

Art and faith in Haute-Savoie



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Deeply marked at the time of the counter-reform by the strong personality of Saint-François-de-Sales, Haute-Savoie was, in the 17th and 18th centuries, a land of choice for baroque art, an expression of the powerful renewal of the Catholic faith generated by the Council of Trent.

In the 19th century, the monarchical restoration of the House of Savoie gave it an important network of churches of the neoclassical style typical of the Sardinian states. These buildings, illustrating the alliance of the throne and the altar, replaced most of the Romanesque or Gothic churches of the Middle Ages.

After the meeting of Savoie in France in 1860, in accordance with the dominant movement of the time, the Savoyard wanted to give their liturgical celebrations the romantic setting of Gothic Revival churches.

In the twentieth century, the demographic dynamism of Haute-Savoie required the construction of numerous churches that bore vivid witness to the renewal of sacred art. Engaged as early as the 1930s by the monk Dom Bellot and the architect Maurice Novarina, this renewal found its fulfilment from the 1960s onwards by translating the new liturgical sensitivity resulting from the Second Vatican Council.



Art and faith in the Mont Blanc region

In the privileged setting of two exceptional viewpoints on the nearby Mont Blanc, this day allows to discover the Baroque Church of Cordon and the modern church of the plateau of Assy, major witnesses of two different expressions of sacred art.

Cordon, plateau d'Assy



Notre-Dame de l'Assomption Church in Cordon is one of the most dazzling and complete achievements of the Alpine Baroque. It features an elegant bulbous bell tower and an architectural volume that unifies the congregation of the faithful and connects it with the celebrant, while distinguishing between the nave and the sanctuary. This is the work of a master mason from Val Sesia. The bright and cheerful decoration has preserved in the vaults and cupola the remarkable paintings of a young German Swiss artist. As for the sumptuous altarpiece of the high altar, where silver competes with gold on a general green tone, it magnificently exposes the theology of the Catholic Reformation

Our Lady of All Graces church on the plateau of Assy, started in 1937, was a landmark creation of the high-Savoyard architect Maurice Novarina. He turned it into a chalet with few openings, protected from snow by an immense roof, while the bell tower establishes a parallelism with the vertical silhouette of the Pointe d'Ayère rising in the background of the landscape. The greatest artists of the 20th century contributed to the decor: stained glass windows by Georges Rouault, and Jean Bazaine, tapestry by Jean Lurçat, ceramics by Henri Matisse and Marc Chagall, mosaic by Fernand Léger, paintings of Pierre Bonnard and Ladislav Kijno, crucifix of Germaine Richier, tabernacle of Georges Braque, virgin of Jacob Lipchitz, to mention only the most famous names



Baroque art in the Mont Blanc region

An expression of the renewal of the Catholic faith prompted by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Baroque art was born in Rome in the second half of the 16th century. In a popular form, it spread in Savoie during the 17th and 18th centuries, mainly in mountainous areas benefiting from several favourable factors: major population growth; New evangelization promoted by great bishops, of which St Francis de Sales was the most illustrious; superabundant activity of Italian master masons from Val Sesia; models, works of art and funding brought back from the Germanic countries of the Catholic faith through dynamic emigration ; ability to take control of oneself even, specific to the village communities of the mountain used to collectively manage forests and pastures.

Cordon, Combloux, Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, Les Houches, Argentière

In the magnificent setting of an exceptional viewpoint on Mont Blanc, the church of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Cordon is one of the most dazzling and accomplished of the Savoyard Baroque. Its elegant bulbous bell tower has preserved the painted decoration of its vaults and dome. Its high quality furniture is dominated by the majestic altarpiece of the high altar where silver rivals gold on a particularly bright green background.



In Combloux, the church of Saint-Nicolas has the most beautiful bell tower with bulb of the French Alps, standing boldly against the sparkling mass of Mont Blanc in the background. The picturesque building is reinforced by the presence of a bell at the top of the roof of the nave, at the top of the façade, whose eaves are painted with scenes illustrating the life of Saint Nicholas. The altarpieces are filled with statues where the usual polychromy gives way to a complete gilding of clothes.

