

Reform and High Politics in France 1517-1525

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In the period 1517 to 1525 Germany, ahead of all other countries, attracts the eye of the historian. The dramatic train of events which unfolded there following the posting of academic theses at Wittenberg – the Leipzig Debate, the Diet of Worms, the Knights' War, finally, the Peasant's Revolt – affords the uncanny sensation of a world shifting on its axis. Germany in these years is without doubt at the centre of European history. Indeed, developments there were closely followed by contemporaries throughout the rest of Europe. And in a way which parallels reaction to subsequent major upheavals like the French or Russian Revolutions, the religious reformation in Germany gradually had its effects on every European country.¹

France is a particularly clear example of the transfer of these revolutionary currents. Its close proximity to Germany and its large and influential intellectual elite concentrated at such centres as Paris, Orleans and Lyons made it particularly open to new influences from across the Rhine. Luther's name was known within months of the outbreak of the struggle in Germany and his works were being read at Paris as early as May, 1519.² The submission of the proceedings of the Leipzig Debate between Luther and Johann Eck of the following summer to the judgment of the Sorbonne, stirred further widespread interest. Until a prohibition was imposed in March, 1521, Luther's writings appear to have widely and freely circulated in the kingdom.³ Indeed, the prohibition of Lutheran books at that time as well as later did not create an effective obstacle to their dissemination. The works of Luther crossed the borders along the routes of trade and travel in an increasing flow and, no later than 1523 and perhaps much earlier, began to reach

¹ See Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Spread of the Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth Century: A Historical Case Study in the Transfer of Ideas," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXVII (1968), 265-86.

² See a letter from Pierre Tschudi to Beatus Rhenanus, 17 May, 1519, A. L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des réformateurs dans les pays de langue française* (Geneva, 1886), T, no. 22, 47-48.

³ Nathaniel Weiss, "Luther et la réformation française," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, LXVI (1917) 285-86.

the popular classes by means of vernacular translations.⁴

At this stage it is possible to single out individual reformers in France who were inspired by the example of Luther. Thus, Friar Francis Lambert of Avignon's visit to Wittenberg in the fall of 1522 established a direct link between southern France and the center of the evangelical movement. The work of men such as Anemond de Coct, Pierre de Sibiville and Aimé Maigret in the wake of Lambert helped to solidify the link between Lyons and Grenoble on the one hand and Germany on the other.⁵ There was an underground activity – the importation and dissemination of evangelical literature, the keeping up of correspondence, private evangelical meetings – whose object was to sow seeds in the mass of the population. In their labor one can recognize the first stages of a clandestine movement. Its leaders were monks and educated laymen without real social importance who tried to gain influence for their views in the broad mass of the populace. From what we know it is apparent that their contacts with Germany were a vital source of encouragement to them.

While this work of secret evangelization was being carried out by persons on the fringe of society, another attempt at evangelical reform which was potentially of far greater consequence was being supported by much more influential persons. This was the reform of the diocese of Meaux initiated by its bishop Guillaume Briçonnet. The reform at Meaux began earlier than the reform activity in the south of the kingdom. In 1518 Briçonnet, newly returned from an embassy to Rome on behalf of Francis I, took up residence at Meaux and instituted regular synods for the diocese. He tried to strengthen his own authority by reasserting control over both the secular clergy and the mendicants. Rules of residence were reimposed. Briçonnet attempted to instill once more a sense of priestly and ministerial vocation. He appealed to the priesthood to abandon the ambitions and worldly tasks which called them away from their parishes. In parishes in which the benefited clergy refused to take up residence Briçonnet forced them to provide decent substitutes. In association with these reforms he sought to place controls over the activity of the Franciscans in the diocese. He

⁴ One contemporary, Josse Clichtove, a conservative Sorbonnist, complained of the translation of Luther's works into French as well as German as early as 1519. See J.-A. Clerval, *Judoci Clichtovei Neoportuensis Vita et Operibus 1472-1543* (Paris, 1894), pp. 30-31. Cf. W. G. Moore, *La Réforme allemande et la littérature française : recherches sur la notoriété de Luther en France* (Strasbourg, 1930), p. 171.

⁵ Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les Origines de la réforme: III, l'évangélisme 1521-1538* (Paris, 1914), p. 435, N. Weiss, "Le Réformateur Aimé Maigret..." *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, XXXIX (1890), 245-253, Weiss, "Les Débuts de la réforme en France d'après quelques documents inédits, les premiers missionnaires. Pierre de Sibiville, Michel d'Arande, Aimé Maigret (1523-24)," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, LXX (1921), 197-212.

attempted to raise the general level of morality of the people in his charge and to carry out a reform of the Hôtel-Dieu with the help of the townsmen of Meaux. One is struck by the parallel which exists between these measures taken at Meaux and the ideas of certain of the members of that influential brotherhood known as the Oratory of Divine Love founded at Rome in 1517. At both Meaux and Rome the key to a revival of religious life in the Church was seen to lie in the revitalization of the secular clergy on the level of the diocese. And more than one scholar has drawn attention to the fact that Briçonnet was in Rome at the time that the Oratory came into being.⁶ It is easy to see that this initial experiment at reform, whose object was a long overdue revival of parish and diocesan life, lay wholly within the terms of the traditional Church and had no direct connection with more radical enterprises inspired shortly thereafter from Germany. At this point the reform at Meaux appears rather to be the natural outgrowth of the whole generation of monastic reform in France that had preceded it, the expansion of the movement of reform beyond the wall of the monastery into society at large.⁷ In a larger context it would seem symptomatic of a general movement toward reform in the Church, signs of which had appeared in Spain and Italy as well.

However, after 1521 it is by no means so easy to abide by this judgment. In that year Briçonnet called to his side a group of evangelical and humanist teachers and scholars from Paris led by Lefèvre d'Étaples, the most renowned of French humanists. Lefèvre and his followers – Gérard Roussel, Pierre Caroli, Michel d'Arande, Martial Mazurier, François Vatable and Guillaume Farel – began to deploy far-reaching initiatives in the name of reform and under the banner of the Gospel. Briçonnet's aim became not merely the reform of his diocese, but the reform of the kingdom as a whole through the effective propagation of the Gospel. The more conservative groups in the Church and the state quickly became aroused against the program of the bishop. A conservative alliance between the Franciscan Order, the Faculty of Theology and the *Parlement* came into existence which repeatedly attempted to curb or to put a stop to his activities. Indeed, in October, 1523, Briçonnet himself was forced to recognize the presence of heretical influences in his diocese. In that month he published two decrees against the spread of the "venin pestilentiel" of Lutheran ideas. Despite this the evangelical circle at Meaux was allowed to persevere with the support of Briçonnet. Regular preaching based on the Gospel was carried on throughout the diocese and the Holy Scriptures were read and expounded. Translations of the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles were distributed and finally Bible study periods were instituted in which the people were allowed to take an active part. In the spring of 1524 certain important figures at Meaux – Lefèvre, Roussel, the *élu* of Meaux, Nicholas

⁶ Lucien Febvre, *Au Cœur religieux du XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1957), p. 155, F. C. Spooner, "France, 1519-1559," art., *New Cambridge Modern History*, II *The Reformation, 1520-1559*, ed. G. R. Elton (Cambridge, 1958), p. 215.

