

Middle Parties in France during the Wars of Religion

In speaking of a middle party or parties during the sixteenth century, we should not imagine organized political parties or churches endowed with clearly defined platforms. Instead, we are speaking of currents of opinion that attracted the adherence of men of good will from diverse milieux, notably jurists, theologians, statesmen, and writers, eager to maintain civic peace and religious concord. In this essay, these 'middle parties' will be defined broadly, but it will be our goal to clarify historically the precise intentions and actions of those who composed them in specific contexts over the course of the Wars of Religion. From the start, we shall assign to them those who worked for peace and refused to take up arms in pursuit of this goal.

Concord Between Catholics and Protestants: The Precedents

Well before the Wars of Religion, Erasmus's 1533 *De sarcienda Ecclesiae concordia* had already begun to inspire a current of opinion that sought a *via media* and worked for religious reconciliation.¹ In 1534, Francis I sought to arrange an encounter between certain Sorbonne theologians and a number of partisans of the Augsburg Confession, taking care to choose from both camps those known to be moderate. To arrange the parley, he turned to the Du Bellay brothers, known for their attachment both to the Catholic Church and to the French crown: Jean, the bishop of Paris, elevated to the cardinalate in 1535, and Guillaume, then in the midst of a brilliant military career that would lead him to be named governor of Turin in 1537.² From the Protestant side Francis hoped to attract Melanchthon, Martin Bucer and Jean Sturm. The 'affair of the Placards' and the refusal of the Elector of Saxony to permit Melanchthon to leave for Paris prevented this parley from taking place, but the project demonstrates the existence from this early date of a concern to resolve the emerging religious differences through conciliation.

Around the same years, a group was taking shape within the Roman Church, led by cardinals Lorenzo Campeggio, Reginald Pole (*Pro ecclesiasticae unitatis defensione*, 1534-36), and Gasparo Contarini, that sought reconciliation with the Lutherans and was even willing to make doctrinal concessions on points as important as the issue of

¹ See here Turchetti, 'Erasme'.

² Turchetti, 'Bellay'.

justification. Although opposed by a group of intransigents led by Johannes Eck, these men were able to rally others to their point of view, including Johannes Gropper and Julius Pflug. Within the Protestant world, Melanchthon, Bucer, Johannes Becker (Pistorius) and Caspar Creutzinger (Cruciger) corresponded regularly with one another about the possibilities of concord. After several years of preliminary negotiations between these groups about the theological and political matters at issue, an interconfessional colloquy was called for Speyer in 1539. Begun at Hagenau in June 1540, continued at Worms in October, resumed once more in Regensburg in January 1541, this sequence of discussions involved Eck, Gropper, Pflug, Contarini, Melanchthon, Bucer, and Pistorius. Despite the efforts of Gropper and Pflug, who had carefully prepared a doctrinal statement known as the 'Regensburg book', and despite the good will that Contarini displayed with his 'Epistola de justificatione' of 25 May 1541, Charles V finally had to conclude that these efforts were a failure. Their partisans did not give up hope, however. A second colloquy was called for Regensburg in 1546. These efforts formed the background to the 1548 Augsburg Interim that Charles V sought to impose on the Empire to preserve its confessional unity, a solution that he phrased (in a formula that would subsequently be repeated frequently in France) as a temporary measure 'until the conclusion of the general council'. In 1557 Erasmus's disciple Georg Witzel, another partisan of reconciliation whose earlier *Dialogus de conciliis* (1534) and *Methodus concordiae ecclesiasticae* (1537) were among the most compelling statements of a middle way — or as he called it a *via regia* — sought to bring his efforts to fruition at another colloquy in Worms.³

Concord Among Protestants

On the Protestant side, the attempts to unify the many local churches that had instituted Reformations around common confessions of faith may also be regarded to a certain extent as expressions of a concern for concord. To be sure, the drafting of confessions, by defining the essentials of a faith, also served to exclude from potential agreements those who could not accept them, and thus contributed to the fracturing of Protestantism between Lutherans and Reformed. At the same time, these confessions were typically conceived by those who drafted them as a means to rally evangelicals around a single banner and to demonstrate that the differences of opinion among Protestant theologians that appeared from the very first years of the Reformation onward were not so great as to exclude common agreement among them. The chain of such efforts ran from the drafting of the Augsburg and Tetrapolitan confessions in 1530, through the 1536 Wittenberg Concord and First Helvetic Confession, to the 1549 Consensus Tigurinus, the 1566 Second Helvetic Confession, the 1577 Formula of Concord, and the 1581 Harmonia Confessionum. This type of concord excluded the Catholics. Its partisans expected their conversion to the true faith of the Reformation.

³ Christin, *Paix de religion*, offers an interesting comparative examination of the efforts to establish religious peace in the Empire, Switzerland, and France.

It is important to see that for some time Calvin and Beza could have appeared to contemporaries in France as promoting the cause of mediation among Protestants as well. As people at the time recognized, Calvin's 1541 *Petit traité de la Cène* represented a middle position on the eucharistic question between Luther's doctrine of a real presence and Zwingli's symbolic understanding of the sacrament. The moderate Erasmian Claude d'Espence noted that 'Calvin walked down the middle between Luther and Zwingli, in accord with Oecolampadius', while the redoubtable Catholic polemicist Claude de Sainctes spoke of Calvin's 'media sententia'.⁴ Calvin also signed both the Augsburg Confession and the Zwinglian Consensus Tigurinus. In 1557, Beza drafted a 'Confessio de Coena' in preparation for the interconfessional gatherings in Frankfurt and Worms that sought to persuade the German Lutheran princes that the Reformed did not disagree fundamentally with the Augsburg Confession on the issue of the eucharist, and that they should consequently intervene with Henry II on behalf of the persecuted Waldensians of Piedmont. Copies were sent to duke Christopher of Württemberg and the elector Palatine Otto-Henry, while not a word was said to Bullinger and the other pastors of Zurich. They nonetheless got wind of the document and quickly reproached Beza for lifting elements from the Augsburg Confession, even as Lutheran theologians criticized him for relying too heavily on the Consensus Tigurinus.⁵ In these efforts, Calvin and Beza were attempting above all to rally political assistance. Calvin saw that his eucharistic views differed from both Zwingli's and Luther's and believed that his were the only ones that could work in France. As late as 1557, he and Beza could nonetheless seem to be pursuing mediating efforts. Calvin would subsequently clarify his distinctive position on the question of the eucharist and draw closer to the Zwinglians than the Lutherans, while still keeping his distance from the former as well.

