



**HAL**  
open science

**“ National Church, State Church and Universal Church:  
the Gallican Dilemma in Sixteenth-Century France ”  
dans Luc Racaut et Alec Ryrie éd., Moderate Voices in  
the European Reformation,, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005,  
p. 104-121.**

Alain Tallon

► **To cite this version:**

Alain Tallon. “ National Church, State Church and Universal Church: the Gallican Dilemma in Sixteenth-Century France ” dans Luc Racaut et Alec Ryrie éd., Moderate Voices in the European Reformation,, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005, p. 104-121.. Luc Racaut; Alec Ryrie. Moderate Voices in the European Reformation, Ashgate, p. 104-121, 2005. hal-02060282

**HAL Id: hal-02060282**

**<https://hal.sorbonne-universite.fr/hal-02060282>**

Submitted on 7 Mar 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## National Church, state Church and universal Church: the Gallican dilemma in sixteenth century France

In the midst of the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, the Gallican Church may seem to have played a pacifying role, even served as an intermediary between the conflicting confessions. While being hostile to Roman absolutism it remained faithful to the old religion, and could as a result have offered a thorough reform of the Church without the same theological and liturgical rifts that Lutheranism and above all Calvinism provoked.

‘Gallicanism’ – a word that was coined in the nineteenth century and is applied retrospectively to the realities of the Old Regime, which does not go without some problems of definition<sup>1</sup> – would therefore have borne within it a vision of the Church that could have provided a meeting ground for the warring brothers of the sixteenth-century religious reforms. This vision of the Church is summarized in two central pronouncements made by the lawyer Pierre Pithou at the end of the sixteenth century: ‘The first is that the Popes cannot command or ordain, either in general or in particular, anything that concerns temporal things in countries and lands under the obedience and sovereignty of the Most Christian King; and if they command or rule anything, only the clerics of the King’s subjects are held to obedience by virtue of their status alone. The second, is that if the Pope is recognized as sovereign in spiritual things, his absolute and infinite power has no currency within France, but it is bound and checked by the canons and the rules of the ancient councils of the Church recognized in this kingdom’.<sup>2</sup> The narrow legal character of this definition of the Gallican liberties seems to place Gallicanism on a different planet than that of the bloody religious conflicts of the sixteenth century. This limited conception of pontifical power, as simple ministerial and not absolute power, does not seem enough to serve as a platform for reconciling Christians at

---

<sup>1</sup> See Tallon, A. (2002), *Conscience nationale et sentiment religieux en France au XVIe siècle. Essai sur la vision gallicane du monde*, Paris : Presses universitaires de France.

least divided as much by the question of justification or the Eucharist as by the question of the Roman primacy. But if the irenic character of Gallicanism is far from being obvious, one cannot deny the ability to dialogue with the Protestant world that the most rigorous defenders of the liberties of the Gallican Church maintained throughout the century, from the cardinal Jean Du Bellay to the historian Jacques-Auguste de Thou. This ability has mostly been highlighted by historians working on the beginning of the seventeenth century who sought to compare the various challenges to Roman absolutism and the Gallican movement.<sup>3</sup> The great conflict of 1606, which saw Paul V place an interdict on the Republic of Venice for having sought to limit the ecclesiastical privileges, paved the way for the temporary unification of all opponents of Rome, Catholic and Protestant, throughout Europe. Venice and its champion Paolo Sarpi stirred the enthusiasm of the Gallican intellectuals. At the same time, these selfsame Gallicans were approving the defence of the divine rights of kings by James I of England and were not indifferent to the projects of religious reconciliation of the Protestant monarch.<sup>4</sup> At that juncture the French Gallican movement seemed to unite all expressions of ‘doctrinal antiromanism’<sup>5</sup> that transcended the confessional divisions against a common enemy: a pontifical absolutism that had failed to stay within the limits of the primacy set by the Gallicans for the Roman Church, but had turned into a ‘totatus’ to use the neologism

---

<sup>2</sup> Pithou P. (1594), *Les Libertez de l'Église Gallicane*, Paris : Mamert Patisson and Robert Estienne, 1594, dans Gillot J. éd. (1609), *Traictez des droitz et libertez de l'Église gallicane*, Paris : Pierre Chevalier, p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> It is not insignificant to indicate that these historians are all English-speaking and therefore more sensitive to a potential parallel between Gallicanism and Anglicanism – a term just as anachronistic as ‘Gallicanism’ but used here by earlier historians to denote the Church of England from the reign of Elizabeth - : Bouwsma, W. J. (1971), ‘Gallicanism and the Nature of Christendom’, *Renaissance Studies in honor of Hans Baron*, ed. A. Molho et J. Tedeschi, Dekalb (Ill.) : Northern Illinois University Press, pp. 809-830 ; Powis J. (1983), ‘Gallican Liberties and the Politics of later Sixteenth-Century France’, *The Historical Journal*, 26, pp. 515-530 ; Salmon J. H. M. (1987), ‘Gallicanism and Anglicanism in the age of the Counter-Reformation’, *Renaissance and Revolt. Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, pp. 155-188.

<sup>4</sup> Patterson W. B. (1997), *King James VI and I and the reunion of Christendom*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, notably pp. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> I reproduce the phrase coined by Franceschi S.-H. de (1999), ‘Antiromanisme doctrinal, pouvoir pastoral et raison du prince : le prisme français (1606-1611)’, *Positions de thèses de l'École des Chartes*, pp. 191-204.

coined by Paolo Sarpi in a letter to a Gallican correspondent.<sup>6</sup> It offered a precedent for going back to an old order that had been jeopardized by the pontifical pretensions, and where the independence of each national Church was the best guarantee of their unity and peaceful co-existence within the bosom of the universal Church.