⁷ A. Renaudet, *Pré-renaissance et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494-1517)*, 2nd. ed. (Paris, 1953).

Le Sueur – began to correspond with Farel who had gone into exile across the eastern frontier of the kingdom at Basle. This would seem to mark the start of the relationship between the group at Meaux and such reformers as Oecolampadius and Zwingli. The correspondence which survives indicates not merely curiosity but professed sympathy for many of the teachings and goals of the reformers of Germany.

Briçonnet and Lefèvre were able to carry on their program at Meaux only because of the protection given to them by the court, particularly by the sister of the king, Marguerite, duchess of Alençon. The latter was able to assure the group at Meaux of the support of the king and the influential queen-mother, Louise of Savoy, for the idea of reform and the dissemination of the Gospel. Indeed, the queen-mother and Marguerite visited the reformers at Meaux in October, 1521.⁸ Furthermore, Briçonnet was able to introduce into the court one of his most trusted subordinates, Michel d'Arande, and the sermons which he delivered there appear to have had an appreciative audience. Royal permission was granted to publish a French translation of the Scriptures and attempts were made to evangelize at other places in France, notably at Bourges and Paris. Here we have the sure evidence of a program which, because of its evangelical element, cannot be placed strictly within the context of previous efforts at reform of the French Church. This was a reform, moreover, which was instituted with the consent of authority and proceeded from the efforts of men who were part of the ruling community of power and intellect in the kingdom. On the other hand, this movement was stubbornly resisted by the conservative elements in this community which used the first opportunity – the crisis created by the defeat and capture of the king at Pavia in 1525 – to destroy the experiment at Meaux which they felt to be a danger both to the orthodox faith and to public order.

There have always been serious difficulties in properly appreciating the history of this reform movement. The short period of its existence and the constraints placed upon its development by strong conservative pressure make it difficult to acquire a clear perspective from which to judge the premises under which reform was introduced at Meaux and the goals toward which it was headed.

Conservatives in the Franciscan Order, the Sorbonne and Paris *Parlement* at the time looked upon the Meaux reformers as heretics and on Briçonnet as a fellow traveller at the very least. On the other hand, the reformers of Germany and Switzerland were sympathetic, but complained about the timidity and caution of the evangelicals at Meaux. Looking back on the reformat Meaux a generation later the Protestant martyrologist Jean Crespin and the historian Theodore Beza took it for granted that the group at Meaux had favored a new definition and organization of faith. According to their accounts Briçonnet wanted to carry through the reform but persecution prevented him from entirely going over to the

⁸ Herminjard, 1, 76, n. 3.

evangelical party.⁹ This opinion became thereafter the standard interpretation of the reformers of Meaux for generations of Protestant writers.

Catholic historians of the sixteenth century assumed that Lefèvre and his associates were heretics. On the other hand, they had difficulty in explaining how Briçonnet, a bishop and a well-intentioned man by all evidence, had allowed himself to support the spread of heresy. Simon Fontaine dealt with the problem by stressing the culpability of Lefèvre and the gullibility and weakness of Briçonnet. Lefèvre, according to Fontaine, was evidently a Lutheran, who took advantage of the bishop – “a simple man, easily led astray under the guise of religion and piety – [and] was able to flatter and beguile him to such an extent by his seemingly true words aided by the renown of his great learning that he caused him to go far astray.”¹⁰ Another Catholic writer Florimand de Raemond attributed Briçonnet’s deviation not to his simplicity but rather to his imprudent curiosity and love of the new learning.¹¹ Both historians agreed, however, that Briçonnet had fallen into error.

But this opinion did not go unchallenged among Catholics. In 1620 there appeared an official history of the Briçonnet family written by the archdeacon of Brie, Guy Bretonneau. This work, although hardly objective, had the merit of being the first account of the subject to be based on an acquaintance with the documents. Briçonnet, the historian argued, deserves to be known as “Factionis Lutherante Debellator Acerrimus.”¹² He is portrayed by Bretonneau as the champion of middle-of-the-road reform who was hated equally by heretics because of his attacks upon them and by the dissolute clergy because of their fear of a reform of the Church.¹³ Another Catholic scholar, Toussaint Du Plessis, writing in the next century, although admitting that Briçonnet and Lefèvre, too, had been attracted by heterodox ideas, denied that either of them ever abandoned Catholicism.¹⁴ Thus, for the first time, a Catholic writer made an attempt to claim Lefèvre as well as Briçonnet for the Church.

In the nineteenth century a new respect for historical objectivity developed which led some scholars – Catholic, Protestant and otherwise – to try to be more or less dispassionate in treating the history of the Meaux reform. Unfortunately,

⁹ Jean Crespin, *Actes des martyrs* (Geneva, 1565) pp. 273-74, Theodore Beza, *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées du royaume de France*, ed. G. Baumand Ed. Cunitz (Paris, 1883), I, 11-12.

¹⁰ Simon Fontaine, *Histoire catholique de nostre temps* (Antwerp, 1558), pp. 58-59.

¹¹ *L'Histoire de la naissance, progresz et decadence de l'heresie de ce siècle* (Rouen, 1623), p. 845.

¹² Guy Bretonneau, *Histoire généalogique de la maison des Briçonnet* (Paris, 1620), p. 133.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁴ Michael Toussaint Chrétien Du Plessis, *Histoire de l'église de Meaux* (Paris, 1731), I, 325.

this healthy objectivity was not always practiced and the treatment of the subject continued to be marred by prejudice – nationalist as well as sectarian. And it is notable that this kind of prejudice particularly afflicted French Protestant scholars.¹⁵

Yet we can see a curious parallel to Protestant attitudes in the views of the most distinguished historian of the early reformation in France, the liberal Catholic Pierre Imbart de la Tour. His thoroughly documented, beautifully written and thoughtful account of Lefèvre d'Étaples and the reformat Meaux is still the basic study of the subject and his views continue to dominate contemporary interpretation.¹⁶ But like the Protestants, Imbart de la Tour looked upon the reform initiated at Meaux as a lost opportunity. Harking back to the viewpoint adumbrated by Bretonneau and Toussaint Du Plessis centuries before, he interpreted it as an attempt to effect a moderate and Catholic reform which if carried through might have avoided a schism in the Church. One cannot but sense that Meaux came to symbolize his hope for liberalization within the modern Church as well. Hence, while pointing out the evangelical and reformist element in the writings of Lefèvre and Briçonnet, he took care to distinguish their views from those held by the evangelicals in Germany. Where others could merely find “an inconsistent protestantism, almost ashamed of itself, and which had neither the courage of its convictions nor a clear view of its principles,” Imbart de la Tour was able to discover the “grand mouvement du catholicisme réformateur, si original, si profond.”¹⁷ But apparently more was involved than an attempt to claim Briçonnet and Lefèvre for the Catholic faith; Imbart de la Tour, like the French Protestants, claimed them for France as well. Writing of the movement at Meaux in the *Revue de l'histoire de l'église* in 1914, he concluded by suggesting that:

If it is true that the movement at Meaux and the Lutheran movement are two distinct movements, that one cannot, that one ought not to confuse them, then the problem of the origins of the French reformation is very near to being resolved. It is a question of knowing to which component it belongs. It is not a matter of indifference to know whether it is connected to Lefèvre or to Luther, since by the one it presents itself in

¹⁵ The nationalist assumptions behind much of nineteenth century French scholarship on the origins of the French reformation was first pointed out by Jean Viénot, “Y a-t-il une réforme française antérieure à Luther?” *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, LXXII (1913), 97-108. They have been carefully documented by Karl Speiss, *Der Gottesbegriff des J. Faber Stapulensis* (Marburg, 1930), pp. 17-18.