Calvin a Theologian of Concord?

In another way as well Calvin was associated with a moderate, if not actively mediating, position in the late 1550s. The model of reform that he was pursuing, so he told his Catholic critics, was not one of novelty, but one of restoring the early Church as it existed at the time of Chrysostom, Basil, Cyprian, and Augustine. He first took up this subject in 1539, notably in his *Response* to Jacopo Sadoletto, and clarified in the successive editions of the *Institutes* from 1541 onward. The Church of the first five centuries after Christ, the era of the councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, and the first council of Ephesus, was explicitly designated as a model, although of course the decrees of these councils, like the writings of the fathers, had to be measured against the touchstone of Scripture.

⁴ D'Espence, 'De eucharistiae adoratione', in *Opera*, 1193-7; De Sainctes, *Examen*, fos. 3-5.

⁵ *Correspondance de Th. de Bèze*, II, 71, 75, 79, 243ff., 251ff; Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 169-70.

From 1557 to early 1562: The 'Moyenneurs' Pursue Conciliation

Calvin's apparently middle-of-the-road policy attracted the attention of a number of partisans of reconciliation who subsequently would play a central role in seeking an accord to bind up the divisions that were beginning to widen in France. Alongside the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic theologians who trekked to Worms, several 'moderati homines' also made the voyage to explore the possibilities of their programs of concord. Among these were the Cologne theologian Georg Cassander and the exiled French jurist François Baudouin. After meeting in Worms, these two soon began to work together, especially after Baudouin was encouraged in this cause by Melancthon.⁶ Baudouin's letters to Cassander of autumn 1561 reveal their goals.⁷ France, he explained, was then divided into three parties. On one side were the intransigent Catholics, called 'papists' by their enemies, led by the cardinal of Tournon, certain noblemen, and some monks and abbots. On the other were the 'Huguenots or Calvinists or innovators' whose political leader was 'that rash one' the prince of Condé, backed by 'a large part of the nobility of middling rank, most of whom want to seize the goods of the Church after the example of England'. 'In the third place,' Baudouin continued, there was 'the order of the moderates and pacifiers who, while recognizing the need to bring corrections into the Church, disapprove of the excesses of the new preachers'. 'They seek a council in order to reestablish the Church in accord with the norms of scripture and the early Church, introducing a minimum of changes and conserving the vestiges of antiquity as much as possible'. At the same time, they were seeking the best way to 'bring back to Christian concord and unity those of one or the other party, or at least the best (*saniores*) among them'. Among the ranks of those in this third party, Baudouin placed those with the highest position in the kingdom, the king of Navarre and Catherine de Medici, as well as the bishop of Valence Jean de Monluc, the chancellor Michel de L'Hospital, certain royal councillors including Paul de Foix, and some Sorbonne theologians including d'Espence and Jean de Salignac. The cardinal of Lorraine, he continued, was very close to them. However far-fetched this last claim would have appeared the Huguenots who identified the house of Lorraine as the evil demon behind all opposition to the true faith, Baudouin in fact collaborated with the cardinal of Lorraine in 1561 on the drafting of a 'Memorandum' that displays an earnest concern for concord and considerable charity toward the 'heretics'.⁸

In October 1561, a sharp battle of polemics broke out between Calvin and Baudouin, whom the Genevan reformer wrongly believed to be the author of the anonymous short treatise *On the Duty of the Pious Man* in fact written by Cassander.⁹ Calvin's first shot against Baudouin, quickly translated from Latin into French under the caustic title *Response à un cauteleux et rusé moyenneur*,¹⁰ forged the new term

⁶ Melancthon to Baudouin, Worms 8 October 1557, *Corpus Reformatorum*, IX, 328.

⁷ Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 264-8.

⁸ Turchetti, 'Confession d'Augsbourg'.

⁹ Cassander, *De officio*.

¹⁰ Calvin, 'Responsio ad versipellem quendam mediatorem', in Calvin, *Opera*, IX, 529-60; French translation: *Response à un cauteleux et rusé moyenneur* (s.l., 1561).

announced in its title and applied it to those who do not 'show themselves openly to be enemies of God's truth' but instead fell between two chairs and feigned sympathy for the truth out of worldly motives.¹¹ For their part, those attacked under this label ruefully discovered that Calvin had changed in position in a manner detrimental to their hopes for concord. Where earlier Calvin had claimed to model his work as a Church reformer on the Church of the first four or five centuries, he now limited the time span during which the Church had preserved its original purity to barely two centuries, evidently fearing that any longer period would facilitate the achievement of a compromise with the Catholics at the colloquy of Poissy that he did not want. He urged Beza for that parley to restrict himself to the first 160 years of the Church insofar as the question of images was concerned, to accept only practices concerning other matters from the first two centuries of the Church, and to consider only the first ecumenical council of Nicaea (325 a.d.) as a valid Church council.¹² His conviction about this last point was hardening at just this moment. Strikingly, the Nicaean council would also be inscribed as authoritative in the Edict of January.¹³

