Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 19:1, Winter 1982

THE FRENCH CALVINIST RESPONSE TO THE FORMULA OF CONCORD*

Robert D. Linder

PRECIS

The important place of the Formula of Concord of 1577 in Lutheran affairs is relatively well established among historians and theologians. By its clarification of doctrine, the Formula of Concord created a new consensus among Lutherans and served as the basis for further delineations and discussions concerning Lutheran orthodoxy. However, little is known about the French Calvinist response to the 1577 document and about the ensuing attempt to discover grounds for Protestant understanding and cooperation in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe. This article explores the hopes, frustrations, and failures of this effort and analyzes its implications for ecumenical understanding today.

The author notes the response of the French Calvinists at three different levels. First, he examines the role of Philippe du Plessis-Mornay (1549-1623) in contacts between the French Calvinists and German Lutherans after 1577. Second, he assesses the officially sanctioned response of the French Reformed Church to the Formula of Concord. Third, he scrutinizes and analyzes those discussions of the French Reformed national synods from 1578 to 1631 which concerned the possibility of a rapprochement with the Lutherans.

This article provides several insights into this early intra-Protestant attempt to reach some sort of understanding based on a discussion of the Formula of Concord. First, it demonstrates how political considerations can greatly complicate religious decision-making and theological détente. It also points out that lay-clerical tensions were present in this effort to bring Lutherans and Calvinists together and that, if unresolved, such tensions can often undermine ecumenical activity. Moreover, this incident illustrates the technique of scapegoatism used in building ecumenical relations. Finally, the Calvinist response to the Formula of Concord shows how all parties in any ecumenical dialogue must be willing to give and take in good faith, notwithstanding the relative strengths or weaknesses of the various parties at the time of the discussion. Otherwise, frustration, feelings of helplessness, and perhaps even anger will result, and ecumenical understanding will be hopelessly stalled. All of these insights appear to have continuing meaning for ecumenism in the twentieth century.

---

*The author thanks the Bureau of General Research of Kansas State University for a grant which made possible part of the research upon which this study is based. Also, the generous criticisms and comments of several scholars—especially Robert M. Kingdon, Robert Kolb, and Paul Mojzes—have assisted in preparing this article for publication.

Robert D. Linder (Baptist) is Professor of History and Director of the Religious Studies Program at Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, where he has taught since 1965. He holds a B.S. from Emporia State University, an M.R.E. and an M.Div. from Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and both an M.A. and a Ph.D. (1963) in history from the University of Iowa. He taught previously at the University of Iowa and at William Jewell College. He is the author of *Twilight of the Saints: Biblical Christianity and Civil Religion in America* (IV Press, 1978); American consulting editor and author of two articles in *The Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Eerdmans, 1977); and author of "The Future of Christianity, in Philip Gardiner, ed., *The Eerdmans Handbook of World Religions, 1982* (Eerdmans, 1982). He was editor of *Fides et Historia*, 1968-78, and has been its book review editor since 1978. Dr. Linder has also served eight years on the Manhattan (KS) City Council, including two terms as Mayor.

After Martin Luther's death in 1546, French Protestants began to follow with great interest the bitter theological quarrels which were dividing the Lutherans into two warring camps. This heated infighting caused the French Calvinists particular distress, since they saw themselves in some measure as an injured third party in the whole affair. As a minority in their own country, they often looked abroad for aid in their struggle to reform the Church of France according to their understanding of biblical principles. The Calvinist dream of a new ecclesiastical era in France was shattered by the outbreak of what was to become nearly forty years of civil war in 1562. The so-called Wars of Religion in France would arrest the spread of the Protestant faith and end all hope for a reformed national church. They also would divide families, split the nation into factions, and fill the remainder of the century with devastation, crimes, and widespread human suffering.

Still, it was not until after 1572 that the Protestant cause began to decline. In fact, the French Calvinists made significant gains in the period 1562-1572, and they appeared to be in the ascendant until the sordid St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in August, 1572, brought to an end their hopes for a full-scale national reformation. The massacre was a relatively traumatic experience and left a crippling mark on French Protestant life for the next hundred years—as well as a "black legend" that has survived into modern times.[1] Certainly after 1572, the Calvinists of France looked more and more to aid and comfort from abroad. Among those places to which they turned for succor were the Lutheran states of Germany, but, because of the Germans' internal dissensions and a growing theological suspicion of the Calvinists, assistance often was not forthcoming from that quarter.[2]