¹⁶ Thus the views in volume three of his *Les Origines de la réforme* shape the account of the Meaux reform in L. Cristiani, *L'Eglise à l'époque du Concile de Trente, Histoire de l'église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, ed. A. Fliche and Victor Martin (Paris, 1948), XVII, 364-68.

¹⁷ Imbart de la Tour, III, viii.

history as a manifestation of the national spirit, by the other as a foreign import.¹⁸

A new and fresh perspective was brought to the problem by Lucien Febvre. Febvre uncovered few, if any, new facts. However, his celebrated article, "Les Origines de la réforme française et le problème des causes de la réforme," which appeared in 1929 greatly deepened understanding of the dimensions of the Reformation as a whole.¹⁹ Febvre pointed out among other things that the modes of thought which expressed themselves in the Reformation were neither the inventions of a few theologians nor the exclusive possession of a single group or nationality. Rather the whole first phase of the Reformation must be understood as a period of widespread religious individualism or "magnificent religious anarchy." In a few sentences Febvre was able to open up the true range of religious sensibility in this age:

Two religions, Catholic and Reformed? Rather many religions, for there were many more than two and the fecundity of an elemental age did not limit itself to the opposition of a well-organized Protestantism to a purified Catholicism. In reality the novel variations of spiritual mood, which were as complex as they were varied, could be, ought to be, counted by tens.²⁰

Febvre's words have the effect of sensitizing one to the complexities of opinion and belief which characterized this period. In terms of the early phases of the Reformation he recalls that no one, whether rebel or reactionary, wished to see the unity of the Church destroyed; furthermore, that there were many who rebelled against the established religious authorities but who nevertheless carried many of the traditional beliefs of the Church away with them. Lastly, he bids us recall that there were many others who adopted evangelical views which were not compatible with traditional beliefs and yet continued to worship in the Church of their fathers. Above all, Febvre tried to restore the sense of specificity and individuality of time and place to the religious history of this period. His article represented a protest against all those who insisted on judging the events of this century exclusively from the perspective of Wittenberg, Geneva or Trent, and who consequently reduced the dimensions of this great upheaval by attempting to subsume all religious ideas under the headings of Protestantism or Catholicism as they came to be defined later. Febvre applied this outlook when he came to render a judgment of Briçonnet:

¹⁸ "Les Débuts de la réforme française 1521-1525," *Revue de l'histoire de l'église de France*, V (1914), 181.

¹⁹ *Revue historique*, CLXI (1929), 1-79; reprinted in *Au Cœur religieux du XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1957), pp. 3-70.

²⁰ *Au Cœur religieux du XVI^e siècle*, p. 68.

In France Briçonnet, who has so many French characteristics, is the man of a time when the Reformation and Counter-Reformation had still not disassociated their destinies²¹

Febvre's conclusion is helpful. It helps us to see Briçonnet's action and the development of reform at Meaux without reference to the point of view of later confessional bodies. On the other hand, Febvre's judgment should not be accepted without reservation. Febvre made a great deal of the diversity of private religious opinion. This was true among the literate and, especially, the educated strata of the population, but we should not forget that in France the Sorbonne and the *Parlement* played a more or less effective role in controlling mass opinion and common belief. We can also welcome the thought that Lefèvre and Briçonnet should be understood in terms of their own intellectual and social milieu and not simply in terms of a pattern prescribed at Rome or in Germany. Yet we should not interpret this to mean that Meaux should be studied in isolation from events in the rest of Europe and especially from developments in Germany.

Febvre, nevertheless, provides a wider perspective from which to analyze the origins of reform in France. He affords a viewpoint which makes the special character of Lefèvre's evangelicism and the play of conservative and liberal forces within the kingdom more comprehensible. But he does not take into account a factor which seems to me to be crucial in bringing the reform at Meaux into proper context and which has been almost ignored until now, namely, the relationship of court politics and international diplomacy to reform.

The court's support of Briçonnet's reform was absolutely indispensable. Only it could have protected the Meaux circle from attacks by the Sorbonne, *Parlement* and other conservative elements. Moreover, since the conclusion of the Concordat of Bologna, the initiative for reform rested with the monarchy alone. Only the king possessed the power to create, through his exclusive power of appointment, a new episcopate committed to reforms envisioned by Briçonnet.²²

In the long run of course Briçonnet's hopes were to be disappointed. Just as many feared the French monarchy of the sixteenth century consistently abused the right of episcopal appointment conferred on it by the Concordat of Bologna.²³

²¹ "Le Cas Briçonnet," *Au Cœur religieux au XVI^e siècle*, p. 161.

²² Briçonnet to Marguerite d'Angoulême, 22 December, 1521, BN MS. 11495, f. 98 v.: "Je luy supplie treshumblement qu'il luy plaise par sa bonté allumer tel feu és caeurs du roy, de madame et de vous que vous puisse veoir par son amour importable et ravissante tellement que de vous trois puisse yssir par exemplarité de vie feu bruslant et allumant le surplus du royaulme et specialement l'estat par le froidure duquel tous les aultres sont gellez." Cf Herminjard, I, no. 48, 86

²³ J. Lestocquoy, *La Vie religieuse en France du VII^e au XX^e siècle* (Paris, 1964), pp. 101-08.

Conditions in the Gallican Church were correspondingly deplorable.²⁴ But, contrary to general belief, at the beginning of the new regime under the Concordat the idea of reform greatly interested the king. Indeed, the Concordat was justified by Francis I in his own eyes on the grounds that it would make reform more possible.²⁵ And, indeed, until distracted by the war with the emperor which began in 1521, he continued to take a direct interest in monastic reform, a traditional concern of the French monarchy.²⁶

Moreover, this interest seems to have extended to episcopal reform also. Briçonnet's efforts at Meaux which began in 1518 must be tied to a parallel initiative by his brother Denis in the diocese of St. Malo the same year,²⁷ as well as to a revival of intellectual interest in the spiritual responsibilities of a bishop.²⁸ These developments should be seen in conjunction with the king's call the next year, 1519, for the reform of the administration of hospitals in all the dioceses of the kingdom.²⁹

Francis I's support for reform at this juncture of course was a means of justifying the new order under the Concordat which so rankled the Sorbonne and the *Parlement* among others. It was also, to be sure, a reflection of his own personality and the mood of the court. He and his sister both were revealing themselves to be great patrons of arts and letters and highly receptive to the innovations of Renaissance culture.³⁰ One recalls the king's invitation to Erasmus to settle in France – an invitation virtually contemporaneous with these initiatives at religious reform.³¹ Indeed, the humanism espoused by Erasmus was

²⁴ Imbart de la Tour, IV, 464.