The Provisional Character of the Edict of January

The Edict of January represented a double setback for the *moyenneurs*, insofar as it marked a rejection of their program for reuniting the confessions and instead gave a measure of legitimacy to the existence of several religions in the kingdom, the very antithesis of concord. Where they had hoped that the colloquy of Poissy might lead to the gulf between the confessions being repaired, instead the failure of the parley only led to an edict that ratified it, one that created a situation of civil and judicial toleration that was very different from what the *moyenneurs* had sought. It can never be repeated too often, however, that this was only a provisional measure that was to be revoked once the situation of 'urgent necessity' in which the kingdom found itself had passed. In registering the edict on 6 March 1562 and thus giving it the full force of law, the Parlement of Paris specifically indicated that it did so:

recognizing the king's letters patent dated the first of this month, the urgent necessity of the moment, and obeying the will of the aforesaid lord the king ... without approving of the new religion; provisionally, and until the aforesaid lord the king orders otherwise.¹⁴

¹¹ Calvin to Coligny, Geneva 24 September 1561, Calvin, *Opera*, XVIII, 732.

¹² Calvin to Beza, Geneva 15 October 1561, 18 February 1562 in *Correspondance de Th. de Bèze*, III, 189; IV, 28, 49. Cf. Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 535.

¹³ 'Edict du Roy' in *Mémoires de Condé* (London, 1743), III, 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21. Cf. Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 415. It is worth noting in passing that the massacre of Vassy took place on 1 March 1562, prior to the registration of the edict. This does not minimize the gravity of the deed, but it does cast an interesting light on the arguments subsequently advanced by the Huguenots to justify their taking up of arms.

It was precisely the provisional nature of the edict that enabled the *moyenneurs* to keep the faith and to continue to pursue their goal of reunion. Nevertheless, they could not help noticing that one of the statesmen responsible for the edict — indeed, perhaps its chief architect — had once been one of their own, Michel de L'Hospital. At the opening of the colloquy of Poissy on 9 September 1561, L'Hospital had still appeared to share their views.¹⁵ He implored the assembled Catholic prelates not to 'condemn out of prejudgement ... those said to be of the new religion, who are baptized Christians like they are'. On the contrary, they should 'call them and seek them out repeatedly, not closing any doors to them but instead receiving them in all mildness'.¹⁶ Here, he was advocating a toleration close in character to clemency and different from civil and judicial toleration, based upon charity toward 'those who had strayed' so that they might be reintegrated into the holy mother Church, a characteristic of the Erasmian program of concord that was taken up by the *moyenneurs* and was particularly dear to the profoundly religious Cassander. L'Hospital was also a man of faith, even if a statesman as well.

L'Hospital subsequently moved away from this Erasmianism to accept the temporary division of the kingdom among more than one religion. In the history of the rise of civic toleration, 3 January 1562 is a memorable date. On that day the chancellor declared his willingness to accept a diversity of religion that had been anathema to him just weeks previously. He explained that it 'is not a question of the constitution of religion but of the constitution of the republic ... and some can be citizens who are not Christians'.¹⁷ In thus distinguishing between the political and the religious spheres, the chancellor assigned the task of resolving the conflict to the former. His ideas may seem to us today admirably modern; at the time they seemed disconcerting, not simply to those who were pursuing attempts at religious reunification, but also to those most attached to France's institutions and traditions, such as the jurist-historian Etienne Pasquier, one of the most even-handed political observers of the day. Pasquier attributed the concessions made to the Reformed in the edict of January to the crown's dissimulation and connivence with the Huguenots and branded 'the exercise of two different religions ... in the same city, ... even in the capital city of France' as 'debauchery'.¹⁸

L'Hospital's new position suggests that alongside the *moyenneurs* a second middle party or current of opinion took shape from 1562 onward, one which gave priority to civic interests above religious considerations. The foundation of the edict of January and of the chancellor's declarations about toleration of this era was the conviction that keeping the peace justified the temporary suspension of the principle of religious unity.

¹⁵ Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 256n.

¹⁶ *Histoire ecclésiastique des églises réformées*, I, 501ff; Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 252-9.

¹⁷ *Mémoires de Condé* (London, 1743) II, 612.

¹⁸ Pasquier, *Lettres historiques*, 78; Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 397-400.

Knowing the subsequent course of events, the impatient historian might be tempted to believe that the various components of what would later come to be known as the 'politique party' were already in place by 1562. Indeed, many historians have succumbed to this temptation and labelled L'Hospital the father of the politiques. But explaining the writings and legislation of a given moment by facts posterior to them in time, even if by only a few years, hardly qualifies as the best of historical methods. Let us try to see just how contemporaries thought about toleration in 1562.

As has been stressed, the edict of January presented its concessions as temporary ones. Not only was this a condition on which the Parlement of Paris insisted when it registered the edict after publishing its remonstrances and a month and a half of delay.¹⁹ The chancellor inserted into the edict a clause that declared that its measures were taken 'to maintain our subjects in peace and concord, while waiting for God to permit us in his grace to reunite them and restore them to the same sheepfold, which is our sole desire and chief intention'. The edict's measures were 'provisional, pending the determination of a general council or other orders from us'.²⁰ To lose sight of the provisional character of the edict would be to transform L'Hospital into a partisan of a pure form of toleration that departed definitively from any hopes of concord. One man did take such a step in 1562, but it was not L'Hospital. It was Sebastian Castellio, when in October 1562 he elaborated the third stage of his evolving theory of toleration.²¹

In calling upon the authorities 'to permit two Churches in France', Castellio's *Conseil à la France désolée* argued from the principle that it was wrong to force people to violate their consciences.²² This argument of Castellio's might be called a principle of pure toleration, since it applied to adherents of all beliefs, not simply to specified sects or churches. Calvin and Beza rained insults down on Castellio for precisely this aspect of his thought, writing of him that he 'counsels that any one may believe what he wish, thereby opening the door to all kinds of heresies and false doctrines'.²³

Given the general acceptance by historians of the claim that the Reformed were also fighting for tolerance in France, Calvin and Beza's opposition to Castellio's arguments might seem surprising. But the tolerance that the Reformed sought was of a very different character from that advocated by Castellio or L'Hospital. Only a very few open-minded spirits in the Low Countries such as Dirk Coornhert were willing to embrace Castellio's principle of pure toleration founded on moral and humanitarian principles. Calvin in turn argued against Coornhert in his *Response à un certain hollandois* that his principles 'permit them to pollute their bodies in all forms of idolatry'.²⁴ The goal of the Reformed in France was to convert the kingdom to the true faith. The toleration that the

¹⁹ *Remonstrances faictes au Roy de France*; Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 400ff.