This moment of confluence between quite different religious currents often serves as a field of observation for describing the irenic or simply moderating role that Gallicanism would have played at the time of the confessional rift. As such it appears as a kind of Catholic Anglicanism, focusing on national specificity, the role of the king in the Church and the conformity of its ecclesiological ideas with the early Church, when Rome exercised only a purely spiritual primacy.<sup>7</sup> This kinship with Anglicanism became even more pronounced for those amongst the Gallicans who did not hide their sympathy for a theology of justification by faith. Such was Arnaud Du Ferrier, a well thought of parliamentarian, close to Michel de L'Hospital, future ambassador to the Council of Trent, and later Venice, and trusted advisor to Catherine de Médicis, and later Henri III. At the beginning of 1562 he offered a memoir to Catherine de Médicis where he admitted that he shared 'this religion that is said to be new, although I myself think it is old and apostolic in that it teaches the free and whole justification through the death and passion of Jesus-Christ alone'.<sup>8</sup> But this confession did not lead Du Ferrier to officially break with the Gallican Church to adhere to Calvinism. He evaded such a confessional clarification all his life. Even Pierre de L'Estoile could let himself be seduced by the Anglican liturgy that he preferred to that of the French reformed Church of Charenton, and by the doctrinal soundness of the preaching that he heard when he went to a sermon at the

---

<sup>6</sup> "Apostolicae sedis primatum, imo et principatum, nemo gnarus antiquitatis et historiae negavit. Hic, quem modo affectant, non est *primatus*, sed *totatus*, si liceat vocabulum effingere ex eo quod abrogato omni ordine totum omnino uni tribuit", Sarpi P. (1961), *Lettere ai Gallicani*, éd. B. Ulianich, Wiesbaden : F. Steiner, p. 134, Paolo Sarpi to Jacques Gillot, Venice, 15 September 1609.

<sup>7</sup> Bouwsma W. (1971) et Salmon J H. M. (1987), *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fr. 4.766, fol. 28 v°. Sur Du Ferrier, see Tallon A. (2002), 'Diplomate et 'politique', Arnaud Du Ferrier', *De Michel de L'Hospital à l'édit de Nantes : politique et religion*

English embassy on 3 August 1609.<sup>9</sup> Coming from such a fierce Gallican, this avowed sympathy for some aspects of the Church of England came no doubt from their affinity with the reform that he dreamt for the Gallican Church, that needed to purge itself of all sorts of abuses and superstitions without following the Calvinist model. Of course, the adherence to Du Ferrier to justification by faith or the sympathy of de L'Estoile for the English liturgy does not make them 'Anglican'. But they prove that there were at the heart of the Gallican Church spiritual movements that were close to what has been term the Elizabethan compromise: a Calvinistic theology, the maintaining of traditional structures and ecclesiastical hierarchy and liturgy. The royal government, if he had wanted to pursue a Gallican reform along these lines, would not have lacked support from the French elite, notably in the Parlement.

Could this Gallican reform have been a *via media* between the two Reformations? It is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of possible intervention for appeasing the religious debate: the mediation between adversaries in order to set up the conditions necessary for a dialogue, without intervening directly, or the proposition of a precise program on which the reconciliation could be based. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the French monarchy, driven by the political need to form a broad front against Charles V, from the Pope to the Protestant German princes via the King of England, attempted to reconcile religious adversaries in order to resolve, or at least moderate, the differences that jeopardized the creation of such a coalition. This accounts for the invitation that was issued in 1534-5 to Melancthon to come to Paris to talk to the doctors of the Faculty of Theology.<sup>10</sup> The strong reservations that this raised amongst the theologians show that the royal wish for mediation was not shared by the majority of the Gallican Church. The latter was divided between

---

*face aux Églises*, proceedings of the conference held at Clermont-Ferrand, 18-20 juin 1998, ed. T. Wanegffelen, Clermont-Ferrand : Presses universitaires Blaise Pascal, pp. 305-333.

<sup>9</sup> L'Estoile P. de (1875-1896), *Mémoires-journaux*, éd. G. Brunet and alii, Paris : Librairie des bibliophiles-A. Lemerre, t. 9, pp. 111-112.

<sup>10</sup> On this subject see Seidel K. J. (1970), *Frankreich und die deutschen Protestanten. Die Bemühungen um eine religiöse Konkordie und die französische Bündnispolitik in den Jahren 1534/35*, Münster : Ashendorff.

partisans of intransigence and advocates of moderation, without one or the other side renouncing for all that to their common allegiance to the Gallican exception. This is an important point because it proves that, as early as the 1530s, the French liberties' defiance of Rome did not necessarily lead to sympathy for those who had seceded from the old religion nor, reversely, that concern for the repression of religious dissent automatically lead the more intransigent Catholics to endorse the thesis of pontifical absolutism.

It is therefore improper to strictly identify Gallicanism with religious moderation, because both sides, intransigent and moderate, fell back on Gallican principles in the face of the new religious makeup. The royal project of 1534-5 was characteristically Gallican in its understanding of religious appeasement: at the cost of recognizing a kind of primacy for the papacy that could even be limited to being nominal, each national Church would have had greater autonomy in terms of ecclesiastical organization, liturgy, even for the boldest certain questions of theology. Similarly, partisans of intransigence conceived of repression along purely national lines: it befell the Faculty of Theology of Paris, the bishops, and the *Parlements* to pursue and chastise heresy. The dogmatic definition of this heresy could well have been left in theory to the general council that all claimed to await, but in fact the characterization and punishment of religious dissent fell back on national jurisdiction, either ecclesiastic or lay. In this respect it is significant that French opponents of heresy were completely indifferent towards the new Roman Inquisition, reorganized in 1542. Even in 1557 when Henri II considered reforming the inquisitorial procedures in the kingdom, he set up a Gallican Inquisition, independent from the Roman congregation, the King and the Pope. This organization remained notwithstanding a dead letter.<sup>11</sup>