²⁵ R. Doucet, *Etudes sur le gouvernement de François I^{er} dans ses rapports avec le Parlement de Paris* (Paris, 1926), I, 330.

²⁶ *Loc. cit.*

²⁷ Thus he tried to upgrade the spirituality of his clergy and flock by promoting the study of Jean Gerson's very popular *Opus tripartitum* in a French translation. See *L'instruction des curez pour instruire le simple peuple* (Nantes, Johannan Baudouyn, 1518), especially, f IV v.

²⁸ Thus, we find an old servant of the monarchy Claude de Seyssel, bishop of Turin, publishing an important *De Episcopo*, the *Tractatus de triplici statu viatoris* (Turin, 1518), cf Paul Broutin, *L'Evêque dans la tradition pastorale du XVI^e siècle* (Paris, 1953), pp. 26-37.

²⁹ Jean Delumeau, *Naissance et affirmation de la réforme* (Paris, 1965), p. 66.

³⁰ This aspect of Francis' life is especially well treated in Charles Terrasse, *François I^{er}, le roi et le règne* (Paris, 1943-48), 2 vols. For Marguerite's activities in this respect, see Pierre Jourda, "Le Mécénat de Marguerite de Navarre," *Revue du seizième siècle, XVIII* (1931), 253-71.

³¹ Margaret Mann, *Erasmus et les débuts de la réforme française: 1517-36* (Paris, 1934), pp. 4-7.

itself virtually inseparable from the principle of reform.

Apart from these considerations there were political reasons behind the persistent support given to Briçonnet by the court through the next few years. The reforms at Meaux were to further inflame the animosity between the court on the one hand and the Sorbonne and Paris *Parlement* on the other. Not only were the Fabrists suspected of being innovators, they were feared because they were protégés of the king. The reforms which they wished to introduce were not only dangerous to religion in the eyes of the Sorbonnists they were also the tokens of the new ecclesiastical régime in which the traditional independence and privileges of the Gallican Church had been gravely compromised. Thus, underlying its attitude of hostility to the reformers at Meaux was a brooding resentment of the monarchy. It represented an implicit challenge to the authority of the monarchy which the king could not afford to ignore. Nor could he ignore the hostility of the *Parlement*. Relations between the king and this high court became more and more embittered through the first decade of the reign. The creation of new offices which diminished the authority of members of the *Parlement*, the large-scale alienation of royal demesne, heavy financial exactions on the towns, and finally, the imposition of the Concordat of Bologna had created a sense of deep grievance in the *Parlement* against the throne. Thus, it was in a mood of barely suppressed anger that the *Parlement*, like the Sorbonne, watched the development of reform at Meaux. The capture of the king at Pavia at the beginning of 1525 was to bring this hostility into the open and the group at Meaux then became its victims. Up until then, royal protection of the Meaux reformers must be understood as part of the covert struggle of the king to protect royal power against the encroachment of *Parlement*.³²

The tempo and direction of royal policy toward reform, it can be conclusively shown, was also influenced by diplomatic relations between France and Rome in this period. All too often the religious policy of the monarchy in the early years of the Reformation has been treated as if it were simply a question of the personal disposition of the king or those around him or at most the product of the struggle between the king and the *Parlement* and Sorbonne. In actual fact, the religious policy of Francis I should be seen in relation to the general European political context and in particular the Italian interests of the king of France. Certainly the key to these interests was the Roman curia. Furthermore, a review of Franco-Papal relations between 1519 and 1525 reveals that this period was marked by acute strains and tension between the two powers. In fact, these years are reminiscent of the years 1511-13 in the previous reign, during which Julius II tried to dislodge the French from the Italian peninsula. The French response at that time took the form of a Church Council whose purpose in large measure was to harry the Papacy into a reversal of its attitude toward the French presence. In so doing the French court was merely pursuing its tradition of using religious affairs as one instrument of its policy toward Rome. Francis I and his advisers were to do likewise during

³² This view of the reform at Meaux is developed in Doucet, I, 319-61.

this new phase of tension.

Animosity between Rome and France grew out of the rivalry between Francis I and Charles of Spain for hegemony in Europe and predominance in Italy. From the point of view of Rome, the armies of the French and the Spanish were equally unwelcome in Italy. Furthermore, an increase in the power of either was, if possible, to be avoided – hence the effort of the Papacy to prevent the election of Charles or Francis to the Imperial throne in 1519 by promoting the candidacy of Frederick of Saxony. When this failed and Charles of Spain was chosen by the electors, the Papacy at first attempted to strengthen its position by an alliance with France. Accordingly, a treaty was concluded in October, 1519.³³

However, new circumstances soon caused the Papacy to change its policy. The price of an alliance with France proved too high. France refused to give up its support of the Duke of Ferrara, an implacable enemy of the Papacy. Moreover, it tried to bind Rome so closely to itself that the latter was deprived of any freedom of action toward the Emperor. This was an increasingly urgent consideration since it became more and more apparent that the Papacy would have to rely on the Emperor to protect the Church against the spread of heresy in Germany.³⁴ By the summer of 1520 the Papacy had promulgated the bull *Exsurge Domine* against Luther. But the papal legates Johann Eck and Jerome Aleander, who were sent to Germany in order to see to its execution, encountered stiff opposition from an aroused public opinion. The Emperor was forced to agree that Luther be tried before an Imperial Diet. What is more, Aleander, writing to Rome at the end of 1520, reported that the Emperor's principal councillor Guillaume de Croy, Lord of Chièvres, wished to hold a Diet not only to placate German opinion but also to draw matters out in order to force Rome to make political concessions, i.e., agree to an alliance with the Emperor.³⁵ At the end of May, accordingly, the edict of Worms was published and an alliance between Pope and Emperor concluded.³⁶

While Pope and Emperor drew closer together, Francis attempted to maintain a façade of good relations with Rome. Thus, he proposed that Pope Leo cooperate with him in the re-conquest of the Kingdom of Naples. Secretly, the French king envisaged the dismemberment of the papal state and the overthrow of Medici rule in Florence. On 15 April, 1521, the Sorbonne issued its longed-for *Determinatio* against the opinions of Luther. This very comprehensive indictment omitted all reference to Luther's attack on the primacy of the Pope, much to the disappointment of the legate Aleander.³⁷ The chief reason for this omission was the

³³ Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, tr. F. I. Antrobus, 2nd ed. (London, 1891-1940), VIII, 3. ³⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII, 14.

³⁵ J. Paquier, *Jerome Aleander: 1480-1529* (Paris, 1897), p. 182.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 255.

³⁷ C. J. Hefèle and J. Hergenröther, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*. H. Leclercq (Paris, 1921), VIII, pt. II, 773.

continued ill-feeling in the Faculty of Theology toward Rome because of the abrogation of the Pragmatic Sanction, but the French court could not have been displeased by it.