²⁰ 'Edict du Roy', in *Mémoires de Condé* (London, 1743) III, 11.

²¹ Turchetti, 'Calvin', 46.

²² [Castellio], *Conseil*, 53.

²³ Beza, 'Vie de Calvin', in Calvin, *Opera* XXI, 85.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

edict of January granted them was thus also provisional in their eyes, until such time as their work of proselytization and the spread of the Gospel would accomplish this final conversion. Pierre Viret's counsel to the faithful makes this clear:

It is true that the faithful would prefer that there was no such interim measure, which gives idolators and the superstitious license and liberty to live entirely as they please, and that they would wish instead that all were well united in the true religion. But since this cannot be obtained at once, and since they know that idolators and the superstitious cannot be attracted by force but must be won over by good doctrine and good example, they are content to wait and put up with the situation with mildness and good will.²⁵

It should also be recalled that the existence of popery alongside the true religion offended Calvin and Beza on theological and ecclesiological grounds, since 'there can be no participation of justice with iniquity, nor of light with the darkness, nor of Christ with Belial, nor the faithful with the unfaithful, nor finally God's temple with idols'.²⁶

This review of the different positions that existed at the time on the issue of toleration helps us to discern more clearly the variety of currents of opinion among the middle parties. Only Castellio was willing definitively to renounce the ideal of ultimate religious concord. L'Hospital preferred concord to tolerance but was willing to accept a provisional measure of toleration to avoid war, as he still thought was possible in January 1562. The *moyenneurs* continued to believe that one or several inter-confessional discussions might produce a reconciliation without recourse to toleration being necessary. The goal of reconciliation continued to be pursued by both of these latter groups even after the edict of January was signed on the 17th of that month. The queen mother and her entourage also continued to work for this goal, as is suggested by the further discussions that she organized among theologians, including Beza, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye between 28 January and 11 February 1562. These are further evidence that the Edict of January did not represent a definitive shift in policy and was not believed to be a lasting solution to the problem of religious division.

Freedom of Conscience and Freedom of Religion

The edict of Amboise that ended the First Civil War contained an important new element for a royal edict: it recognized the principle of freedom of conscience. As its third article specified, 'each person may live freely in their house anywhere without being investigated, bothered, forced, or constrained for reason of their conscience'. This was a landmark measure, even if it must be noted that its recognition of liberty

²⁵ Viret, *Interim*, 402; De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, 134.

²⁶ De l'Espine, *Discours*, 22; Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 259-61.

of conscience did not bring along with it an equally generous recognition of the somewhat different principle of freedom of religion, i.e. the right to practice one's religion's collective rites of worship. Reformed worship was only permitted on the lands of 'all gentlemen who are barons, castellans, exercise rights of high justice, or are lords holding *plein fief de haubert*', who were allowed by the edict to 'live in the house in which they reside in freedom of their consciences and exercise of the religion they call Reformed'.²⁷ At the same time, religious concord, or as the text declared, the reconciliation of the 'wills of our subjects in union', remained the crown's chief concern. Once again, the tolerance granted was framed as provisional, 'hoping that time, the fruits of a good, holy, free, and general or national council, and the force of our approaching majority' would bring this union. Charles would attain his majority in 1564; the text was thus pledging his commitment to the cause of conciliation as well as looking to the Council of Trent for the solution.

The edict of Amboise was received better than the edict of January, a year of warfare having strengthened the attractions of peace. Although the subsequent four years of peace were hardly untroubled, they also prompted a number of Frenchmen to reflect further about issues of concord and toleration. Some, concerned about religious sentiment in general, suggested that the firm establishment of toleration prevented the development of atheism. This was the argument of the *Brief discours sur l'estat present, et des moyens pour remedier aux troubles qu'on peut craindre cy après*. According to this treatise, the provisional nature of the tolerance granted by the edict of Amboise had the unfortunate effect of inciting people to remain neutral on the debated religious issues. Many seek 'to retain and confirm men in doubt and to prevent them from declaring for one party or the other, saying that the edict of pacification is only a provisional edict, or at least was received as such by the parlement with certain secret restrictions such that the edict could not long endure'. The resulting state of mind was harmful for society and for religion.

Hence I conclude that to maintain the kingdom in peace and tranquility, three points are chiefly necessary, to establish freedom of religion well and firmly and to remove all doubt and mistrust about it, to have both religions publicly exercised everywhere and to forbid neutrality ... in order to avoid the abovementioned ill consequences, especially that of atheism, and finally to create a chamber within each parlement not suspect [of partiality] by the members of either religion.²⁸

These considerations of a cultivated individual attentive to social problems, concerned about preserving religious commitment independently of the specific confession chosen and seeking to avoid war, can be taken to place their author in a middle party.

²⁷ *Receuil général*, 136.

²⁸ *Brief discours*, 25-9. This work is discussed in the fundamental study of De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, 182ff.