In keeping with a Gallican ecclesiology of communion between largely autonomous churches which is reminiscent of the Greek Church, advocates of dialogue and its adversaries

alike always restricted their projects to the national arena. This allowed for some, and above all the monarchy, to reconcile repression within the kingdom with toleration of foreign Protestants in the name of the autonomy of each Church. This national preference, however, was not altogether bereft of any ambitions for the rest of Christendom. For many subjects of Francis I and Henri II, it was obvious that France and its king would resolve the religious conflict by giving the example of a true reform of the Church that broke with Roman corruption without threatening the communion of national Churches. This feeling derived mainly from the analysis that the Gallican movement, for the most part, made of the religious crisis and its causes. The monstrous development of pontifical power and the moral corruption of the ecclesiastical order that followed were the true causes of the split. The Gallican Church, with its liberties that were not privileges but rights intact, offered more than any other Church a return to the purity of ancient ways. This discourse re-emerged with every tense moment in the relationship between Rome and France. When the conflict between Henri II and Julius III put the kingdom on the verge of a break from Rome in 1551, Jean Du Tillet, the royal councillor most hostile to pontifical pretensions, asserted that:

There cannot be a better outcome and more favourable to God and men than for our sovereign the King to be the instigator of a good reformation of the ecclesiastical estate of his kingdom. Because there will follow a reformation of the other estates that will assuage the wrath of the Maker, provoked by the sins of the irreligious, and the return to the fold of those who have taken pretext of the errors and scandals of the ministers of the Church mainly of Rome and been led astray, and lead the way for other

---

<sup>11</sup> Tallon, A. (2003), 'Inquisition romaine et monarchie française au XVIe siècle', proceedings of the conference *Inquisition et pouvoir*, Aix-en-Provence, 24-26 octobre 2002, ed. G. Audisio, forthcoming.

monarchs and princes to imitate the said King in this part, which will lead to universal peace between Christians.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, this arrogant confidence in the pacifying role of the French king was also nourished by the illusion that ‘only Gaul is free of monsters’, to reproduce the famous quote by Saint Jerome that was cited at leisure by the French. Convinced that the kingdom was always and would always remain devoid of heresy, the French elite underestimated the strength of religious dissidence within France itself or was convinced that repression would easily stem its flow.

From the mid 1550s onwards, such short sightedness was no longer in order and the kingdom seemed to be the country in Europe which was worst hit by heresy. Confidence in the defence of the Gallican liberties as the best hope for reconciliation remained nonetheless intact. As late as the early 1580s, with Venice and Spain resisting the trespassing of lay jurisdiction by Rome, Arnaud du Ferrier, ambassador of Henri III to the Republic, could write back to his master:

‘the credit and authority of the Roman courtiers goes diminishing, so much so that if the ancient rights and freedoms of your Gallican Church were to be passed on to the other countries of Christendom, things could well go back to their first state and be governed according to the old councils of the Catholic Church and decrees of the Roman Church’.<sup>13</sup>

A few months later, he added, again on the same subject of lay resistance: ‘if we continue to keep good this course the rights and freedoms of your Church will be common to all Christendom and in this, sire, we can hope for the whole pacification of your kingdom’.<sup>14</sup> Even against the background of the religious split within France itself, some Gallicans

---

<sup>12</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fr. 473, fol 10.

<sup>13</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Five hundreds Colbert 368, p. 164, Du Ferrier to the King, 11 November 1580.

continued to think that only problems of jurisdiction were at fault and that the restoration of the authority of the magistrates in the face of Rome and the respect of the old liberties of the Church was the universal panacea.

This confidence was not always expressed with as much clarity, in part because after the conspiracy of Amboise in March 1560, the French elite attempted a policy of conciliation that encompassed not only specifically religious and liturgical but also theological ones, even if they were careful to speak officially of mere modifications of ecclesiastical discipline. Different programmes were thought up in diverse, sometimes rival, circles but they shared characteristics with the French plans that were submitted to the Council of Trent in its third and final session.<sup>15</sup> In the elaboration of this program of concord, the Cardinal of Lorraine always seems to have played a crucial role. It is unclear when Charles of Lorraine rallied to such a solution based on negotiation rather than the policy of pure and simple repression that marked the end of the reign of Henri II and that he pursued as the first minister of Francis II. The conspiracy of Amboise, the assembly of Fontainebleau, the death of the young king and the withdrawal of the cardinal from the court were as many milestones in the journey that led Lorraine to propose the confession of Augsburg as a possible meeting ground – and not it seems as a permanent settlement – to the Reformed ministers during the assembly of Poissy in September 1561.<sup>16</sup> His failure led him to meet with the duke Christopher of Württemberg, old brother in arms of the duke of Guise, and his court theologian Johannes Brenz at Savern between 15 and 18 of February 1562. During these talks, Lorraine made multiple concessions, that some have interpreted as being a mere red herring where others have seen evidence of a

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194, Du Ferrier to the King, 18 January 1581.

<sup>15</sup> Tallon, A. (1997), *La France et le concile de Trente (1518-1563)*, Rome : École française de Rome, pp. 283 sq. and pp. 827 sq.

<sup>16</sup> On the difficult question of the real intentions of Lorraine, see mainly Turchetti, M. (1993), 'Une question mal posée : la *Confession d'Augsbourg*, le cardinal de Lorraine et les moyennieurs au colloque de Poissy en 1561', *Zwingliana*, 20, p. 53-101 ; Tallon, A., *La France et le concile de Trente*, p. 308-315 et (1997), 'Les Guise pionniers de l'œcuménisme ?', in *Homo religiosus. Autour de Jean Delumeau*, Paris : Fayard, p. 361-367 ;

clear adherence to Lutheranism, an attachment which would have been dissimulated for obvious reasons of political expediency.<sup>17</sup> Both hypotheses are to be rejected, however: Lorraine wanted above all to establish a dialogue, in the hope of convincing the Lutherans to come to the general council which was opening for the third time at Trent. Catherine de Medici' pressed Elizabeth to send English bishops to the council for the same reason: Lorraine did not want the French to be isolated in front of the curial party and he hoped that a Protestant presence would force the assembly towards reconciliation rather than condemnation. He gladly saw himself in the role of mediator that he already virtually occupied in being capable to talking to the Protestant theologians as well as to the ambassadors of the Pope.