The French court like other European powers tended to think of the Papacy almost entirely in political terms.³⁸ It was the most important factor with which the French had to deal in Italy and a key instrument through which the king controlled the Gallican Church.³⁹ The theoretical basis of the relationship was defined by royal legists by admitting the spiritual primacy of the Pope while insisting on the full independence of the monarchy in temporal matters.⁴⁰ As a corollary there might be introduced the notion that as protector of the faith the king had the duty to regulate ecclesiastical affairs when required by urgent circumstances.⁴¹

There were times, however, when the ears of the French king might be exposed to more radical notions of his powers over the Church. A good example of an extreme type of royal Gallicanism can be found in a court epic of the time entitled *Le triomphe des vertus* preserved in manuscript in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.⁴² This work, full of allegories in praise of the king and the infant dauphin Francis, probably dates from 1518 or 1519 and is dedicated to the queen-mother. It is a shamelessly sycophantic and banal effort with no literary merit. On the other hand it does set forth in strongest terms the independence of the French monarchy from the authority of the Pope and monarchical rights of governance over the Gallican Church – rights which were held to be irrevocable.⁴³ But it goes further than this. Citing Plato and Virgil it argues that God has granted the king “as much power on earth as He has in heaven. In past time kings were popes, patriarchs and kings ...”⁴⁴ It points out furthermore that at the present time the Christian kings of Armenia are both kings and popes. It concludes from this that

God wishes this in order that all honor both human and divine should be given to the king whom one ought to obey like God himself. For he

³⁸ Imbart de la Tour, II, 56-64.

³⁹ R. De Maulde La Clavière, *La Diplomatie au temps de Machiavel* (Paris, 1889-93), I, 32.33.

⁴⁰ Imbart de la Tour, II, 75-77.

⁴¹ Martin, *Les Origines du Gallicanisme* (Paris, 1939), I, 309-310, 318, 320-21.

⁴² Pt. I, BN MS. Fr. 443; Pt. II, BN MS. Fr. 144. The author was Jean Thenaud, a Franciscan in the service of the queen-mother. See De Maulde La Clavière, *Louise de Savoie et François I^{er}: trente ans de jeunesse: 1485-1515* (Paris, 1895), pp. 321-24.

⁴³ BN MS. Fr. 144, f. xlvi v. – xlvi r.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, f. cxvii v. “... autant de puissance en terre qu’il en a pour luy on [en] ciel. Jadis les roys estoient popes, patriarches et roys...”

who offends him blasphemes against God eternal, of whom, as St. Paul says, he is the image and example.⁴⁵

These remarks, brief as they are and taken in context, certainly do not provide the basis of a line of policy or a redefinition of royal power with respect to the Church. Yet they do indicate that the idea that royal authority might be combined with headship of the Church was not entirely foreign to the French court. They show that this was a possibility that could occur to people in France in 1519 as well as in England a dozen years later.⁴⁶

The correspondence between Briçonnet and Marguerite of Alençon constitutes the chief source of information concerning the relationship between the reformers at Meaux and the court. The letters, although largely devoted to the inculcation of mystical evangelicism, do allow us to chart the course of this tie through the years 1521-24.⁴⁷ They began in June, 1521, while the court was at Dijon where the king was overseeing preparations for the defense of Burgundy and the reinforcement of his armies in Italy. The war against the Pope and Emperor had already begun. The same month Papal and French soldiers fought one another at Reggio. In September Leo X threatened Francis with excommunication and interdict if he did not cease his aggression and surrender Parma and Piacenza to the Papacy. Meanwhile, Francis cut off the export of bullion from France to Rome.⁴⁸ Marguerite took the initiative, writing to Briçonnet in early June to ask for spiritual help for herself and her husband Charles who had gone to defend the crucial northeast frontier of the kingdom.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Loc. cit.* "Cecuy dieu le vouloit affin que tout honneur divin et humain fust fait au roy auquel on doit obeir comme à dieu. Car qui l'offense it blasphemé dieu eternel duquel it est l'ymage et exemplaire comme dict saint paoul."

⁴⁶ On royal Gallicanism see Gabriel Hanotaux's introduction to *Recueil des instructions aux ambassadeurs et ministres de France* (Paris, 1888), VI, L-LI.

⁴⁷ There are 128 letters in BN MS, Fr. 11495. The collection is analyzed in Ph.-Aug. Becker, "Marguerite, duchesse d'Alençon et Guillaume Briçonnet, évêque de Meaux d'après leur correspondance manuscrite: 1521-24," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* (XLIX, 1900), 393-477, 661-67. See also Pierre Jourda, *Répertoire analytique et chronologique de la correspondance de Marguerite d'Angoulême* (Paris, 1930).

⁴⁸ Pastor, VIII, 42, *Journal de Jean Barillon: 1515-1521*, ed. Pierre de Vassière (Paris, 1899), pp. 286-88. This was an old tactic of the French. See Martin, I, 287-88.

⁴⁹ Marguerite d'Alençon to Briçonnet, Before 12 June, 1521, BN MS. Fr. 11495, f. i. r.: "Et pour ce que la paix et la victoire est en sa main, pensant que, outre le bien publicq du royaume, avez bon desir de ce qui touche son salut et le mien [je] vous employe en mes affaires, et vous demande le service spirituel; car il me fault mesler de beaucoup de choses qui me doivent bien donner crainte...." Cf

In the next few months a regular correspondence came into being. Marguerite volunteered her help to Briçonnet at court.⁵⁰ By the fall of 1521 the bishop of Meaux was in great credit there. It was in recognition of the favor that he enjoyed at court and perhaps also of his association with the new ecclesiastical regime introduced by the Concordat that the University of Paris elected him to the important post of *conservateur des privilèges apostoliques* at the beginning of September.⁵¹ At the end of the month Briçonnet was visited at Meaux by Marguerite and the queen-mother.⁵² Thereafter, Michel d'Arande, a protégé of Briçonnet, was more or less permanently in attendance at court and served as a close link between Briçonnet and the royal family.

The policy of the court was not all of one piece during these years. On the contrary it moved in fits and starts depending on the military situation and conditions within the kingdom and at court. There is nevertheless a fairly consistent relationship between royal enthusiasm for reform and the fortunes of France in Italy and, in particular, the state of French relations with Rome.

In the summer and fall of 1521 as we have seen Franco-Papal relations were at a low ebb. Indeed, no genuine warming of relations occurred until the winter of 1524, three years later, when it seemed that the French had definitely re-established themselves in Italy. The Papacy then detached itself from its Imperial alliance. In the interval between this initial estrangement and ultimate reconciliation relations between Rome and France passed through three further stages. The first of these began in December, 1521, with the death of Leo and lasted until the spring of 1523. Leo's death and the accession of Adrian VI opened the possibility of a new understanding with the Papacy. As things turned out, however, the French never learned to trust the new pope and remained lukewarm toward him at best despite his protestations of good intent.

The second phase was considerably briefer running from April to September, 1523, and marked by a complete breakdown in relations and open hostility between the two powers. It was interrupted by the death of Adrian VI on 14 September. The final phase of relations saw a slow but progressive *approchement*

Herminjard, I, no. 35, 66.