Religious Union and Concord

Another theme expressed in the writings of this era is what might be called the pacifist message that fratricidal conflict was the very antithesis of Christ's teachings. The anonymous theologian who wrote *Les louanges et recommandations de la Paix* reminded his readers that Jesus 'required forcefully of his followers (that is to say Christians) among other things that they be one with him, just as he was with his Father'. He likened civil war to parricide, and urged his audience in conclusion, 'Examine and consider carefully all his doctrine, and you will not find anything in it anywhere that does denote friendship or mean charity'.²⁹

More peremptory yet was Jean Vauquelin de La Fresnaye's poem *Pour la Monarchie de ce Royaume contre la division*:

The radiating light of one sun
Fructifies the earth entire...
Two suns with too burning heat
Would thwart the cultivator's hope:
Just so, it is said, two princes
Would serve no better than two suns.
And we French, as we unite
To one sole God whom we bless,
So too to one sole king must we unite
And bless him eternally without quarrel.³⁰

One sun, one king, one faith: the nostalgic refrain runs constantly through the writings of the time.

Certain authors of the period criticized the government's religious policies as too conciliatory even while remaining in the middle groups. Such criticisms turned sharp in the vigorous brief against the terms of the edict of Amboise written by Jean Bégat, a president of the parlement of Burgundy. His *Remonstrances faictes au Roy de France par les Députés des Trois Estats du Pays et Duché de Bourgogne sur l'édit de Pacification*³¹ declared that the coexistence of two religions was incompatible with the kingdom's traditions, while multiplying historical examples that sought to prove that the coexistence of more than one religion always produced terrible and irreversible conflict. The Dijon Parlement was forced by the king and queen mother to register the edict over its objections in May 1563, and Bégat's arguments begat a refutation, the *Apologie de l'Edit du Roy sur la pacification de son Royaume, contre les Remonstrances des estats de Bourgogne*. The author of this tract stressed that the edict was dictated by necessity and that 'permission is not approval'. Just as the king granted this permission to prevent a greater evil, so it should not be doubted that he would ultimately revoke it.³² His reply in turn inspired Bégat to pen one of the

²⁹ *Louanges*, Aii-Aiii.

³⁰ *Pour la Monarchie*, 21.

³¹ *Mémoires de Condé* (London, 1743) IV, 356ff.

³² *Apologie de l'Edit*, 21-3; De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, 181.

period's most vigorous and profound reflections about religious concord, the *Response pour les Deputés des trois estats du Pays de Bourgogne*. Deploying a series of historical, juridical, moral, and political arguments, Bégat argued that the toleration of two religions ran counter to the interests of the crown and would ultimately impede its exercise of power. Bégat was one of those who grasped that the question of tolerance was essentially a political issue. He can be seen as the exponent of still another current of ideas within the middle parties.

An Initial Balance Sheet

The analysis of tracts of this period whose arguments amply merit the historian's attention and which display the many currents of thought flowing into the efforts of the middle parties could be pursued at much greater length. To summarize matters briefly, let us simply group the diverse currents of this period into three broad tendencies: (1.) the partisans of a definitive granting of religious toleration that can properly be called 'freedom of religion' in its most generous formulations, inspired above all by the concern to maintain peace within the kingdom but also for some by the fear that continued uncertainty about the limits of permissible religious practice would encourage atheism (the author of the *Brief discours* and Castelleio can both be placed within this tendency, their differences notwithstanding); (2.) the advocates of a provisional toleration such as that pursued by the crown, backed by vigorous efforts to reestablish concord once passions had cooled and a free general or national council had done its work (the authors of *Louanges pour la Paix* and the *Apologie de l'Edit* as well as L'Hospital); and (3.) the *moyenneurs* who pursued concord through the means of interconfessional parleys and an internal reform of the Catholic Church as the necessary preliminary to national reconciliation (Baudouin, d'Espence, Jean de Monluc, Paul de Foix,³³ and even Bégat, once again despite his evident differences from the others).

The Conference of Paris and the Edict of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés

The continued influence of this last group on Catherine de Medici's policies is shown by two important events of the second half of the 1560s: the Conference of Paris of July-August 1566, and the edict of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés of September 1568.³⁴ The first, a debate about such contested issues as the eucharist between Simon Vigor and Claude de Saintes for the Catholic side and Jean de L'Espine and Hugues Sureau du Rosier for the Reformed, demonstrates that the search for a theological solution to the religious division had not been abandoned despite the failure of the earlier colloquies of 1561-1562 and offers still further grounds for accepting the statements of the edicts of pacification and their defenders that toleration was a provisional strategy

³³ On whom see Smith, 'Paul de Foix'.

³⁴ Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 396ff, 409ff, 443, 575ff, 590, highlights the continuity of Catherine's policies throughout these years.

while concord remained the ultimate goal. It implied reciprocal concessions from both Churches on points of doctrine and discipline.³⁵

The edict of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés may repay more extended discussion, since it has been largely neglected by historians.³⁶ This was in fact two edicts, signed on the same day, 25 september 1568, and ratified by the Parlement of Paris three days later. The first according to Jean de Serres was 'cried throughout the city by a herald of arms of France', who noted that 'never was an edict or even a peace treaty so rapidly published, nor with greater ceremoniousness'.³⁷ If the Parlement was so quick to embrace it, this was because it was no edict of toleration, but an edict of concord. It was also unique in being presented as the expression of the will of a king who had finally attained political maturity and begun to assert his own will. The preamble offers a lengthy history of the crown's previous efforts to 'preserve unity and repress division of religion'.³⁸ According to this account, 'the protectors of the new opinion ... being the strongest in our privy council' in January 1562 sought to

attain their goal, as they did, of the toleration of the exercise of the two religions by our provisional edict given on 17 January 1561 [1562 n.s.], which our aforesaid honoured lady and mother, being at the time of the weaker party, was constrained to allow, against her opinion which has always been most Christian.

The same constraints were said to have weighed on the other members of the council such as the cardinals of Bourbon and Tournon, the duke of Montmorency, and the marshal Saint-André:

who, among other considerations that moved them to tolerate the above noted, advised our aforesaid honoured lady and mother that this was the least evil thing that could be done at the time, seeing that the exercise of the aforesaid new opinion would remain entirely outside the cities; and that it was necessary to hope that we would remedy this evil when we had attained greater age, authority, and power.