But along which *via media* did Lorraine, in complete agreement with Catherine de Medici', want to lead Christendom?<sup>18</sup> The various plans that were offered, from the Estates General of Orleans to the first Tridentine debates to which the French took part from autumn 1562, shared many of the same components:<sup>19</sup> a stern reform of the ecclesiastical abuses, massive introduction of the vernacular in the liturgy, notably in the singing of psalms in French, communion in both kinds, the struggle against 'superstition' in terms of cult of saints, veneration of images and relics. Coyness in terms of dogma can be explained no doubt by the

---

Caroll S. (2003), 'The Compromise of Charles Cardinal de Lorraine : New Evidence', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 54, p. 469-483.

<sup>17</sup> The first historiographical current that sees in Lorraine's attitude a simple political manoeuvre reproduces doubts that had been expressed by the Genevans, notably Theodore Beza, for example Michelet wrote about Savern: 'Lorraine's natural proclivity was towards deception'; Jules Michelet, *Renaissance et Réforme*, Paris, Robert Laffond, 1982, p. 532 sq. The other historiographical current, convinced that Lorraine actually adhered to the confession of Augsburg, also has its origins in the sixteenth century and is well treated by Caroll, S., 'The Compromise...', p. 477 sq.

<sup>18</sup> For a full treatment of the conformity of Lorraine and Medici' agenda see A. Tallon, *La France et le concile de Trente*, pp. 291, 349 sq.

<sup>19</sup> See for example the project proposed by the cardinal of Lorraine to the German Lutherans in June 1561, Evennett H. O., (1930), *The cardinal of Lorraine and the Council of Trent*, Cambridge : University Press, p. 485, the advice given to the queen mother at the beginning of 1562 by moderate parliamentarians, Christophe de Harlay, Paul de Foix and Arnaud Du Ferrier (note that the latter is by far the most original), BNF, Fr. 4.766, the propositions of the cardinal of Lorraine to the private council in August 1562, Caroll S., 'The Compromise...', pp. 473-474, the instruction given to Lanssac and to Lorraine when they left for the council of Trent and the thirty-five articles brought forward by the French to the legates in December 1562, Tallon A., *La France et le concile de Trente*, p. 827 sq. et 842 sq.

embarrassing failure of Poissy, where the elaboration of a compromise on the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist proved impossible. The project's silence on theological aspects proper of the conflict also stemmed from its erasmian inspiration<sup>20</sup>, which shies away from any clear theological pronouncements on the points in conflict. Lastly, for many, it was essential to re-establish communion, even at the cost of postponing the question of a lasting basis on which to maintain it. Autonomy of the Churches, dear to the Gallicans, should have eased the difficulties that remained.

The civil wars in France, that erupted at the beginning of 1562 after more than two years of severe troubles, did not put an end to these projects but on the contrary rejuvenated them. Catherine de Medici' even cultivated for a time the hopes of constituting a European front to promote the reformation of points of discipline, such as she conceived them rightly, like communion of both kinds or liturgy in the vernacular, and to thus put an end to the confessional rift. Her best ally in this was the Emperor Ferdinand, who sought to obtain the same concessions from the Council of Trent, and from the Pope with some success<sup>21</sup>, even if the reactions of the Protestant powers were more disappointing: Elizabeth preferred to help the prince of Condé in exchange for Le Havre while the German princes remained deaf to the proposals of a French government that was warring with its Protestants subjects.<sup>22</sup> Lastly, the closing session of the Council of Trent seemed to have put a final stop to any potential openings. The moderate Gallicans missed the historic opportunity to reunite all Christians around a formula of compromise. The dogmatic intransigence of the institutional Churches, that the supposed rallying of the cardinal of Lorraine to the Roman theses at Trent

---

<sup>20</sup> I am fully aware of the very questionable quality of this adjective the definition of which is elastic to the point of meaninglessness. But I do not believe that there is an alternative that can do justice to the partisans of a 'philosophy of Christ' devoid of superstition, but also free of the concern for a rational and strict definition of dogma that characterizes medieval scholasticism.

<sup>21</sup> Constant G. (1923), *Concession à l'Allemagne de la communion sous les deux espèces. Étude sur les débuts de la Réforme catholique en Allemagne (1548-1621)*, Paris : E. de Boccard, 2 t.

encouraged, was the main reason for this failure. The French monarchy's refusal to receive the canons of the council left some room to manoeuvre within the Gallican Church, but the irenic efforts to transcend the confessional rift could no longer hope to go beyond the confines of the national, even the local context by relying on the royal policy of pacification. Only the old Gallican religion was left standing, the last to conform to the apostolic tradition according to its most zealous defenders, but it was caught in a vice between two new confessional inflexibilities. Such was the lesson that Etienne Pasquier drew from the failure of the colloquy of Poissy: 'the assembly breaks; after its end, we had presently three different religions in this France: one that would swear by nothing but the name of Christ in its sermons; the other by the name of Jesus in its synagogues, and the third, us old Catholics who do not recognize anything else in our churches and base our faith on nothing but the name of Jesus-Christ'.<sup>23</sup> Loyola and Calvin, and their heirs Lainez and Beza, the two adversaries that were face to face at Poissy, had succeeded in making the split irrevocable. In his eyes, each side mutilated in its own way the true Christian religion, but the latter was jealously kept in the gallican enclave, and always remains untamed.

The dichotomy posited by Pasquier to evident polemical ends, to better position Gallican conformity to true Christianity, has been reproduced in recent scholarship, even if it espouses a different formulation.<sup>24</sup> It is not difficult indeed to see here a form of inverted apologetics against the erstwhile confessional historiography: the 'heroes' were the adogmatic Christians, whereas the 'villains' were both Rome and Geneva, united for the occasion, that imposed a confessional straightjacket to their followers and prevented a return to unity.

