nationale, he clarified and consolidated Richer's biography. In the main, he confirmed Puyol's remarks on the proud and argumentative nature of the syndic as well as the definition of his doctrine as a new combination of episcopalism and regalism. Repeating the conclusion of an earlier work,²⁰ he saw in the 'Richerism' of the end of the seventeenth century and of the eighteenth century a development of Richer's presbyterianism, which he called 'parochialism'.

With the exception of the works of Francis Oakley, to which we will return, the few writings devoted to Richer during the last thirty years have not substantially changed the image which Puyol and Préclin gave of him: an ambitious man who

¹⁶ Ibid., vol. 1. 446.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, 58–59.

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, 411.

¹⁹ Edmond Préclin, 'Edmond Richer, 1559–1631. Son œuvre. Le richérisme', *Revue d'histoire moderne*, 5, 1930, 241–269, 321–336.

²⁰ Edmond Préclin, *Les Jansénistes du XVIII^e siècle et la Constitution civile du clergé. Le développement du richérisme. Sa propagation dans le Bas Clergé 1713–1791*, Paris, Librairie Universitaire Gambier, 1928.

was prepared to do anything to see his ideas prevail (Claude Sutto),²¹ an apologist for the absolute monarchy who regarded the authority of the prince as sacred (Monique Cottret),²² the proponent of an extraordinarily virulent form of Catholic antiromanism (De Franceschi),²³ the defender of a radical form of Gallicanism (Frédéric Gabriel).²⁴

The same can be said of Yves Congar who reproduced, without criticising it, the negative image which the Ultramontane writers painted of Richer. If, particularly in his last works, the Dominican theologian recognized the contribution of Gerson and of conciliarism to the ecclesiology of communion he favoured, he continued to see in Richer the defender of a legalistic and reductionistic vision of the Church.²⁵ He erroneously created the impression that Richer's ideas had been censured by Pope Pius VI at the time of the condemnation of the Synod of Pistoia in 1786.²⁶

But does this do justice to an author who ceaselessly maintained that all he wanted to do was to honour the doctrine of the School of Paris and whose main intention was to curb the excesses of absolute power, in the Church as much as in the state? If he were Gallican, he was above all else a conciliarist, admittedly of a later generation. The purpose of the present work is to take a new look at the life and work of Edmond Richer by distancing ourselves from the portrait painted by his Ultramontane adversaries and by the historians who took their inspiration, sometimes unwittingly, from them.

I would like to acknowledge my debt towards the historians, particularly the Anglo-Saxon ones, who have, for the past half a century, renewed the study of Conciliarism. Far from considering this doctrinal current as an historical accident solely aimed at resolving the crisis of the Great Schism, they see it as a particularly consummate expression of an ecclesiology of the Church as a body whose roots were entrenched in a patristic and mediaeval theology which continued in a variety of guises up to the French Revolution, which fell into obscurity

21 Claude Sutto, 'Une controverse ecclésiologique au début du XVII^e siècle: le *Libellus de ecclesiastica et politica potestate* d'Edmond Richer (1611)', in *Homo Religiosus. Autour de Jean Delumeau*, Paris, Fayard, 1997, 426.

22 Monique Cottret, 'Edmond Richer (1559–1631). Le politique et le sacré' in Henri Méchoulan, ed., *L'État baroque (1610–1631). Regards sur la pensée politique de la France du premier XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Vrin, 1985, 167–168.

23 Sylvio Hermann De Franceschi, *La crise théologico-politique du premier âge baroque. Anti-romanisme doctrinal, pouvoir pastoral et raison du prince: le Saint-Siège face au prisme français (1607–1627)*, Rome, École française de Rome, 2009, 320.

24 Frédéric Gabriel, art. 'Richer, Edmond' in Luc Foisneau (ed.), *Dictionary of Seventeenth-Century French Philosophers*, Bristol, New York and London, Thoemmes Press Continuum, 2008, 1093.

25 Yves Congar, *L'Eglise de saint Augustin à l'époque moderne*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1970, 394–395.

26 See below, part 1, chapter 8.

during the nineteenth century and which found a new relevance at the time of the Second Vatican Council. The work of Gerson, to which frequent reference will be made in this book, is now studied on its own merits and appreciated positively as a result.²⁷ Another historiographical revival which has influenced me is that of Gallican studies. Recent works on this subject, in French as much as in English,²⁸ examine, better than has been done before, the Gallican movement and its long-term effects. It is to be understood as a return to the origins – a past of the Church and of the French nation that is more or less idealised – which entails, in a context which has been transformed by the Wars of Religion, the excesses of the League and the growth of monarchical aspirations, a new vision of the relations between religion and politics.