The edict of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés then became the accomplishment of this intention. 'We accorded them [the earlier edicts] being still of young age,' Charles IX declared; now that God has 'of this hour given [us] the age, understanding, and judgement necessary to govern ourself', matters would be different.

³⁵ *Actes de la Conference*; Soulié, 'Conférence de Paris'.

³⁶ I have tried to emphasize its importance in Turchetti, 'Concorde ou tolérance?', 344ff, and 'Nota su Bodin'.

³⁷ De Serres, *Memoires*, 221.

³⁸ I have used the version published by Delaborde, *Coligny*, III, 529-30.

³⁹ The long tradition of presenting the edict of Nantes as being unique in containing this clause still lives on. See Garrisson, *Edit de Nantes et sa Révocation*; idem, *Edit de Nantes. Chronique*.

For these reasons ... we have by a perpetual and irrevocable edict forbidden and prohibited and do forbid and prohibit, on pain of seizure of one's person and goods, any person of any dignity, condition, and status whatsoever living in our kingdom and the lands under our authority, all exercise of a religion other than the Catholic and Roman, which we hold, as did the kings who preceded us.

The qualification of this order reestablishing a single religion in the kingdom as 'perpetual and irrevocable' is noteworthy, for this was the first edict about religious matters of the civil wars to include this phrase, destined subsequently to become famous in debates about the edict of Nantes.³⁹ This was also the first of the edicts of concord that would subsequently alternate with the edicts of toleration.⁴⁰

Can this measure be viewed as part of the efforts of the middle parties to restore religious unity? Rather than seeking to achieve this goal through interconfessional discussion and an internal reform of the Church so as to make it more attractive to those who had left it, the goal of the *moyenneurs*, the edict of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés simply tried to impose unity by constraint, in the manner of England's Acts of Uniformity of 1549, 1552, 1559, and 1562 (although without specifying precise points of doctrine as they did). It did not call into question the prior granting of freedom of conscience⁴¹ and urged the kingdom's bishops to take 'great care' to ensure that 'our subjects of the aforesaid so-called religion might return to and reunite with our other subjects in the unity of the holy Catholic Church'. Nonetheless, lacking any encouragement of the internal reform of that Church, and since those who prepared it knew that it would stiffen the opposition of the Huguenots, who had already taken up arms for the Third Civil War, it does not seem appropriate to insert it among the efforts of the middle parties. It should further be noted that L'Hospital was not among those who drafted it, for he had left the court on 24 May 1568.⁴² This conclusion is of importance for properly situating the subsequent efforts of the so-called *politiques*.

1568-1598: The Politiques among the Middle Parties

The historical investigation of the origin and character of the 'politique party' has to date been far from satisfactory.⁴³ As Edmond M. Beame has recently shown, interpretative traditions have accumulated that have done far more to confuse the issue than to clarify it.⁴⁴ Relying far more on some critical primary sources than on these accu-

⁴⁰ This alternation is a theme of my 'Religious Concord'.

⁴¹ 'Nonetheless we do not intend or desire that those of the aforesaid so-called reformed religion are in any way investigated for their beliefs, provided that there is no exercise of any religion other than the roman catholic'.

⁴² On that date Jean de Morvillier, bishop of Orléans, was named keeper of the seals in his stead. On this moderate Catholic, see Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza?*, 204, 328.

⁴³ The standard work remains De Crue, *Parti des politiques*.

⁴⁴ Beame, 'Politiques'. See also Bettinson, 'Politiques'.

mulated traditions, I shall try here simply to indicate what seem to be some basic contours of the situation, focussing on three critical dates: 1568, 1575, and 1588.

1568: The Appearance of the Word

The year 1568 appears to have been a critical moment in which the political currents that would persist to the end of the century took shape. Among the intransigent Catholics, new militant confraternities and leagues emerged in this year, most importantly the confraternity of the Holy Cross and the league of the Holy Spirit. Among the irreducible Protestants, hostility was mounting by the summer as rumours circulated that the Catholic army was being reinforced. By late August, civil war was underway, a full month before the promulgation of the edict of Saint-Maur-des-Fossés that Huguenot propaganda would subsequently designate as the reason for their taking up of arms. At this moment, the word 'politique' appears in a declaration of the prince of Condé's, his *Remonstrances et requestes envoyées au Roy* dated 23 August 1568. The work insists upon the wicked machinations of the cardinal of Lorraine, the 'source, root, and origin of the ruin and subversion that threatens this crown ... to massacre all those who are not of their party and faction'. Among those targeted are the 'Politiques, who they consider to be even worse and more dangerous than the heretics'. These, the pamphlet explains, are 'those of the roman religion who are not of their humour and party, whom they call Politiques, because they want to maintain the peace and are enemies of the troubles'.⁴⁵ This is one of the first mentions of a group identified as the politiques, here presented as dissident, peace-loving Catholics. The term would remain relatively rare for several years.

1575: Associés and Ligueurs

Whatever kernel of a 'politique' grouping might have taken shape by 1568, their activity over the next few years could hardly have been very efficacious in these years when the hatreds between Papists and Huguenots were building to the paroxysm of Saint Bartholomew's eve. The rarity of the word during these years does not seem surprising. In the decade 1573-1583, by contrast, far more talk of politiques appeared. Exactly what opinions were designated by the label is often hard to discern, even if historians have subsequently tended to equate the politiques with the 'Malcontents' and 'Associés', i.e. those Catholics who entered into direct alliances with the Protestants.