---

<sup>22</sup> For the example of the Palatinate, see Wirsching A. (1986), 'Konfessionalisierung der Aussenpolitik : Die Kurpfalz und der Beginn der französischen Religionskrieg (1559-1562)', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 106, pp. 333-360.

<sup>23</sup> Pasquier E. (1982), *Le catéchisme des jésuites*, éd. C. Sutto, Sherbrooke : éditions de l'université de Sherbrooke, pp. 144-145.

<sup>24</sup> It is the case for example of Wanegffelen T. (1999), *Une difficile fidélité. Catholiques malgré le concile en France XVIe-XVIIe siècles*, Paris : Presses universitaires de France, marked by a polemic against falling in line with Trent that is finally quite naive.

However laudable the ecumenical inspiration that underpins this vision of the confessional conflicts of the sixteenth century, it is nonetheless marked by the sin of anachronism. If the failure of the irenic plans of the Gallicans of the 1560s was due to confessional intransigence, it is necessary to understand the motivations that led the former defenders of this ‘via media’ to rally to such intransigence; to try to measure the continuities that may have existed between attitudes of religious moderation and confessional mobilization; and finally to avoid reducing the diversity of Tridentine Catholicism to a unanimity that only existed in the polemic of the Protestant adversary. The cardinal of Lorraine, the very same whose ‘u-turn’ at Trent is supposed to have provoked the failure of the moderates, did not betray the program that he had set himself: many of the Tridentine decrees on the training of the clergy, the re-establishment of Episcopal power, notably against chapters and regulars, on preaching and catechism, on decency of worship, on struggle against superstition, met the demands formulated in the various Gallican programs between 1560 and 1562. Regarding the disciplinary concessions, such as communion in both kinds or the introduction of the vernacular in the liturgy, the council refused to make a pronouncement, which disappointed the French and the Imperials, but left these options open. In any case, the Pope’s concession to the German Catholics allowing them to take communion in both kinds showed very quickly that it had no pacifying influence. This point was even conceded by the Gallicans that remained faithful to the boldest forms of irenicism at the beginning of the 1560s, like Arnaud Du Ferrier. As early as 1565, he wrote to Charles IX ‘Sire, the troubles that arose in Istria because of religion that I reported in my last letters have become worse despite the fact that communion in both kinds and the marriage of priests were conceded to them’.<sup>25</sup> Even if Trent failed to satisfy all the aspirations of the Gallican reformers, the conciliar decrees were not only the expression of curial intransigence – something to be nuanced considering that it was

---

<sup>25</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fr. 10.735, fol. 63, Venise, 27 january 1564 a. s.

the cardinal Morone, former prisoner of the Inquisition under Paul IV, that was closing the council – but were also the result of a compromise that took into account the French hopes.

If we relinquish the stark dichotomy between Gallican tradition and the spirit of Trent, the failure of the projects of reconciliation of the first half of the 1560s takes a whole new meaning. It no longer is the lacklustre victory of confessional fanaticism over the softness of the third way, but the internal elucidation of tensions inherent in the Gallican Church. And it did not take place independently from the political and religious evolutions that marked the whole of Europe, from the hardening of confessional identities to the domination of Philip II's new monarchy. But if this European backdrop played a considerable role, the specificity of the Gallican Church was without doubt even more important. The tensions that ran through it in the first half of the sixteenth century, largely underestimated by the monarchy, and recently by historians, interfered with the confessional debate and ended up determining it to a large extent. These tensions stemmed from the increasing influence of royal power over the Church of France: the Church resented this as keenly as pontifical absolutism but could not complain about it with the same force. The concordat of 1516 did call up a violent opposition that was brutally repressed by Francis I. The strong monarchy of the knight king and his son prevented unrest from being voiced, but as soon as royal power was weakened by the death of Henri II, the denunciation of the concordat and its main disposition, the nomination of major benefices by the king, picked up again. The clergy were not the only ones to make the connection between the religious troubles and the violation of the liberties of the Church by the temporal powers. Pierre de Ronsard, court poet who would not lightly criticize his masters, dared nonetheless in the *Discours des misères de ce temps*, to lament the civil wars and the progress of heresy :

You, princes and kings, the fault that you have committed

For which all the Church now suffers,

Although in your time you did not know  
Or feel the misfortune that has befallen us.  
The ease with which you sold the offices  
That gave to the great the vacant benefices,  
Who filled the Church of God with the unlearned,  
Who filled the courts with private knaves,  
Is the cause of this evil....<sup>26</sup>

The parallel between the venality of the offices and the royal nomination to the major benefices was common, because it tarred the enforcement of the concordat with the brush of simony. So the monarchy was not only an accomplice of the clerics' worst abuses, but it was also responsible for them, using them to its advantage instead of reforming them. So the debate around the reformation of the Church takes a whole new meaning. Those who wished for an even stricter royal wardenship of the clergy in order to restore its dignity readily argued that since at least 1516, the monarchy had had all the means to fulfil these wishes but that it chose instead to deepen the moral crisis of the first order of the kingdom. It is plausible that the king of France, even after 1516, did not have full power over its Church and that the Protestant princes or Henry VIII could take measures that were unthinkable in the context of the French concordat.<sup>27</sup> But not all contemporaries saw things in this way: the concordat had gone too far in their estimation and the powers that it conferred on the king were excessive. It placed him above a Church of which he was only a member. At the assembly of Poissy, although he was fully committed to the policy of concord which he even possibly initiated himself, the cardinal of Lorraine nonetheless reminded the king of the limitation of his power of intervention in religious matters. In his speech of 16 September 1561, he asserted the

---

<sup>26</sup> Ronsard P. de (1994), *Œuvres complètes*, Paris : Gallimard, v. 2, p. 1028-1029.