If there is an author to whom I am particularly indebted not only for having brought to the fore the conciliarist tradition in the early modern era but also for the suggestion of reading Richer in the light of Gerson's works, it is the American historian Francis Oakley. Taking a clue from Thomas Mayer,²⁹ he suggested, in an article which appeared in 1999,³⁰ distinguishing between a classical age or a gold age (d'Ailly, Gerson, Cusa), a silver age (Almain, Major) and a bronze age (Richer, Vigor) of conciliarism. This typology convincingly illustrates the continuity of the conciliarist movement. Richer, editor and commentator of Gerson, is put in perspective. The pages which Oakley devotes to the author of the *De ecclesiastica et politica potestate* in his article of 1999 invite the reader to transcend the rigid and reductionist image which Puyol and Préclin convey of the syndic's work.

27 Brian Tierney, *Foundations of Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1955; Olivier de la Brosse, *Le pape et le concile. La comparaison de leurs pouvoirs à la veille de la Réforme*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1965; Louis Pascoe, *Jean Gerson: Principles of Church Reform*, Leiden, Brill, 1973; G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, *Jean Gerson, Apostle of Unity: His Church, Politics and Ecclesiology*, Leiden, Brill, 1999; Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition. Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300–1870*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003; Brian Patrick McGuire (ed.), *A Companion to Jean Gerson*, Leiden, Brill, 2006.

28 William Bouwsma, 'Gallicanism and the nature of Christendom' in *Essays in European Cultural History*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990, 311–312; Alain Tallon, *Conscience nationale et sentiment religieux en France au XVI^e siècle. Essai sur la vision gallicane du monde*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2002; Jotham Parsons, *The Church in the Republic: Gallicanism and Political Ideology in Renaissance France*, Washington, University of America Press, 2004; 'La culture gallicane: références et modèles (droit, ecclésiologie, histoire)', special issue of *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 226, n° 3, 2009. The pioneering work of Joseph Lecler ('Qu'est-ce que les libertés de l'Église gallicane?', *Recherches de sciences religieuses*, 23, 1933, 385–410; 24, 47–85) is of great importance.

29 Thomas Mayer, 'Marco Mantova, a Bronze Age Conciliarist', *Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum*, 16, 1984, 385–408

30 Francis Oakley, 'Bronze-Age conciliarism: Edmond Richer's Encounter with Cajetan and Bellarmine', *History of Political Thought*, 20, 1999, 65–86. The main ideas in this article are reproduced in Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition*, 140–172.

The majority of Richer's works are easily accessible thanks to the digitisation of ancient texts undertaken by Google, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, to mention only the main leaders in this project. A notable exception is the *Apologia pro ecclesiae & concilii auctoritate*, the first ecclesiological document written by Richer which was published without his permission in 1607 and of which, it would appear, only two copies remain: one in London and the other in Venice. As we have seen, a large portion of Richer's works was published after his death. Only one work remains unpublished to date: the *Historia academiae parisiensis*, a history of the University of Paris in several volumes, which contains numerous personal recollections.³¹ A major source on Richer's life is his autobiography, which was initially kept in manuscript form and later published under the title *Histoire du syndicat d'Edmond Richer*. Préclin, who found its 'conclusions to be biased', nevertheless judged it to be 'interesting and accurate concerning the facts'.³² The only regret regarding sources is that none of Richer's correspondence has been conserved. On several occasions during his life, Richer felt threatened and it is possible that, on one of these occasions, he destroyed his correspondence.

This book consists of two parts. The first, which has eight chapters, traces Richer's life from a chronological point of view. The last chapter examines the reaction towards the work of the Gallican theologian during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The second part proposes a reading of Richer's work. It begins with an overview of the theological and political movements associated with the School of Paris. The two following chapters deal, respectively, with Richer's ecclesiological and political thinking. From a methodological point of view, they differ considerably from works which other authors have devoted to the subject. The syndic's best known treatise, the *De ecclesiastica et politica potestate*, is used as a guideline. On each of the contentious points, the point of view of the Ultramontane theologian André Duval and Richer's reply in his later works, the *Demonstratio libelii de ecclesiastica et politica potestate* (1622) in particular, are given. References by Richer and Duval to masters of the University of Paris are carefully examined so as to verify the pledge made by Richer to take his inspiration only from the doctrine of the School of Paris. The two authors who are most frequently quoted are Gerson and Almain.