In the village of Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, facing the eternal snow of the domes of Miage, the church of Saint-Nicolas surprises with the sumptuousness of its decor and the richness of its treasure. So much magnificence is explained by the generosity of the children of the parish who emigrated to the Germanic world. The façade, which is protected by a painted eaves, has a particularly elaborate architecture. Inside, the entablature that encircles the unique volume of the nave is animated by a brightly coloured frieze. It is supported by pilasters with heavily sculpted capitals, while the flutes of the barrels are only a striking trompe-l'oeil. In the imposing altarpiece of the high altar, which combines the frills of the rococo with the first fruits of the neo-classical rigors, the great painting of Saint Nicholas is an excellent canvas painted in Vienna. On the other hand, the paintings that adorn the vaults were made in the 19th century by Italian artists from Val Sesia. The museum exhibits an extraordinary treasure of goldsmiths and liturgical ornaments of Germanic origin for the most part. At the foot of the needle of the Taster, Les Houches, like Cordon or Argentière, give the example of these parishes created in the 18th century in response to the demographic growth of the Savoyard mountain. Its Saint-Jean-Baptiste church covers its unique volume with a succession of more or less complex ridge vaults. The transept arms, of shallow depth, are animated by the slight concave rounded end. The sanctuary is bathed in a light cleverly designed to highlight an elegant altarpiece whose subtle harmonies of blues echo the tone of the walls and vaults

The church of Saint-Pierre d'Argentière, in the magnificent setting of the Argentière glacier, has a very colourful interior. The main altarpiece stands behind a monumental tabernacle extending the width of the altar table. This tabernacle, of great execution, was brought back from Austria, where it would have been made in Vienna. Although the side altars were reconstructed in the neo-classical era, they still have baroque statues of great expressiveness that have nothing to envy to those of the high altar.



THREE-DAY PROGRAM

Art and faith in Haute-Savoie, Lake Annecy to Lake Geneva In Aravis and Mont-Blanc

In an incomparable natural setting, from the shores of Lake Annecy to the shores of Lake Geneva and the Aravis Mountains to the Mont Blanc massif, these three days allow us to discover a good part of the very rich heritage of churches whose baroque and modern art have enriched Haute-Savoie. They also reveal the particularism of the neoclassical style of the Sardinian Restoration, an illustration of the alliance of the throne and the altar in the states of the House of Savoie until the 1850s. Not forgetting the neo-gothic style whose romantic spirit prevailed after the meeting of Savoie to France.

Day 1

Annecy, Meythet, Thônes, La Clusaz, Entremont.

Saint-Joseph-des-Fins Church, a 1937 manifestation of the first thrills of a renewal of sacred art in Annecy, applied the innovative solutions devised by Dom Bellot: a concrete structure using parabolic arches very characteristic of the creations of this architect who was a Benedictine monk. But the building is clad externally with a cladding of cut stones, while the bell tower is surmounted by a bulb echoing the Baroque tradition of Savoy. The decoration, of great symbolic richness, is expressed by stained glass, stone or wood carving, wrought iron, mosaic, ceramic and wall painting

The Saint-Paul Church in Meythet, the last church of the Diocese of Annecy in 1998, is an elegant architectural achievement by Jacques Herrgott, founded on a rich symbolism: the soft canopy of a tent supported by twelve pillars arranged in a circle in a square. The circle and the square are found on the façade of the building in the oculus which dialogue with the door. Behind the altar, an immense painting by Arcabas is forcefully imposed on the entire height of the wall. Above the baptistery, there is a large stainless steel bird. The crucifix shows great expressiveness and the liturgical furniture is of a rare quality. A carillon of 17 bells animates the tower



At the entrance of the Aravis massif, the church of Saint-Maurice de Thônes, dominated by a powerful bulbous bell tower, has a plan with three naves covered with vaults of ridges. It has the largest altarpiece that baroque art has produced in the mountains of Savoie. Its elevation is spread over three levels, whereas most of these altarpieces have only two. It is also the one where the theological presentation of the Catholic faith is the most complete and rigorous. The side altars have a lot of charm, especially that of the Sacred Heart, where tiny statuettes of Christ and his twelve apostles, sculpted with great finesse, fill niches connected by intertwined branches of a vine laden with clusters.