<sup>27</sup> It is the thesis of R. J. Knecht, (1963), 'The Concordat of 1516 : A Re-assessment', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, t. 9, pp. 16-32 (reprinted in Cohn H. J. éd. (1971) *Government in Reformation Europe 1520-1560*, Londres : , pp. 91-112).

obedience of the clergy to the king whose power was subordinate to God, but he added: ‘Nevertheless you should remember Sire that you are not only minister of God and our Lord Jesus-Christ, but also of his Church, which you nourish and keep; you are her son and not her lord, member and not chief’.<sup>28</sup> Each royal intervention evoked amongst the French clergy, even its most moderate members, unease at seeing the king become the judge of properly religious questions. This misgiving went from strength to strength until the time of the League and remained strong until the beginning of the seventeenth century, nourished by the quarrel surrounding the place of the Church in the State, or the State in the Church.

The Gallican resentment towards the monarchy, nourished first by the abuse of power that royal nominations represented in the eyes of the concordat’s adversaries, turned into real concern, especially when the Protestants did not hide their intentions to use the crown’s attempts at conciliation to rally the Gallican Church to its cause. The Gallican third way was in their eyes more of a stepping stone, the shortest way possible, to the truth of the Gospel. These hopes survived the disappointments of the 1560s and when after the third war of religion the government seemed to be more favourable to the Reformed, they once more dreamt of a massive conversion of the Gallican Church. When the question of the wedding between Queen Elizabeth and the duke of Anjou arose, the Vidame of Chartres wrote to the marshal Francis of Montmorency, figurehead of the moderate party, to outline the future. He foresaw an alliance with England; help given to the prince of Orange and to the Swiss and German Protestants, an alliance with the Turk that would allow France to take Flanders and place the duke of Anjou at its head, and to retake Milan and Naples in order to give them to the duke of Alençon. Victory against Spain would also be the victory of the Reformation:

‘Then the Gallican Church will free itself from the errors of the Roman Church, as it has done numerous times in the past; a general council could then be called and the

---

<sup>28</sup> Duranthon A. éd. (1767), *Collection des procès-verbaux des assemblées générales du Clergé de*

errors that were introduced by the ambition and avarice of the Roman Church will no longer be favoured and confirmed by practise and corruption and an order and police of religion and unity of doctrine will be introduced within France, Germany and England that all the other provinces of Christendom will be forced to embrace and the quarrels between subjects and their prince, that are used by Satan to destroy Christendom, and to favour the Turk while the Christian princes are distracted by the defence of the papal superstitions and maintain his power, will end'.<sup>29</sup>

If the Saint-Bartholomew's day massacre crushed for many years the hopes of a conversion of the French monarchy, Henri IV's accession gave them new currency. Many expected the Protestant king of a Catholic kingdom to be the architect of a reconciliation in favour of the reformed camp. In the *Advis sur la nécessité du concile et sur la forme de le rendre légitime et libre pour l'union chrestienne*, published in 1591, Pierre de La Primaudaye asked for the calling of a national council, presided over by the king. If the council re-established religious unity within France, its example would be followed in all Christendom.<sup>30</sup> The hypothetical third way or Gallican *via media* had little consistency for the reformed: many saw it as a subterfuge intended to lead them back to Catholicism via tortuous ways; others thought on the contrary that it would clear the way for the Reformation; but all agreed to deny it any future as a lasting solution to the religious conflict.

The prospect of a victory for the Reformation thanks to the royal attempts at concord cleverly borrowed from familiar themes from the royal mystique: the king of France, temporal vicar of the prince of peace, would punish the vices of his clergy and take leadership of Christendom in order to free Constantinople and the Holy Land, where he would surrender his

---

*France, depuis l'année 1560 jusqu'à présent*, Paris : Guillaume Desprez, v. 1, part two, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Catherine de Médicis, (1891), *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, éd. Hector de La Ferrière, Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, t. IV, p. 8-9, letter of October 1570.

<sup>30</sup> Tallon A. (2000), 'La fin d'un instrument de paix : le concile œcuménique', *Paix des armes, paix des âmes*, Proceedings of the international conference of Pau, 8-11 October 1998, (ed.) P. Mironneau and I. Pébay-Clottes, Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, p. 25.

power to Christ.<sup>31</sup> The Protestant interpretation of these prophecies, that had become a commonplace of monarchic ideology, had been in circulation at least since Francis I, but became more widespread at the beginning of the 1560s, contemporary with the royal policy of concord. It also skilfully played on the old Gallican precept of the authority of the king in matters of ecclesiastical polity in order to give it more spin to restore the purity of the faith. Charles Du Moulin encouraged the king to follow ‘the examples of the good kings of Judea Ezechias and Josias, who restored religion under the word of God, toppling and banishing the idols and their idolaters, because they are no other ways to avoid the wrath of God that is imminent (Psa. II). And to say that this does not befit the kings and princes, is to deny that their authority and power devolves from God, and it is a crime of lèse majesté royal and divine, moreover such calumny is principally offensive against God’.<sup>32</sup>

These calls for the intervention of the sovereign increased in turn the Gallican suspicion towards the projects of royal mediation. Because if the Catholic partisans of a policy of concord, like the cardinal of Lorraine, were willing to consider a reformation of abuses, they were not prepared to allow it to go as far as Protestantism and a break from Rome. This point of view was more widely shared than is commonly thought, even if some historians have highlighted the unshakable loyalty of the ‘politiques’ to Rome during the great debates at the end of the century.<sup>33</sup> The Gallican parlementaires condemned papal interference in the internal affairs of the kingdom as a matter of fact, but they were equally unwilling to tolerate a schism. They upheld the right and even the duty of the king to re-establish purity of

---

<sup>31</sup> Voir Haran A. Y. (2000), *Le lys et le globe. Messianisme dynastique et rêve impérial en France aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles*, Paris : Champ Vallon, particularly the chapters III and IV.

<sup>32</sup> Du Moulin C. (1561), *Traicte de l'origine, progres et excellence du royaume et monarchie des François, et couronne de Fran[c]e, oeuvre monstrant que toutes monarchies, empires, royaumes et seigneuries sont periz et ruinez par l'idolatrie*, Paris, fol. 30 v<sup>o</sup>-31.