A word in conclusion concerning the vocabulary used. The categories of Ultramontanism, Gallicanism and conciliarism date, at the earliest, from the eighteenth century³³ and should be used with care. Richer and his con-

31 Bibliothèque nationale de France (henceforth BnF), ms. lat. 9943–9948 (seven volumes).

32 Préclin, 'Edmond Richer', 328.

33 H. Raab, 'Zur Gerschichte und Bedeutung des Schlagwortes Ultramontan im 18. und frühen 19 Jahrhundert', *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, 81, 1962, 152–173; Parsons, *The Church in the Republic*, 5; De Franceschi, *La crise théologico-politique*, 23.

temporaries did not use this vocabulary. On the other hand, the expression 'liberties of the Gallican church' is old. According to Joseph Lecler, it was in use as early as the fourteenth century.³⁴ As for the term *Ultramontains* (Ultramontanes) it appears, with a capital letter, in Richer's works to indicate the supporters of pontifical supremacy.³⁵ The expressions *catholiques zélés* (zealous Catholics) and, later on, *catholiques dévots* (devout Catholics) were, however, more frequently used. For reasons of clarity, I will speak of Gallicans and Ultramontanes.

This book owes much to conversations and letters written to and received from colleagues who have become friends: if I do not mention all of them, at least I would like to cite Nicole Lemaître, Thierry Amalou and Frédéric Gabriel. I also owe a debt of gratitude towards the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal which allowed me three periods of sabbatical leave, spread over several years, to work on the book.

Finally, I thank Carole Beckett, a South African colleague, for having put so much effort, in close collaboration with me, into the English translation of the book, which was originally published in French.³⁶ Unless stated otherwise, all the translations from the French are ours. Apart from minor changes and references to work published in the meantime,³⁷ the translation is conform to the original. My gratitude also goes to Herman Selderhuis who graciously welcomed this book into the Refo2000 series of Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Pietermaritzburg, April 2019.

34 Lecler, 'Qu'est-ce que les libertés de l'Eglise gallicane?', 401.

35 See, for example, Richer, *Histoire du Syndicat*, 24.

36 Philippe Denis, *Edmond Richer et le renouveau du conciliarisme au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 2014.

37 The most important work is an article soon to be published under the title 'Edmond Richer (1559–1631), Jean Bodin and the Transformation of the Gallican Political Tradition' in *History of Political Thought*.

Part One.

The Life of Edmond Richer

Chapter 1.

The early years

Childhood and studies

The date and place of Edmond Richer's birth are open to debate. He made no mention of them in his autobiography, the *Histoire du syndicat de Richer*, a work he probably wrote himself although it is narrated in the third person.¹ Adrien Baillet, who compiled a biography of Richer sixty years after his death, gave his date of birth as 30 September 1560.² In a book which appeared a century and a half later, Pierre-Édouard Puyol spoke of 1559,³ a detail repeated by several biographers,⁴ but as he gave Baillet as his source, it is possible that he made a mistake.⁵

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- 1 *Histoire du syndicat d'Edmond Richer par Edmond Richer lui-même*, Avignon, Alexandre Girard, 1753. The handwritten manuscript, reproduced more or less word for word in the printed work, is conserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (ms.fr. 10561) under the title 'Histoire de ce qui s'est passé contre Edmond Richer, docteur en théologie de la Faculté de Paris, pour avoir défendu l'ancienne échole de Sorbonne, et mis en lumière un petit livre de la Puissance ecclésiastique et politique, incontinent après que le chapitre général des Jacobins, fut célébré à Paris l'an 1611'. Adrien Baillet used it in 1692 to compile *La vie d'Edmond Richer, docteur de Sorbonne*, a work which appeared after his death (Liège, s.n., 1714; Amsterdam, Etienne Roger, 1715 and 1717; s.l., 1734) See Léonard Wang 'En marge de la controverse gallicane ultramontainiste en France au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. Une Biographie Oubliée: *La Vie d'Edmond Richer, Docteur de Sorbonne*, de Baillet', *Dix-septième siècle*, 1974, 104, 80. According to Edmond Préclin, 'Edmond Richer, 1559–1631. Son œuvre. Le richérisme', *Revue d'histoire moderne*, vol. 5, 1930, 242, the printed work is a 'reproduction almost word for word' of the autograph manuscript.
 - 2 Baillet, *La vie d'Edmond Richer*, 2. The same information is found in Louis Ellies Du Pin, *Table universelle des auteurs ecclésiastiques disposez par ordre chronologique et de leurs ouvrages véritables ou supposez*, vol 2, Paris, André Pralard, 1704, col. 1756.
 - 3 Pierre-Édouard Puyol, *Edmond Richer. Étude historique et critique sur la rénovation du gallicanisme au commencement du XVII^e siècle*, vol. 1, (1559–1612) Paris, Olmer, 1876, 52.
 - 4 Préclin, 'Edmond Richer', 241; Jean Carreyre, art. 'Richer, Edmond' in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 13, Paris, Letouzay, 1936, col. 2698.
 - 5 This is the conclusion reached by Pierre Féret (*La Faculté de théologie de Paris et ses docteurs les plus célèbres. Époque moderne*, vol. 4, Paris, Picard, 1910, 1) who noted that Richer died on 28 November 1631 at the age of seventy-one. This information appears in Baillet, *Vie d'Edmond Richer*, 406.