The dynamic nature of the Calvinist movement itself was largely responsible for this growing distrust between German and French Protestants, for Calvinism had become the faith of a steadily growing number of Germans in the generation immediately preceding the final drafting of the Formula on Concord in 1577. For example, the important and influential Elector Frederick III (1559-1576) of the Palatinate embraced Calvin's sacramental views during this period, thus introducing a new and perplexing factor into German religion and politics. As

---

[1]Modern scholarship has tended to play down the significance of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. However, the older view of the all-traumatic effect of the massacre has been revived in a powerful study with convincing statistics by Philip Benedict in his recent book, *Rouen during the Wars of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[2]For the best introductions to the complex political and religious situation in France and the Empire from Luther's death in 1546 until the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, see J. H. M. Salmon, *France in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975); N. M. Sutherland, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the European Conflict, 1559-1572* (London: Macmillan, 1973); Robert M. Kingdon, "Reactions to the St. Bartholomew Massacres in Geneva and Rome," in Alfred Soman, ed., *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew: Reappraisals and Documents* (The Hague: Martimus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 25-49; Lewis W. Spitz, "Imperialism, Particularism and Toleration in the Holy Roman Empire," in Soman, *Massacre*, pp. 71-95; and Claus-Peter Clasen, *The Palatinate in European History, 1559-1660* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963).

the German Lutheran princes worked to calm their own wrangling theologians and to woo the sympathetic Emperor Maximilian II (1564-1576) further from Rome, the coming of another major expression of Protestant Christianity vastly complicated an already thoroughly sticky religio-political situation. Maximilian could not hope to maintain the Peace of Augsburg (1555),[3] survive his personal preference for the Augsburg Confession, and continue his pro-Protestant stance without the support of a common front of the German princes against Rome and its allies.

This idea of a Protestant common front became more and more ephemeral as Calvinism invaded Germany and became increasingly political. In order to understand the Lutheran stiffening against cooperation with Calvinism, one must view it in the context of this increased Calvinist missionary activity in Germany and its political results. For instance, the prince of Hesse-Kassel refused to sign the Formula of Concord after becoming a Calvinist. Eventually, after a number of bitter experiences initiated by its ruling Calvinist prince, Lower Hesse became Calvinist, and Upper Hesse remained Lutheran. Thus, between the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War in 1618, a half dozen important German princes became Calvinists, much to the consternation and concern of the Lutherans.[4]

Therefore, the French Protestants, in their turn, watched with mixed feelings as the German Lutheran theologians forged the tool of eventual intra-Lutheran conciliation: the Formula of Concord. They knew that this new theological development might prove a blessing or a curse to them, but in 1577 they knew not which. It could be a blessing if a strong and united German Lutheran communion decided to extend this principle of reunion and conciliation to all of Protestantism. On the other hand, if it resulted in a powerful and reunited Lutheranism, staunchly opposed to any dealings with other non-Roman Catholic Christians, it might become a curse. As it turned out, a portion of the Formula of Concord was addressed directly to the perceived Calvinist threat, at least in theological terms. Even though the Formula was the product of prolonged conscientious work by men of considerable concern and good will, it was created in the midst of violence and recrimination. As a result, the Formula became basically a defensive document, definitely confessional rather than ecumenical. Both the preface and those several articles of the Formula clearly aimed at the Calvinist position make this clear. As Willard D. Allbeck so gingerly put it: "It is

---

[3]The Peace of Augsburg of 1555 provided for a mutual toleration of Roman Catholics and the adherents of the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Sacramentarians and Sectarians (such as the Anabaptists) were excluded. Even though the Calvinists hotly denied that they were Sacramentarians and even though Calvin himself signed the Augsburg Confession, most German Calvinists were excluded from the provisions of the 1555 Augsburg treaty for either political or theological reasons or both. See further Matthias Simon, *Der Augsburger Religionsfriede* (Augsburg: E. Kieser, 1955).

