

THE PIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS

Audrey Virot – I began studying the Pious Establishments when I came across them somewhat by chance when working on the diplomatic correspondence between the French embassy and the Holy See. I regularly saw questions concerning the Trinité des Monts and Saint-Louis des Français and I wanted to understand what these involved because at a historical and a judicial level, it is an object of great complexity. In law one would say that each institution is *sui generis* because it doesn't have a very precise nature in law and doesn't fit into any juridic category. They comprise La Trinité des Monts, Saint-Claude des Bourguignons, Saint-Louis des Français, Saint-Nicolas des Lorrains and Saint-Yves des Bretons. They have their own archives that can be found in Via San Giovanna d'Arco at the home of the Religious Foundations

All these institutions have existed in Rome since the end of the Middle Ages and in reality they are the result of the displacement of populations that made up France at this time. There were Bretons, people from Lorraine and Burgundians who came to Rome either to find fortune or because they were pilgrims or because they were men of the Church who came to Rome to take advantage of a boom period in the city, drawn by the presence of the pontiffs subsequent to the Avignon period. All these people settled in Rome and felt the need to find others of their own kind, to help each other and to continue to share common traditions that originated from their territories of origin. That's how a collection of brotherhoods appeared and bit by bit, hospices were built, then churches which were gradually made rich.

Religious Foundations have no equivalent in the wider world and that is because of the unique features of the city of Rome. By the time the nation-states came into being, the European nations were already all present in Rome because it is the seat of the papacy. They therefore had all needs, both for political activity and in order to affirm a degree of power because all know that splendour and wealth are also signs of power. Projecting this power in Rome was important for all European nations in the context of recent times where these different nations were either at war, in conflict or in competition! Because while there are indeed the French Religious Foundations, there are also Spanish ones who have a very beautiful church, a Portuguese Pious Establishments, an English college and in general those of quite a few European nations. The Germans also have a church so Rome from this point of view is a shop window onto power and to be able to display this power in front of the Pope, in the city of the Pope, is important for all these different nations. Now as far as France is concerned, the kings of France wanted to embellish these churches and make them, well, the most beautiful nation churches of Rome. Now once this heritage had been established, it might suffer hardship by virtue of the vicissitudes of history but it has always been

maintained and has always continued to be made beautiful and that is why it is still present in Rome today.

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