The question of Richer's place of birth is of some significance for it could indicate, on the part of the Gallican theologian, a desire to conceal his origins. According to a first version, mentioned in Richelieu's *mémoires*⁶ and repeated by Baillet,⁷ the future theologian was born in Chaource, south of Troyes, of impoverished parents who were known for their integrity and piety. The eldest son was destined for an ecclesiastical career. Edmond, the second son, did not have this opportunity but, as he had a taste for studying, he left his paternal home at the age of eighteen and made his way to Paris.

An anonymous text, inserted at the end of the autograph manuscript of Baillet's *Vie d'Edmond Richer*,⁸ gives a different version of Richer's early life. According to this document, the future theologian was born in Chesley, a village a few kilometers to the south of Chaource and not in Chaource itself. At a very young age, he lost his father and was taken in by a certain Hénault, a farrier by trade who lived in Chaource. The man was impressed by his intelligence and offered to raise him. The narrator introduced himself as the great-great grandson of the farrier. He claimed to have heard Richer's story from his maternal great grandfather who had learnt it from his father. In 1568 – Richer was eight years old – Hénault sent him to join his four sons in a school run by two Jesuits, one of whom, Edmond Morange, was to die whilst caring for victims of the plague.⁹ The young orphan learnt to read and write and acquired the rudiments of Latin. Some years later, he bid farewell to his adopted father, who provided him with money for the journey and set off for Paris to continue his studies. When he completed his training, he took the three younger Hénault sons under his wing in recognition of the assistance he had received during his childhood.¹⁰

As Puyol, who reproduced this document, said, the second version is to be preferred to the first because of its precision and because it mentions the source of information.¹¹ This raises the question of why neither Richelieu nor any of the other chroniclers or biographers mentioned the fact that Richer was an orphan. Very assertive about his disputes with academic, ecclesiastical or political authorities, the Gallican theologian maintained a silence about his origins, at least in his written works. At the very most, in his *Testamentum*, written in December

6 *Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu*, ed. Lavollée, vol. 10 (1629), Paris, Droz, 1931, 420.

7 Baillet, *Vie d'Edmond Richer*, 2–3.

8 Bibliothèque nationale of France (BnF), ms. fr. 2109, reproduced in Puyol, *Edmond Richer*, 53–55.

9 Edmond Richer, *Historia Academiae Parisiensis*, unpublished manuscript, BnF, ms. lat. 9944, vol. 2, quoted in Puyol, *Edmond Richer*, 55. See also Préclin 'Edmond Richer', 243. On Edmond Morange, see Henry Fouquieray, *Histoire de la Compagnie de Jésus en France des origines à la suppression*, vol. 3, Paris, Bureau des Études, 1922, 122.