And what were the ideals and ambitions of the latter? Useful illumination is provided by the *Treaty of Association made between the Catholics and those of the reformed religion seeking the restoration of the Kingdom of France, against the evil and pernicious counsellors of his Majesty*, printed in 1575. The treaty contains three sections. The first sets out the motives of the association, which are presented as love of country and the mutual affection of each religion for the other while waiting to see 'what will be determined according to the word of God by a free and legitimate gen-

⁴⁵ De Serres, *Memoires*, 128. See further De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, IV, 319; Delaborde, *Coligny*, III, 510; De Caprariis, *Propaganda*, 416ff.

eral or national Synod'. The second lists the ills affecting the country which justify the taking up of arms 'against the authors and brewers of these calamities': an attack on the nobility, the maladministration of justice, and the oppression of the third estate and the poor by Italians 'notoriously plundering the kingdom'. The third advances the associates' chief request, the convocation of an Estates General. Particularly interesting is the manner in which the act of association was formulated as a form of contract:

We Catholics and we of the reformed religion, both natural-born Frenchmen, being reduced to this necessity of contracting, beyond our common obligation and that of our ancestors, to a new alliance and association of goods and persons for the just and necessary conservation both of the crown and of the commonwealth of our common mother and country, ... do contract and swear a holy and loyal association of bodies, hearts, and goods as follows.⁴⁶

In contrast to earlier efforts by members of the middle groups, this association had the novelty of involving the taking up of arms in the name of preserving the state. It nonetheless joined the goal of providing a way out of the situation of conflict through religious concord with that of restoring the proper social, legal, and political order. A national council was the means for achieving the former, an Estates General the latter. Until the national council could be assembled, the agreement also laid down rules governing the exercise of religion in the regions affected:

And as for that which concerns the diversity of religions, as it has not yet pleased God to unite us in various points of that, we each affirm respectively that we will not harm in any way, within this present association, the religion of the other, but that all shall retain full freedom of conscience ... not understanding by this that it will be permitted by the ministers of each to exercise their office... To avoid all occasion for division until God in his grace has united us in religion ... it is decided that in those cities where there is exercise of the reformed religion, all things will remain in their present state concerning religion, and in those where the exercise of the reformed religion is not now practiced, if any of the locality shall request it, it will be gradually established through common agreement under the authority of the governors and magistrates in good peace and tranquility, and not otherwise. Also, since despite the diversity of religion true Catholics and true adherents of the reformed religion condemn

⁴⁶ *Traicté d'association faite*, Aii.

that which is notoriously illicit and wicked..., impiety
blasphemies, etc. will not be tolerated.⁴⁷

Once again, that typical formula of all programs of concord, 'until God in his grace has united us in religion', appears in this document.

Whatever the politiques may have stood for in this era, we can associate the Associés with a specific program, combining at once the eventual hope of the restoration of religious unity with temporary coexistence in mutual respect of the two religions, a call for restoring the political, social, and legal order, and a willingness to take up arms to achieve these goals.

Lest people find this treaty insufficiently clear, the most prominent of the Catholic Associés, the duke of Alençon, provided a further explanation of his reasons for embracing this cause in two pamphlets of 1575, the *Protestation de Monseigneur fils et frere du Roy, Duc d'Alençon*, and the *Declaration de Monseigneur François fils et frere du Roy, Duc d'Alençon ... Contenant les raisons de sa sortie de la Court*. These offered a shrewd dissection of the political, religious, legal, and economic elements contributing to the crisis of the moment and concluded with the assertion of his desire to 'maintain the Christian Religion' in such a way that 'both Catholics and Reformed' and 'all people of any understanding will find these two religions more tolerable together'.⁴⁸ Both Alençon and Henri de Montmorency-Damville, who was actively building an alliance with the Huguenots in Languedoc in these years, were attempting to rally the nobility around a potential way out of the political impasse of the moment, while at the same time assuaging their ambitions to play a leading political role. For their part, the Reformed were delighted and saw the treaty as a 'cordial agreement' and the Catholics who signed it as honourable men; one called the constable Montmorency 'inclined to peace and a *moyenneur* to achieve it'.⁴⁹ The crown and certain of its supporters meanwhile now classified the Associés as rebels in the same manner as the Huguenots. The Associés in turn labelled the Catholic League that took shape in 1576 as 'enemies of peace'. In fact, article 23 of the League of Péronne called on the signatories of this document to 'remain in the fear of God, within the boundaries of the Apostolic and Roman Church, in obedience to the king, and in enduring friendship, union, and concord'.⁵⁰ Here once again concord was invoked within a program that was only willing to conceive of union within the established bounds of Catholic orthodoxy.

Defining the Middle Parties More Clearly

Should we include either the Ligueurs or the Associés among the middle parties? Perhaps we might, if it sufficed to appeal to the values of peace and concord. But it seems more convincing to add the criterion of a group's attitude toward war and to exclude from the middle groups those who were willing, under whatever pretext, to

⁴⁷ Ibid., Biii.

⁴⁸ *Declaration de François d'Alençon*, 15.

⁴⁹ *Brieve remonstrance*, 42, 51.

⁵⁰ *Articles de la ligue*, fo. 10.

take up arms. Erasmus, who praised 'condescension', and the Moyenneurs, who practiced the art of compromise in matters of doctrine, were always willing to make concessions for peace, even at the risk of incurring the hatred of both Protestants and Catholics. On these grounds, I would exclude both the Ligueurs and the Associés from the middle party, even while recognizing the continuity between the Associés and the advocates of provisional toleration of the years 1562-1568 in terms of the solution to the problem of religious differences that they advocated.