<sup>33</sup> It is the point on which insists Powis J. (1983), *op. cit.* In a way which is much less convincing, Nancy L. Roelker argues that the parlement gave priority to the struggle against heresy until the beginning of the 1560s, and that frightened by the Roman offensive after the Council of Trent, it then attempted to confine the forces that were favourable to pontifical absolutism, Roelker N. L., 1996, *One King, One Faith. The Parlement of Paris and the Religious Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Berkeley : University of California Press. For a

conduct, even faith, within the Gallican Church, but on the condition that he always recognized himself as an obedient son of this Church. At the beginning of 1562, Paul de Foix offered his advice on religious matters to Catherine de Medici' along these terms.<sup>34</sup> He subordinated the political to the religious order, with Machiavelli implicitly in his sights when he spoke of the ancient Romans 'who only held religion as means to advance their policy. And we on the contrary think that the republic should serve religion instead'. The very duty of the king to serve the religious order and to keep his subjects in the true faith forced him to intervene in the crisis that hit the Church. Paul de Foix approved the calling of a colloquy of theologians under the presidency of the sovereign, even if such a meeting seemed to have become impossible. In order to keep the kingdom from the worst evil, atheism, the king even had to even envisage tolerating the right of dissidents to assemble. If Paul de Foix was very bold in his propositions, he nonetheless always subordinated royal intervention to the duty to preserve an intangible patrimony, which escaped the control of the sovereign. He implicitly admitted the existence of a limit to royal action, even if he pushed its limits much further than other moderate Gallicans, notably within the clergy.

Although in reality Reformed theology also limited magisterial intervention in the Church's affairs, even the most moderate French Catholics were convinced that Protestantism gave all powers, including dogmatic, to the sovereign alone, so transforming the Church in a simple organ of the State and making faith a question of politics. They derived this conviction from an English example they totally rejected, with a few exceptions that have attracted an inordinate amount of attention from the historiography. Indeed, the evolution of the English Church represented a bad example for the whole moderate fringe of Gallicanism. This rejection can be explained partly by an Anglophobia that remained very strong, even stronger

---

more nuanced rendering of parliamentary Gallicanism, see Parsons J. (1997), *Church and Magistrate in Early Modern France : Politics, Ideology and the Gallican Liberties, 1550-1615*, PhD Johns Hopkins University.

<sup>34</sup> Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fr. 4766, fol. 29-33.

perhaps than Hispanophobia that developed in the second half of the century. A throwback from the Hundred Years War, the vision of the English as cruel and power mad was revived by the eccentricities of Henri VIII. This monarch was the object of a veritable black legend throughout Catholic Europe<sup>35</sup> and if Francis I officially tried to humour this indispensable ally against Charles V, France was not the last to denounce the Henrician Reformation. The horror that Henry VIII's policy evoked mainly derived from the perception in the eyes of the French that it turned a national Church into a State Church. Charles de Marillac, ambassador in England, painted such a picture of the situation on the island to the constable de Montmorency: 'evil has reached such a height here that all examples of misfortune now strike England'. The bishops that were instituted by the King submitted themselves willingly to his every whim:

'In order to be found loyal and good ministers, when they write about true obedience, they [the bishops of Henry VIII] allow their king to interpret divine law, to add, subtract and do more than the apostles or their vicars and successors ever dared to undertake; so much so that through their good arguments, everything that he says should be held as a dictate from God or oracle of his prophets, and they want to render to him not only the obedience that is due to a king, obedience and service that bind them on earth, but make him into a true idol to be worshipped.'

As a true tyrant, the king pillaged the goods of the Church and lived in perpetual defiance of all and sundry 'From this derives that every day new bloody edicts are issued so that one man even taking a thousand precautions cannot be safe; and at the slightest occasion loose himself'.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> See for the Spanish case Marshall P (2001), 'The Other Black Legend : The Henrician Reformation and the Spanish People', *The English Historical Review*, 116, p. 31-49.

<sup>36</sup> Kaulek J. éd. (1885), *Correspondance politique de MM. de Castillon et de Marillac, ambassadeurs de France en Angleterre 1537-1542*, Paris : Félix Alcan, p. 211-213, Marillac to Montmorency, London, 6 August 1540.

What is striking in the development of the black legend of Henri VIII, is that it not only concerned the intransigent circles. Charles de Marillac was a diplomat who wished above all to constitute a great alliance against the Emperor and he had no qualms of conscience when faced with the prospect of an alliance with the Protestants or the Turk. Rewarded for his services with the bishopric of Vannes, and then the archbishopric of Vienne, he was one of the stouter defenders of the policy of concord during the assembly of Fontainebleau. In a celebrated speech there, he called for the reformation of the ecclesiastical abuses and a national council. His pessimistic vision of the English Church did not stem from a potential intransigence, but from a rejection of tyranny, and the refusal to endorse the total usurpation of ecclesiastical affairs by temporal power. For the moderate Gallicans the English example was revealing of the ineluctable degeneration of a State Church into arbitrariness and chaos. This counter-example stood as a warning against the development of events in France itself. The monarchy had already violated the liberties of the Church in obtaining from the Pope the nomination to the major benefices. It must not be allowed to go any further and usurp new powers lest France be plunged in the same tyranny as England.