⁵⁰ Marguerite d'Angoulême to Briçonnet, After 19 June, 1521, *ibid.*, f. 6v.

“Je vous prie que ceste charité ne me soit desnyee, et je m'oblige que ainsy que serez mes bons advocatz envers Le tout qui luy plaira me faire estre la vostre en ceste court en toutz les affaires oÿ me vouldrez employer et cognoissant que pour le present avez affection fondee en raison et seul regard Du tout seul.” Cf. Herminjard, I, no. 36, 67.

⁵¹ There was a slight element of defiance in this choice since the king had sent letters in favor of Arthur Fillon, bishop of Senlis. See C.-E. Du Boulay, *Historia Universitatis parisiensis* (Paris, 1665-73), VI, 129-30. For a description of this office see Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1936), I, 167, 342-43, 417-19, 427.

⁵² Jourda, *Répertoire*, p. 9.

between Francis and the new Pope, Clement VII. This movement culminated in a peace and alliance between France, Venice and the Papacy openly proclaimed on 5 January, 1525.

Royal support for the Meaux reformers was fairly consistent through most of this period. Thus, during 1521 Marguerite of Alençon assisted Briçonnet in putting curbs on the Franciscans in the diocese of Meaux⁵³ and in ensuring Lefèvre against the attacks of the Sorbonne for his opinions on the three Magdalenes.⁵⁴ In 1523 the court intervened to prevent the prosecution of Lefèvre for the views he expressed in his *Commentaries on the Four Gospels* (1522) as well as to protect other reformers such as Louis de Berquin.⁵⁵ Even in 1524 when relations with Rome began to improve the court moved to shield Briçonnet from attacks by conservatives.⁵⁶ Indeed, the reformers of Meaux continued to receive the protection of the court even when it was withdrawn from more militant and outspoken

⁵³ Marguerite d'Alençon to Briçonnet, After 19 June, 1521, BN MS. Fr. 11495, f.6v.: "J'espère que sy les peres viennent ici qui [qu'il] leur sera respondu selon vostre conseil. Dieu me doit grace d'y faire selon sont saint voloir, en sorte que, apres nos petiz labours, puisse par sa misericorde eternellement le louer avec vostre sainte compagnie." Cf Herminjard, I, no. 36, 67-68. Cf Toussaint Du Plessis, I, 331.

⁵⁴ A. Clerval, *Registre des procès verbaux de la Faculté de Théologie de Paris* (Paris, 1917), pp. 294, 300, 304-305. Cf Marguerite d'Alençon to Briçonnet, Before the 22 November, 1521, BN MS. Fr. 11495, f.45 r.-v.: "Je ne stay sy je me doibtz plus resiouir d'estre estimé du nombre de ceulx à qui [je] desire de ressembler ou me contrister de voir noz freres faillir soubz coulleur de bien faire. Mais veu que la chose ne touche à moy seulle mais va contre l'honneur de celluy qui a souffert par charité la mort pourchassée par envye d'ipocrites soubz nom d'infacteur de la loy, il me semble que le plus tost clorre la bouche aux ygnorans est le meilleur, vous assurant que le roy et madame ont bien deslibéré de donner à congnoistre que la verité de Dieu n'est point heresie." Cf Herminjard, I, no. 43, 78.

⁵⁵ On Lefèvre see Clerval, pp. 356-57, 363, 415-16, Becker, p. 434, Doucet, I, 339. For Berquin see Nathaniel Weiss "Louis de Berquin, son premier procès et sa retractation d'après quelques documents inédits (1523)," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, LXVII (1918), 162-83.

⁵⁶ Marguerite to Briçonnet, 9 March, 1524, BN MS. Fr. 294 v.: "Toutefois ne suis je si parfaite que saint Pierre qui presse des persecutions de son maistre mist la main au glaive ignorant le tres-grand bien qui procede de tres grand peine. Parquoy desirant par ignorant affection vous en soulager et par foy de la grace de Dieu en vous vous y accompagner, vous prie ne estesi avicieulx de boire tant de ceste eaue amere..." Cf Jourda, *Répertoire*, no. 153, p. 35, BN MS. Fr. 6528, f. 90 v., 92 r.

evangelicals in order, in part, to placate the Papacy.⁵⁷ Only the emergency created by the disaster at Pavia and the capture of the king forced it to withdraw its support altogether.

But royal support did not only take the form of protection of the Meaux circle from hostile forces. In the fall and winter of 1521 we find the court supporting Briçonnet's idea of a reform of the Gallican Church⁵⁸ and the publication of a French New Testament.⁵⁹

It is striking that this receptive attitude toward Briçonnet's plans coincided with a low point in Franco-Papal relations. We have already noted how bitter relations between Francis I and Leo X had become prior to the latter's death in December, 1521. Nor did Leo's death immediately improve the situation. The French party in the electoral conclave threatened schism if Giulio de Medici, the principal agent of the Emperor in Italy, should be chosen pope by the conclave.⁶⁰ The election of Adrian of Utrecht, the old tutor of Charles and regent of Spain, on 19 January, 1522, was hardly a palatable alternative to the French. Francis contemptuously remarked that the Emperor's "schoolmaster" had been made Pope, and for a time apparently refused to recognize his title.⁶¹ The same month, January, 1522, the king ordered the assembly of ecclesiastical councils in each archdiocese "in order to reform the Church and to eliminate many abuses and also to provide to benefices which are vacant and in order that the monies from these benefices no

⁵⁷ Thus in December, 1524 the queen-mother ordered the arrest of the evangelical Aimé Maigret at Lyons. Her zeal was applauded by Clement VII. See H. Hours "Procès d'hérésie contre Aimé Maigret," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance*, XIX (1957), 14-43. Weiss, "Le Réformateur Aimé Maigret..." *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, XXXIX (1890), 245-53. Clement's letter to Louise of Savoy can be found in J. Fraikin, *Nonciatures de France. Nonciatures de Clément VII, Vol. I: Depuis la bataille de Pavie jusqu'au rappel d'Acciaiuoli* (Paris, 1906), pp. 397-98.

⁵⁸ Marguerite d'Angoulême to Briçonnet, December, 1521, BN MS. Fr. 11495, f.46 r.: "... vous renvoye maistre Michel lequel, je vous assure, n'aperdu, pour le lieu, temps. Car l'esperit que nostre Seigneur par sa bouche aura frappé des ames qui seront enclines à recevoir son escript, et entendre verité, comme il vous dira, et plusieurs aultres choses luy ay prié, congnoissant que ne mectez en doute sa parole. Vous priant que entre tous voz piteux [pieux] desirs de la reformation de l'église oÿ plus que jamais le roy et madame sont affectionnez, et le salut de toutes pauvres ames, ayez en memoire celle d'une imparfaicte, mal ronde, mais toute contre faicte parle [perle]." Cf Herminjard, I, no. 47, 84.