1588: The Flowering of a Term of Opprobrium

Whenever one encounters the word 'politique' in the political literature of the years 1574-1588, it almost always has pejorative connotations. Before coming to define a specific group, the word was an insult, usually applied to a Catholic enemy. Thus, the author of the 1574 *Remonstrance aux Seigneurs, Gentilshommes et autres faisant profession de la Religion reformée en France* complained not only of those Catholics who were 'disloyal massacrers and disturbers of the public peace', but also of 'the connivence and negligence of an infinite number of lords and officers of the Crown, who call themselves Politiques' who knowingly allowed the disturbances of the former to occur.⁵¹ In subsequent years, the images used in connection those labelled as politiques grew steadily darker, although no clearer. By 1580 the word was widely used. In 1587 it made its first appearances in pamphlet titles, as in the poetic *Advertissement à tous les bons catholiques de rendre graces à Dieu, sur la victoire obtenue contre les Heretiques et Polytiques de ce temps*. In the League literature of the crisis year 1588, the politiques are traitors to their religion and their country, infidels, heretics, Libertines, atheists, and so forth. The *Description du Politique de nostre temps* explains that while the name of politique was once a name of honour,

Today this fine name soiled by a thousand vices
Is just a name of horror, the ruin of good government,
A name filled with garbage, and justly scorned
For the crimes of those who have so abused it.⁵²

The picture is no different in *La Foy et religion des Politiques de ce temps*, the *Description de l'homme politique de ce temps avec sa foy et religion*, the *Discours sur les calomnies imposées aux Princes et Seigneurs Catholiques par les Politiques de nostre temps*, or the *Remonstrances tres-humbles au Roy de France*, which speaks of the politiques as 'simulated Catholics' 'or rather marmite Catholics, worldly men, who have burdened and persecuted the Church more than the heretics themselves'.⁵³

As used in the literature of the era, the term politique thus appears to have denoted so generic and imprecise a bogey-man that it becomes hard to know if it can be properly applied to any really existing political grouping or current of opinion. It is

⁵¹ *Mémoires de Condé* (London, 1743) III, 50, 56.

⁵² *Description du politique*, Blv. I quote this work more fully in Turchetti, 'Rivoluzione dimenticata', 344-5.

⁵³ *Remonstrances tres-humbles au Roy de France*, 353.

clear enough what sort of research is now required to clarify whether or not the term might still retain some genuine utility. The different texts of a given moment need to be compared to see whether or not they agree on the identity of those whom they designate as politiques, and the individuals whom they designate need to be studied to see if they in fact had links to one another or shared common values. The relevant secondary literature is inadequate for answering these questions. Can convincing links be made between the politiques and Michel de L'Hospital, said by so many modern historians to be the founder of the movement? Can a coherent group be discerned around Pierre de Beloy, the Catholic jurist and defender of Henri de Navarre designated by several pamphlets as the prototypical politique?⁵⁴ For the moment, I can only call these questions to the attention of investigators and hope that answers will be soon forthcoming.

Conclusion

Insofar as the pamphlets of the 1580s offer any clarity, those called politiques were for the most part pacifists who made the prevention of further conflict a higher priority than religious or dogmatic questions. If this picture is accurate, they can thus be placed in the tradition of the middle parties and distinguished from the Associés, who were willing to take up arms to obtain their political goals. As can sometimes happen, however, some of those considered politiques may have been forced by the course of the civil wars to abandon the stance of neutrality and join the fighting, in which case they would have appeared the heirs to the Associés in their willingness to form a military alliance with the 'heretics'. According to the common wisdom, they believed that the quest to reimpose religious unity was the chief source of war and so sought from the government a stable, if not definitive, grant of religious toleration. The inclusion of the phrase 'perpetual and irrevocable' in the edict of Nantes was a response to this request, even if those responsible for the edict understood the phrase differently.⁵⁵

There did thus remain in the 1590s a party or set of parties deserving closer study by historians that was located between the extremes represented by the Papists and Ligueurs on one side and the Huguenots and Associés on the other. At least some of the specific currents that fed this middle way are already clear, and these may be grouped around the three poles that we have already discerned for the 1560s. First, some sought the religious reunification of the entire country in a single, transformed national Church in the manner of the Moyenneurs. Indeed, as Henry IV began to consider the possible religious policies open to him in his quest to secure the throne to which he had so shakily succeeded in 1589, this project took on renewed appeal. Proposed in such tracts as the 1590 *Traicté du Concile*, the 1591 *Advis sur la nécessité du Concile*, and the 1607 *Response au discours fait au Roy pour l'assemblée d'un nouveau Concile*, it was supported by moderate Catholics such as Pierre de L'Estoile,

⁵⁴ On this important figure, see Turchetti, 'Concorde ou tolérance', 345n.

⁵⁵ Turchetti, 'Perpétuel et irrévocable'.

many parlementaires of Gallican leanings opposed to the reception of the Council of Trent, and such moderates within the Reformed Church as Jean Hotman de Villiers, Jean de Serres, Charles Perrot, and Pierre-Victor Cayet.⁵⁶ Second, some backed a program of pure toleration. These clustered around two positions. Some supported this out of religious impulses, believing this the only way to avoid the further growth of atheism and religious indifference; in their spiritual motivations and love of peace, these men seem close in spirit to Castellio. Others, in the manner of those described as politiques in the polemics of the era, appear to have been led to this position because they had grown convinced of the impossibility of ever reuniting believers through either a national council or by forcing them all back into one Church. The third broad group of this period contained those advocating provisional toleration of two religions without abandoning the ultimate goal of their eventual reunification. Among these were the key figures who came from a variety of backgrounds to cooperate in drafting the edict of toleration that would finally last for more than a generation: the royalist Cheverny, the moderate Protestant Duplessis-Mornay, the ex-Ligueur Coqueley, the Gallican Beloy, the parlementaire de Thou, and the legist Forget. For them, the immediate priority had to be the pacification of the kingdom. Once this was assured through a toleration justified by necessity, the task of pursuing religious concord could be taken up again.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ On the projects of a new council in this period, see Vivanti, *Lotta politica*, 367ff; Turchetti, 'Henri IV'.

⁵⁷ Turchetti, 'Arrière-plan'.