10 BnF, ms. fr. 2109.

11 Puyol, *Edmond Richer*, 53–55.

1629,¹² he let it be known that he came from Chaource, a statement which does not necessarily contradict the anonymous story as Chaource and Chesley are close to one another.¹³ In a work which appeared in 1603 he stated that he had taken in his mother and sister who were old or ill at the Cardinal Lemoine College where he was the grand master. He became annoyed at the attacks levelled at him by Georges Critton, his adversary at the time, for an act of basic charity deceitfully presented as an ethical fault.¹⁴ In his autobiography he spoke of his brother Jean, advocate in Parliament, who backed him during his disputes with the episcopacy and the Faculty of Theology in Paris in 1612.¹⁵ In a later biographical document we learn that his brother was a parish priest at Bougival, to the west of Paris.¹⁶ The fact that Richer was discreet about his origins could be a sign of an attitude of reserve which may, in part, explain the character traits mentioned by his contemporaries: his severity, his intransigence, his determination to follow up his intentions come what may, his ironic and bitter exchanges with former friends with whom he had broken off contact. Merciless regarding himself, he showed no lenience towards his disciples or subordinates.¹⁷ His 'proud and ruthless nature' – these are the words of Cardinal Richelieu who met him twice¹⁸ – contributed to strengthening the hostility of his adversaries against his theological opinions.

In Paris Richer enrolled for a humanities degree at the Cardinal Lemoine College.¹⁹ In order to meet his needs, he took on a domestic position 'at the home of a doctor called Bouvard who lived at the College and who had a number of students boarding with him'. As Baillet nicely expressed it, 'he put his life on mortgage in order to avoid hunger'.²⁰ The *Responses aux objections proposees contre les capacitez de Emond Richer*, a short document of 1612 which tries to establish the suitability of the Gallican theologian for the collation of a vacant canonicate of Notre-Dame de Paris,²¹ stipulates that he received tonsure on 20 December 1578. At the time, he was eighteen years old and had just arrived in Paris. A sign that one had entered into a clerical order, tonsure brought material

12 Edmond Richer, *Testamentum*, Paris, 1630, 1.

13 I do not follow the view of Henri Préclin ('Edmond Richer', 243, note 2.) who considers that the mention of Chaource in the *Testamentum* suffices to discredit the anonymous story.

14 Richer, *De optimo academiae statu libri duo*, Paris [Heureux Blancvillain], 1603, 173.

15 *Histoire du syndicat*, 194.

16 BnF, ms. fr. 2109, in Puyol, vol. 2, *Edmond Richer*, 396, 397.

17 See the psychological portrait of Richer which Préclin painted in 'Edmond Richer', 249–251.

18 *Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu*, vol. 10 (1629), 422.

19 *Ibid.*, 421

20 Baillet, *La vie d'Edmond Richer*, 3.

21 *Responses aux objections proposees contre les capacitez de Emond Richer*, par MM. Sebastien Bouthullier, Iean Gouaut & Pierre de Bailly. Pour servir au iugement du procès dudict Richer, demandeur en complainte, pour raison du possesseur d'une Chanoinie de l'Eglise de Paris. Contre lesdits Bouthullier, Gouaut & Bailly, deffendeurs. s.l.n.d., 14. Regarding the matter of the canonicate, see Puyol, *Edmond Richer*, 412.

and utilitarian benefits without the tonsured person necessarily being associated with a particular order or falling under its jurisdiction. It was for this reason that lay students could have their heads tonsured.²² However, this was not the case with Richer. From the moment of his arrival, or soon after, he had priesthood in mind. We do not know exactly when he was ordained.²³

If we are to believe Richelieu, the young countryman did ‘rather well’ in humanities but in philosophy ‘he did not do as well, never being able to grasp the basics of this science’.²⁴ According to Baillet, it took him less than three years to move into philosophy and a further two years to graduate as a Master of Arts.²⁵

According to the *Responses aux obiections*, Richer studied theology ‘from 1579 until Saint Remy 1582’, that is a period of three years and nine months. He then went to Angers where ‘he taught as a regent from St Remy 1582 until St Remy 1585’, in other words, from 1 October 1582 until 1 October 1585. The fact that this town had a Faculty of Theology linked to that in Paris²⁶ is worth mentioning. It was in Angers that, in the spring of 1585, Richer met René Benoist, – a doctor of the Sorbonne of fluctuating theological opinions who soon after this became an eminent preacher in Paris under the League, – when he took over the chair of *chanoine théologal* in the town and gave a few lectures.²⁷ His sermons, which drew great crowds, may have contributed to the success of the League in Angers in February 1589.²⁸

Richer graduated as a Master of Arts as soon as he returned to Paris in November 1585.²⁹ There is no doubt that he interrupted his theological studies for

22 Marie-Madeleine Davy, ‘La situation juridique des étudiants de l’université de Paris au XIII^e siècle’, *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France*, 17, 1931, 302–303.