⁵⁹ Briçonnet to Marguerite, 22 December, 1521, *Ibid.*, f. 98 r.: "Je loue nostre Seigneur qu'il a inspiré au roy vouloir de executer quelque chose que j'ay entendu."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Pastor, IX, 11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 32-33.

longer leave the kingdom of France.⁶² This clearly indicates that the king's interest in reform was closely associated with ill-feeling toward Rome.⁶³

Likewise, in June, 1523, we find Briçonnet ecstatic at the commitment evinced toward reform by the king and queen-mother in a private interview.⁶⁴ But one notes that this interest seems to be closely connected with another lowpoint in French relations with Rome. Thus, the same month the king prohibited the dispatch of bullion from France to Rome or the seeking of offices there,⁶⁵ he threatened to set up an anti-pope⁶⁶ and reminded Adrian of the fate of Boniface VIII in similar circumstances.⁶⁷ The king's attitude and his simultaneous support for the Meaux evangelicals, as well as other reformers, apparently was noted at Rome. Thus when pressed by the Imperialists to ally himself openly with them Adrian replied that:

"I shall not declare myself against France because such a step would be immediately followed by the stoppage of all supplies of money from that kingdom, on which I chiefly depend for the maintenance of my court, and because I know on good authority that the French King would become a protector of the Lutheran heresy and make a resettlement of

⁶² *Le Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris sous le règne de François 1^{er}: 1515-36*, ed. V.-L. Bourrilly (Paris, 1910), p. 87.

⁶³ Indeed, his interest faded when prospects for a reconciliation improved to some extent during the course of 1522. See Pastor, IX, 56. See also a letter from Briçonnet to Marguerite of September, 1522, Herminjard, I, no. 54, 104-105. Cf. *Le Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris...*, p. 95.

⁶⁴ Briçonnet to Marguerite, After 18 June, 1523, BN MS. Fr. 11495, f. 237 v.-238 r.: "Ayant hier, Madame, en la bouche du roy oy propos selon son tres. chretien nom dont loué soit le pere de lumiere qui les tenebres de nature humaine par lumiere filiale a illuminé, a esté d'une part joieux et consolé voyant la superexcellente divine bonté se casher de ceulx qui presument et cuident avoir la clef de la sapience divine de laquelle estaictz, excludy, n'y permettent aultres entrer, et luireés coeurs humbles se confient de la seule douceur et misericorde. Et d'aultre part larmoyant que telz dons de grace d'esperit de tribulations et occupacions du monde que l'ennemy luy suscite, prenoyant le fruict que nostre seigneur par son ministre pourroit avoir. Vous estes bien eueuse d'avoir les douces pastures qui procedent de luy et de madame." Cf. Jourda, *Répertoire*, no. 110, pp. 26-27, Becker, pp. 435-36.

⁶⁵ *Le Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris...*, p. 95.

⁶⁶ Pastor, IX, 197.

⁶⁷ See M. Sanuto, *I Diarii* (1496-1533), ed. R. Fulin, F. Stefani et al. (Venice, 1879-1903), XXXIV, 340-47, *Le Cabinet historique*, XIII (1867), pt. 1, 57-58.

ecclesiastical order in his dominions.⁶⁸

Historians have often been puzzled over the sudden denunciation of the Lutheran heresy by Briçonnet on 15 October, 1523, whereas until that moment he had been virtually silent on this point and had been espousing a largely undefined evangelicism. Without prejudice to the question of Briçonnet's religious convictions one must point to the fact that a drastic change in the political situation occurred between June and October. Thus, France's enemy, Adrian VI, died on 14 September.⁶⁹ At the same moment France was deeply shaken by the conspiracy of Bourbon and by foreign invasion.⁷⁰ Shortly after these developments one notes the court's sudden interest in countering the dangers of heresy. Indeed, it even inquired of the Sorbonne how to go about doing so and, moreover, asked how persons of exalted rank, supposedly wrongfully accused of sympathy for Luther's teachings, could exonerate themselves.⁷¹ The response of the Faculty makes it clear that it believed that the spread of heresy was directly tied to the permissiveness and, indeed, protection of the court. The Sorbonne demanded that Luther be denounced everywhere in the kingdom and that all heretical books should be handed over to royal officials.⁷² The Sorbonne's answer was dated 7 October. Briçonnet's decrees embodying the substance of the Sorbonne's recommendation came only eight days later.⁷³ This was not the end of the matter either. A year afterwards in the course of negotiations with the French king, the papal nuncio Aleander raised the matter of the questionable activities of Briçonnet and Michel d'Arande in the course of a discussion with Francis concerning the spread of heresy in France. Aleander could get no answer from him.⁷⁴

Such circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the attitude of the court and of Briçonnet toward evangelical reform was conditioned by the actual state of relations between France and Rome. That hostility toward Rome was an important factor behind their attitudes is suggested also by the position taken by Lefèvre

⁶⁸ Quoted in a letter from Lannoy to Charles V, Naples, 15 July, 1523, Pastor, IX, 201-202.

⁶⁹ The news reached the French court by the 21st. Francis I immediately determined to invade Italy concluding that the situation in the Peninsula had dramatically changed in France's favor. Cf. Sanuto, XXXIV, 463. Thereafter royal interest in reform became perfunctory.

⁷⁰ M. Mignet, *Rivalité de François^{er} et de Charles Quint* (Paris, 1875), I, 441, *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris* ..., pp. 144-46.

⁷¹ Clerval, p. 423, n. 79.

⁷² Text in Charles Du Plessis D'Argentré, *Collectio judiciorum de novis erroribus, qui ab initio 12. steculi usque ad 1632 in Ecclesia proscripti sunt et notati* (Paris, 1728-36), II, 3-5.

⁷³ Texts in Toussaint Du Plessis, II, 558-59. Cf. Herminjard, I, 153-58.

⁷⁴ See Paquier, pp. 313-14.

d'Étaples in his *Commentaries on the Four Gospels* of 1522, a work published under the protection of the king and bishop. There, in contrast to the view he took five years earlier, Lefèvre refused to concede the title *pontifex maximus* to the Pope.⁷⁵ His interpretation of Matthew 16: 18-19 also reflected a highly conditional view of Papal authority.⁷⁶ Indeed, his interpretation of this passage was cited as schismatic by the syndic of the Sorbonne, Noël Beda.⁷⁷

It might be asked, finally, whether it is credible that a reformer like Briçonnet could have allowed himself to play politics in this manner. An examination of his career prior to his efforts at Meaux reveals that for all his interest in reform—which was genuine enough—his whole experience had been as a diplomat in the service of the French monarchy in Italy especially concerned with relations with Rome.⁷⁸ He had served as French ambassador to Rome in 1507,⁷⁹ had been a principal agent along with his father and brother in organizing the Council of Pisa against Julius II⁸⁰ and had helped to complete the negotiation of the Concordat of Bologna during a mission to Rome in 1516. Indeed, on this last occasion he secretly agreed in accordance with the wishes of the king to repudiate the principle of conciliar

⁷⁵ See *Commentarii initiatorii in quattuor evangelia* (Paris, Simon de Colines, 1522), f. 203 r.: “Ergo qui maiestatis domino se maxime humiliat ille sit cæteros maior, et hoc, quo ad spiritum. Nam aliter esse posset quo ad mundum: si ille qui hoc munere honoraretur, corde animoque spiritu sub Christo non esset humillimus, aut ei qui talis esset, et scientia dei præditus, in mundo talis honor propter Christum non impenderetur. Christus ergo in ecclesia semper est, fuit et erit simpliciter maximus, maximus pontifex, maximus mediator, maximus interpellator...” In contrast only three years before in the *De Tribus et Unica Magdalena Disceptatio* (Paris, H. Estienne, 1519), f. 2 v., 39 v., he had unhesitatingly referred to Leo X as *pontifex maximus* and earthly vicar of Christ.