In the heart of the Aravis, Sainte-Foy de la Clusaz church has preserved an 18th century bell tower, on which rises an elegant stack of domes made in the 19th century inspired by the bulbs of the Baroque period. The church itself was completely reconstructed in 1974 as a large cottage with a large *tavaillons* roof that inserts it into the village's traditional habitat. Glass stained glass windows, reminiscent of traditional mountain life, give it a particularly collected atmosphere.

In the Borne Valley, at the foot of the Plateau des Glières, Baroque art came to transform the modest Gothic church of an old abbey of Canons Augustins, Notre-Dame d'Entremont. An extraordinary decoration painted in trompe l'oeil animates the whole façade. With the sumptuous altarpiece, in reality a triumphal arch surmounting the altar standing before the wall of the apse, and with the rich treasure of the sacristy, these contributions of baroque art say maybe more the power and wealth of the priest who financed them rather than the fervor of his faith.

Day 2

Sallanches, Cordon, Combloux, Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, plateau d'Assy.

The former collegiate church of Saint-Jacques is a baroque church dating from the 1680s whose decoration was entirely restored after the fire that destroyed Sallanches in 1840. This decoration illustrates the solemnity of the neoclassical style of the Sardinian Restoration by trompe-l'oeil, the rich paintings of Casimir Vicario, the pulpit and the superb stalls sculpted by Piedmont's carpenters. The large organ is by Joseph Callinet. A beautiful sundial gives the time on the southern façade of the building.

In the magnificent setting of an exceptional viewpoint on Mont Blanc, Cordon owns one of the most remarkable baroque sanctuaries in the Savoyard Alps. The church of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption, marked by an elegant bulbous bell tower, has preserved the painted decoration of its vaults and dome. As for the furniture, of great wealth, it is dominated by the altarpiece of the high altar, where silver rivals gold on a particularly bright green background.

In Combloux, the church of Saint-Nicolas has the most beautiful bulbous bell tower in the French Alps, which stands out boldly against the sparkling mass of Mont Blanc, which serves as its backdrop. The building is reinforced by the presence of a bell at the top of the roof, on the façade, whose eaves are painted with scenes illustrating the life of Saint Nicholas. The altarpieces are filled with statues where the usual polychrome gives way to a complete gilding of clothes.

In the village of Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, facing the eternal snow of the domes of Miage, the church of Saint-Nicolas, astonished by the sumptuousness of its decor and the richness of its treasure that explains the generosity of the children of the parish who emigrated to the Germanic world. The façade, which is protected by a painted eaves, has a particularly elaborate architecture. Inside, the entablature that encircles the unique volume of the nave is animated by a brightly coloured frieze. It is supported by pilasters with heavily sculpted capitals, while the flutes of the barrels are only a striking trompe-l'oeil. In the imposing altarpiece of the high altar, which combines the frills of the rococo with the beginnings of the neo-classical rigors, the great painting of Saint Nicholas is an excellent canvas painted in Vienna. On the other hand, the paintings that adorn the vaults were made in the 19th century by Italian artists from Val Sesia. The museum exhibits an extraordinary treasure of silversmiths and liturgical ornaments of Germanic origin for the most part.

Facing Mont Blanc, on the plateau of Assy, the church of Notre-Dame de toutes Grâces, started in 1937, was a landmark creation of the high-Savoyard architect Maurice Novarina. He turned it into a cottage with few openings, protected from snow by a huge roof, while the bell tower establishes a parallelism with the silhouette of the Pointe d'Ayère that stands in the background of the landscape. The greatest

artists of the twentieth century contributed to its decoration: stained-glass windows of Rouault and Bazaine, tapestry of Lurçat, ceramics of Matisse and Chagall, mosaic of Léger, paintings of Bonnard and Kijno, Richier crucifix, Braque tabernacle, Lipchitz virgin.

Day 3

Peillonex, Viuz-en Sallaz, Vongy, Amphion, Thonon.