This fear was expressed during the Gallican crisis of 1551. Because of the alliance between Pope Julius III and the Emperor against Henri II's clients the Farnese, the King threatened to break all contacts with Rome and to establish a patriarchate in France. The Gallican Church had not been so close to schism since the distant time of Louis XII and Julius II. The circles that were most hostile to pontifical absolutism, however, did not seem to be pleased. The cardinal Jean Du Bellay had been the staunchest defender of the Gallican liberties and of royal power in the face of the Pope throughout the reign of Francis I, and was one of the architects of dialogue with the German Protestants.<sup>37</sup> Sent to Rome at the beginning of the reign of Henri II, he showed himself to be a merciless critique of pontifical abuses, all

---

<sup>37</sup> See A. Kess.

the while rejecting all proposals of reform emanating from the Pope. One could have expected a stauncher support for Henri II in his struggle against the Pope from the caustic patron of Rabelais. On the contrary, in August 1551, at the heart of the crisis, the cardinal moved away from the court 'so that he cannot be a witness to the events that will unfold', and all the while blaming Julius III for the conflict, he shared his concerns: 'Even if the intention of the king was not to leave the obedience of the Church, but only Julio its minister, I can see clearly what will unfold in the end. The beginning in England was slow, even less rash than what is here proposed, but the end was such that can be found today'.<sup>38</sup> The comparison between the English and the Anglican situation, far from encouraging a rapprochement, on the contrary inspired fear of an evolution on the English model.

This wholesale rejection of the English experience was manifested through fundamental differences between the two national churches: for the Gallicans, the role of the monarchy had to remain within the limits of common law and Catholic tradition. The liberties of the Church were indeed threatened by pontifical absolutism, but it was inadmissible to fight it by surrendering blindly to royal absolutism. If opposition to the second form of absolutism was more discreet, it was none the less resolute. The Gallican *via media* had to take it into account: if it relied on a certain autonomy of the national Churches to put an end to the religious crisis, it was unthinkable that this autonomy should be at the cost of allowing the temporal powers to conflate Church and State. This idea shone through clearly in the defence of the jurisdiction of the great French abbeys in all Christendom that Paul de Foix, who was ambassador in Rome, submitted to Pope Gregory XIII. The Pope like the king of Spain wished to create independent congregations in Italy and in the Iberian peninsula. For Paul de Foix, Gregory XIII ran the risk of creating a dangerous precedent: the princes would 'put an end at last to the spiritual state which limit their temporal state and bring about a situation

---

<sup>38</sup> Du Bellay J., Letter to de Mannes, [Le Mans], 18 August 1551, *Revue de la Renaissance*, 1903, t. 4,

where there will be as many spiritual leaders as there are temporal kingdoms'. The Pope had to remind 'the princes and people that if they were distinct and separate in the temporal sphere, they were conjoined united and common in the spiritual sphere, namely in Jesus Christ, and in the bosom of our mother the Holy Church, and in the Christian and Catholic Faith, in their obedience to the Holy apostolic See'. Even in times of temporal conflicts, this spiritual union remained.<sup>39</sup> Beyond the usual arguments, Paul de Foix gave a clear example of a Gallican conception that was at the opposite of the 'anti-universalism' that is usually attributed to him.<sup>40</sup> It was necessary to preserve the 'amiable concert of the Church', according to the quaint formula of a convinced Gallican parlementaire, Louis Servin.<sup>41</sup> Each national Church played its instrument and read from its song sheet, but it had to stay within the orchestra. This harmony would be broken if the national Churches, transformed in State Churches, introduced drastic political differences in the spiritual domain.

But for the Gallicans the unity of the Church was guaranteed by Rome. Indeed, the ambitions of the pontifical power had to be contained, because they were at the origin of the crisis. In 1594, Antoine Hotman had this paradoxical idea: the more freedom a Church managed to keep, the more Rome was assured of its obedience:

A regulated submission is the more secure, and the firmer the limits and guards of the superior power are, the less likely they are to be shaken. France is a prime example as it always remained firm in its reverence towards the holy see of Rome, when many other nations, who had subjected themselves to a blind obedience, as if ashamed of their abject condition, have turned rebellious and have shaken off the yoke of obedience through a servile treachery. It is always better to deal with those who are honest, free and in possession of their

---

p. 176-177.

<sup>39</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France, Fr. 16.044, fol. 45, Paul de Foix to the King, Rome, 5 March 1582.

<sup>40</sup> See the vision of Gallicanism that underwrites the work of Donald R. Kelley, (1984) *History, Law and the Human Sciences. Medieval and Renaissance Perspectives*, Londres, Variorum Reprints, notably "Civil Science in the Renaissance : Jurisprudence in the French Manner", p. 270-272 and "The Development and Context of Bodin's Method", p. 135.

rights than with serfs and slaves, who only do they duty as long as strength and fear constrain them.’<sup>42</sup>

The Gallican liberty was for Hotman a precious gift for the whole of Christendom, since it provided an opportunity for the Churches that had been duped through a ‘servile treachery’ to take once more an honourable place in the bosom of the universal Church.

The various Gallican projects of concord offered a great diversity, from an agreement with the Protestants on essential points of dogma to simple measures of disciplinary reforms for the clergy. These projects emanated from competing institutions, that were defiant of each other, the monarchy, certain parliamentarians, members of the clergy, and so on. All, however, were secure in the knowledge that the ancient order of the Church, the only guarantor of concord, resided in the respect of the liberties of the national Churches, at once by the Pope and by temporal power, and in the continuation of a communion between these national Churches through the recognition of the spiritual primacy of the pontiff. This conviction anchored Gallicanism firmly within a forward looking Catholic Church, representing one of its incarnations and mirrored in its own way its great developments, at once preventing it from evolving towards the Reformation, but also from transforming itself into a possible *via media*, despite the hopes of the partisans of concord. The discourse of the latter should not be transformed anachronistically in an ecumenical project; nor did it constitute a form of ecclesiological nicodemism, masking a *de facto* adherence to the Reformation; lastly it was not the mark of a critical Catholicism that refused all forms of dogmatic strait-jacketing. It should be interpreted as nothing more than what it pretended to be: a discourse of loyalty to tradition, which had its rightful place in the Roman Church, and even, over the years, in the Tridentine Church.

---

<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Thou J.-A. de (1734), *Histoire universelle*, Londres, t. 14, p. 122.

<sup>42</sup> Hotman A., *Traicté des droicts Ecclesiastiques, privilèges et Libertez de l'Église Gallicane*, dans Gillot J. éd., *op. cit.*, p. 307.