⁷⁶ *Comm. init.* f. 66 v.-67 r. Lefèvre's views are similar to although not identical with the traditional Gallican interpretation of these verses. Cf. Olivier de la Brosse, *Le Pape et le concile: la comparaison de leurs pouvoirs à la veille de la réforme* (Paris, 1965), pp. 211-15.

⁷⁷ *Annotationum Natali Bede... in Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensium Libri Duo et in Desiderium Erasmus Roterdamnum Liber Unus...* (Cologne, 1526), f. clxxv r.-clxxvi v.

⁷⁸ See L. Febvre, “Le Cas Briçonnet,” *op. cit.*, pp. 145-61, also R. Limouzin-Lamoignon “Guillaume Briçonnet,” art. *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, ed. M. Prevost, et al. (Paris, 1956), VII, col. 286.

⁷⁹ The address which he delivered before the Pope and College of Cardinals at that time provides an important insight into the political side of his character. It is reprinted in *Chroniques de Jean d'Auton*, ed. Paul E. Jacob (Paris, 1835), IV, 305-65.

⁸⁰ For the role of the Briçonnet *père* and *fils* at Pisa, see Renaudet, *Le Concile Gallican de Pise-Milan, Documents: 1510-1512* (Paris, 1922), pp. 1-161, *passim*.

supremacy in the Church in behalf of which he had been an articulate spokesman at the Council of Pisa.⁸¹ Thus, Briçonnet must be understood to have been as much an ecclesiastical politician as an ecclesiastical reformer and loyal to the king above all. Royal support for Briçonnet's reforms at Meaux was thus based on a confidence in an old and trusted servant of the monarchy.

Our stress on the political motivation behind the court's support of the Meaux reformers and its permissiveness toward the spread of Lutheran ideas helps to give this period of French history a clearer focus. In particular it puts the reform at Meaux in the perspective of the Gallican tradition with its strong political content where it properly belongs. Thus, the monarchy had interested itself in the question of religious reform since at least the time of the Great Schism and the Church Councils of the last century.⁸² Furthermore, it had made use of this concern to justify its increasing interference into and control over the Gallican Church during this period. The question of a council to bring about reform of the Church in its head and members had been a key feature in French diplomatic relations with Rome throughout the previous century.⁸³ The banner of reform had been raised when Charles VIII marched on Rome in 1494 and again when Louis XII sent his bishops to the Council of Pisa in 1511.

The failure of the Council of Pisa and the subsequent abandonment of conciliarism by the French deprived them of a traditional instrument of their Italian policies.⁸⁴ On the other hand, evangelical reform of a moderate kind might serve almost as well under the new conditions created by the religious revolution in Germany. Indeed, it was this attitude first manifested in the support given to Briçonnet, at Meaux, which was to lie behind the eirenic and reform policies of the

⁸¹ O. Raynaldi, *Annales ecclesiastici post Baronium ab anno 1198 ad annum 1565*, ed. J. D. Mansi (Lucca, 1756-57), XXXI, 128. Cf. Hefele and Hergenrother, VIII, pt. I, 328-29.

⁸² See Martin, I, *passim*, also E. Delaruelle, E. R. Labande and Paul Ourliac, *L'Église au temps du grand schisme et de la crise conciliaire: 1378-1449, Histoire de l'église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, ed. J. B. Duroselle and Eugène Jarry (Brussels, 1964), XIV, pt. I, 327-44.

⁸³ These relations, centering around the question of the council, in the first place, and, then, the pragmatic sanction of Bourges, have been outlined in E. Delaruelle, *et al, ibid.*, XIV, pt. I, 356-68, Imbart de la Tour, II, 88-106, and R. Aubenas and R. Ricard, *L'Église et la renaissance: 1449-1517, Histoire de l'église depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, ed. A. Fliche and V. Martin (Paris, 1951), XV, 56-57.

⁸⁴ By agreeing to the bull *Pastor aeternus* in 1516, France acknowledged the supremacy of Pope over council. Moreover, the idea of a council became a distinctively imperialist idea in the sixteenth century against which the French came to deeply distrust. See Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, tr. Dom Ernest Graf (London, 1957), I, 201, 224-28, 230, Elton, *Reformation Europe 1517-1559* (London, 1963), p. 150.

monarchy during the next decade.⁸⁵

Could the diplomatic struggle between France and the Papacy have deepened into a permanent schism? It is perfectly legitimate to speculate on this question. Certainly the fact that the official theology embodied in the works of Lefèvre was quite moderate was no obstacle. The case of the essentially political reformation introduced by Henry VIII into England proves this.⁸⁶ Still, one must admit that such a development was not very likely. In the first place, to carry through such a break would have meant that the monarchy would have virtually had to abandon all of its ambitions in Italy. Yet these ambitions were the very root of French foreign policy.⁸⁷ Furthermore, given the structure of the French Church it is difficult to see how the monarchy could have controlled it without the support of Rome.⁸⁸ Finally, in the face of the hostility of the Emperor, a break with Rome would have provided the latter with an enormous propaganda advantage.⁸⁹

The diplomatic struggle with Rome in conjunction with the religious revolution in Germany, nevertheless, did have important effects in France. It created a climate in which Lutheran propaganda could for a long time circulate in the kingdom with a considerable degree of freedom. It, furthermore, provided the background to the more or less officially patronized evangelicism at Meaux. Paradoxically, however, the merger of the Meaux evangelicals with those of Germany only took place following the end of the quarrel between France and Rome.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Imbart de la Tour, III, 273-366.

⁸⁶ The official religion of the Henrician reformation was erasmianism and more radical evangelical theologies were shunned. See James Kelsey McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 109-110, 112, 124-36, 159-65, *et passim*.

⁸⁷ On this point see R. J. Knecht, "The Concordat of 1516: A Reassessment," *Birmingham Historical Journal*, IX (1963), 31. One notes how the interest in reformat court waned as its Italian prospects brightened following the death of Adrian VI. See above, no. 69.

⁸⁸ De Maulde La Clavière *La Diplomatie*, I, 32-33, makes this point.

⁸⁹ Francis I's alleged favoritism toward Lutherans was, in fact, a feature of imperialist propaganda. See Imbart de la Tour, III, 234.

⁹⁰ This, of course, only happened in 1524 with the gradual waning of court interest in reform and even then it was not a complete union of belief. The process can be followed in Herminjard, I, *passim* as well as in M. Mousseaux, *Aux Sources françaises de la réforme, textes et faits: La Brie protestante* (Paris, 1968), pp. 44-95.