In their church dedicated to Notre-Dame de l'Assomption, Chanoines Augustins de Peillonex inserted in 1720 an astonishing baroque decoration that covers the entire apse of this beautiful 12th century Romanesque building, incorporating the three windows of the bedside. While the usual decoration of the baroque churches of Haute-Savoie is expressed by the wood carved, painted and gilded, here it uses stucco with the greatest originality. A sound and light spectacle gives the profound meaning of this setting, which testifies to the fervent renewal of a religious community sustained by the reforming will of the episcopal authority.

Preceded by a porch with Ionic columns, the large Saint-Blaise church of Viuz-en-Sallaz is one of the most beautiful illustrations of the neoclassical style of the Sardinian Restoration. The painted decoration is due to the Avondo brothers of Val Sesia, region from which also came the artisans who sculpted the stalls, pulpit and baptismal fonts. The monumental altarpiece of the high altar is one of the most sumptuous creations of Giuseppe Gilardi, also from Val Sesia.



In Vongy, at the gates of his native Thonon, architect Maurice Novarina paved the way for the renewal of sacred art in the Diocese of Annecy by designing the church of Notre-Dame du Léman in 1933. Composed of a single nave, it is covered by a magnificent broken ship, made of Hungarian oak, supported by diaphragm concrete arches.

Concrete is also the material of the large triangular transom that illuminates the façade. Beautiful stained glass windows, a monumental mosaic adorning the apse, an original Virgin Mary, the tabernacle, a paschal chandelier and a magnificent bronze communion table are the particularly neat decoration of this church

Notre-Dame de la Rencontre in Amphion, between Thonon and Evian, is a small church designed in 1977 by Maurice Novarina, for the many vacationers who stayed at the nearby campgrounds. It therefore takes the form of a tent under a pyramidal roof covered with oxidized copper green. This very friendly square-plan church is illuminated by the vivid polychromy of its sculpted wooden decoration, a naive work by André Poirson where the great symbols of Romanesque art are found.

Saint-Hippolyte de Thonon church was originally that of a Benedictine priory whose still remains the beautiful Romanesque crypt. Reconstructed in the late Gothic style of the 15th century, this church became a Protestant temple at the time of the Reformation. After the reconquest of Chablais to Catholicism by St Francis de Sales, she was assigned to the Barnabites, called from Italy to manage the Holy House of Thonon, a dynamic study center opposed to the Calvin Academy in Geneva. The Barnabites enlarged it with a new choir and gave it a sumptuous stucco baroque decoration, a very refined work by artists from Ticino, in contrast to the popular rusticity of the baroque decoration of the mountain churches.



Adjoining and communicating with the church of Saint-Hippolyte, the Basilica of Saint-François de Sales was wanted by Thonon to mark the elevation of the holy bishop to the rank of doctor of the Church in 1877. Built in the neo-Gothic style then prevailing, it gives a remarkable interpretation of it with its pointed arches, rosettes and gargoyles, its plan with transept and its elevation on three levels, superimposing large arches, triforium and high windows. It is illuminated by beautiful modern stained-glass windows and Maurice Denis has enriched it with two large sticked canvases and a frieze cross path which were his last paintings, completed in 1943.

With the church of Sainte-Jeanne de Chantal, the architect Claude Marin left to Thonon a church of very pure volume, covered by a huge roof that goes down very low and whose panelling produces the warm atmosphere usually created by wood, The atmosphere here is reinforced by the red of the great mosaic where the saints of heaven and earth make the body of Christ visible. The magnificent stained glass windows of Jean-Marie Balayn, evoking Genesis, have the originality to occupy the entire surface of the facade.

TWO-DAY PROGRAMS

Sacred art in Haute-Savoie

Three two-day programs are feasible from the three-day program :

Day 1

Annecy, Meythet, Thônes, la Clusaz, Entremont

Day 2

Sallanches, Cordon, Combloux, Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, plateau d'Assy

Day 1

Annecy, Meythet, Thônes, la Clusaz, Entremont

Day 2

Peillonex, Viuz-en-Sallaz, Vongy, Amphion, Thonon

Day 1

Sallanches, Cordon, Combloux, Saint-Nicolas de Véroce, plateau d'Assy

Day 2

Peillonex, Viuz-en Sallaz, Vongy, Amphion, Thonon