23 In the *Declaratio ... super editione libelli sui de ecclesiastica & politica potestate*, a notarised document of 30 June 1622, Richer presented himself as a priest of the diocese of Langres with a doctorate from the Sacred Faculty of Theology in Paris (*Libellus de ecclesiastica et politica potestate ...*, new ed., Cologne, 1702, ii). See also Richer’s *Testamentum*, 1. As a doctor of the house and society of the Sorbonne, Richer was in all likelihood ordained as a priest without ecclesiastical title or office. See Roland Mousnier, *Les institutions de la France sous la monarchie absolue 1598–1789*, vol. 1, Paris, 1974, 225–226.

24 *Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu*, vol. 10 (1629), 421.

25 Edmond Richer, *De optimo academiae statu libri duo*, 1603, 94, quoted in Baillet, *La vie d’Edmond Richer*, 3.

26 Féret, *La Faculté de théologie*, vol. 2, 44–45.

27 Émile Pasquier, *Un curé de Paris pendant les guerres de religion. René Benoist, le pape des Halles (1521–1608)*, Angers, 1913, reprint, Geneva, 1970, 194. On René Benoist, see also Thierry Amalou ‘Deux frères ennemis, deux sensibilités catholiques: les prédications de René Benoist et de Gilbert Genebrard à Paris pendant la Ligue (1591–1592)’, unpublished paper, 2006. Accessible online: <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01774718>.

28 Robert Harding, ‘Revolution and Reform in the Holy League: Angers, Rennes, Nantes’, *Journal of Modern History*, 53, 1981, 400.

29 *Responses aux obiections*, 4–5. According to Richelieu, it was after receiving his Masters in Arts degree that Richer went to Angers to teach for ‘several years’ (*Mémoires du Cardinal de*

three years in order to study arts: he admitted this during the proceedings of 1612, stressing that this practice was seen as acceptable before the reform of the University of Paris in 1600. But three years were not sufficient to obtain a Masters in Arts degree. It would appear that between 1579 and 1582 Richer sat in on lectures in theology whilst pursuing his studies of the humanities. This unusual path can doubtless be explained by the unstable climate which marked this period.

In Paris, Richer taught philosophy at the College of Bourgogne and registered for theology at the Sorbonne.³⁰ It was during this time, according to Baillet, that he was received by the *curé* of Saint-Gilles, a doctor in theology called Étienne Rose who can be identified as Guillaume Rose, the bishop of Senlis, a man who, like Richer, came from Champagne.³¹ His new protector treated him like a son. All his expenses were taken charge of. Passionate about studying, the young man spent in the library all the time that he did not devote to lectures.³²

Richer graduated as doctor of theology on 15 May 1592,³³ seven years after having received his Master of Arts degree. According to the *Responses aux obiections*, he devoted a total of ten years and four months to his theological studies.³⁴ At the beginning of the sixteenth century, such studies took between thirteen and fifteen years to complete.³⁵ This was probably also the case under Henri III, in theory at least. Richer, who began his studies before the revision of

Richelieu, vol. 10, 421). Baillet's account says the same thing. The version given in the 1612 document is to be preferred because at the University of Paris a *régentat* (lectureship) of at least one and a half years was required in order to obtain a Masters degree in Arts. See James Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France. The Faculty of Theology of Paris, 1500–1543*, Leiden, Brill, 1985, 12.

30 *Mémoires du Cardinal de Richelieu*, vol. 10 (1629), 421–422. Teaching and studying theology could, in effect, take place at the same time (Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform*, 12).

31 I would like to thank my friend and colleague Thierry Amalou for this suggestion.

32 Baillet, *Vie d'Edmond Richer*, 4. On this Dr Rose or Roze see also BnF, ms, fr, 2109, quoted in Puyol, *Edmond Richer*, vol. 2, 397. The author of the anonymous story presents the story in a different light. According to him, when Richer arrived in Paris he took lodgings at the College of Boncourt and not at the Cardinal Lemoine College, as Richelieu wrote in his memoirs, and the doctor from the Sorbonne at whose home Richer worked as a domestic servant was the one who became his benefactor, having noticed 'his excellent mind'. He subsequently made him sole legatee of his estate 'which was quite considerable' (Puyol, *Edmond Richer*, 55).

33 *Responses aux obiections*, 5. See also Richer, *Apologia pro Joanne Gersonia*, Leiden, Paulus Moriaen, 1676, 38.

34 *Responses aux obiections*, 5

35 Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform*, 16.