[4]Spitz, "Imperialism," pp. 75-76; and Émile G. Léonard, *Histoire generale du Protestantisme*, 3 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1961-1964), 2: 199-200.

not so irenic toward Calvinists and other non-Lutherans. It is, therefore, a document of specific Lutheranism."[5]

Calvinists in Germany, France, and elsewhere immediately recognized the challenge inherent in the Concord Formula. The most immediate repercussions occurred in 1576 in the Palatinate, where the Lutheran Ludwig VI (1576-1583) had succeeded his Calvinist father, Frederick III. Ludwig purged the University of Heidelberg faculty of Calvinist professors, including the distinguished Daniel Toussain and Matthieu de Lamoye when they refused to subscribe to the Formula. He removed many other Calvinists from positions of influence in government and society. The same sort of thing happened in other Lutheran Concord principalities and cities, making it difficult for the French Protestants to ignore this turn of events.[6]

This study will focus on the French Calvinist reaction to the Formula of Concord in the years following 1577. In so doing, it will provide some insights which may have continuing value in an age of growing interest in the interrelationship of religion and politics. Moreover, this subject will yield some helpful information about how Christians have struggled with the problems of commonality and exclusiveness in the past, how they have expressed their ecumenical instincts, and how they have jealously guarded their distinctive heritage. Finally, it will stress historical development by showing that any age of religious vitality is accompanied by controversy and tension. So it was in sixteenth-century Europe, and so it is today in twentieth-century America—as modern Lutherans know so well. All of these factors make any investigation of the French Calvinist attempt to respond to the Formula of Concord of compelling interest to contemporary Christians of sensitivity and concern.[7]

In order to comprehend the reaction of French Calvinists to the Formula of Concord, I will note their response at three different levels. First, I want to examine the manner in which Philippe du Plessis-Mornay (1549-1623) tried to come to grips with the Concord challenge. Mornay was a distinguished Huguenot statesperson and the acknowledged leader of the genuinely religious French Protestants after 1572. Next, I will assess the officially-sanctioned response of the French Reformed Church. This official reply came in 1583 in the form of

---

[5]Willard D. Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), p. 11. Also see Allbeck, *Studies*, pp. 1-15; J. L. Neve, *The Lutherans in the Movements for Church Union* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication House, 1921); Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959); Lewis W. Spitz and Wenzel Lohff, eds., *Discord, Dialogue, and Concord: Studies in the Lutheran Reformation's Formula of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); and the entire issue of *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 8, no. 4 (1977), which was devoted to an examination of the Formula of Concord.

[6]Spitz, "Imperialism," pp. 78-82; and "Documents," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 46 (March, 1897): 234-235.

[7]For a brief assessment of the ecumenical implications of the Formula of Concord in relation to the French Calvinists, see Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1967), pp. 65-69.

endorsing the publication of an important irenic document called the *Harmonia Confessionum fidei*. Finally, I want to scrutinize the continuing discussion of the possibility of *concordia* with the Lutherans in the French Reformed community at its national synods from 1578 to 1631. Experts in sixteenth-century Calvinist history have not completely ignored these various individuals, documents, and meetings in the past. However, none have been studied systematically to determine their relationship to the Formula of Concord. I will give them a more detailed examination in this context than they hitherto have received. Finally, it should be clear from this that I propose to investigate only the French Calvinist political and ecclesiastical response, touching on the theological aspects of their efforts to grapple with the Formula of Concord only as they relate to political and ecclesiastical considerations. The French Reformed theological response to the Formula has been competently described elsewhere by Professor Jill Raitt.[8]

I

Mornay was the key individual in the French Protestant reaction to the Formula of Concord. He was born at Buhy in Normandy in 1549 and originally intended to enter the priesthood. However, his mother turned Protestant and later diverted him to classical studies at the University of Paris from 1560 to 1567. Mornay himself professed Christ and embraced Reformation doctrines upon the death of his father in 1559, largely through his mother's influence. After studying Latin, Greek, and Hebrew at Paris, he traveled to Geneva, Basel, Heidelberg, and Padua for further education from 1567 to 1572. Returning to France, he became a friend of Gaspard de Coligny and urged him to continue a basically anti-Hapsburg foreign policy.

This association with Coligny nearly cost Mornay his life on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572, when he narrowly escaped death by hiding in a barn, after which he fled to the protection of the English embassy and, shortly after, to England itself. He returned to France in 1573, and became one of the leaders of the moderate Huguenots. In 1576, he married a remarkably well-educated and cultured woman named Charlotte Arbaleste (d. 1606). Also in that year he became chief advisor to Henry of Navarre and served him faithfully as a soldier, diplomat, and confidant for a quarter-century. In 1589, King Henry IV (the

[8]Jill Raitt, "The French Reformed Theological Response," in Spitz and Lohff, *Discord*, pp. 178-190. The meaning of the Lord's Supper and related issues of the day were often at once theological and political. Raitt points out, e.g., that many of the German princes grew weary of the constant polemics over the Supper in 1567 and after. Moreover, following 1586, the influential Lutheran leader, Ludwig, Duke of Württemberg, lost interest in France because of the constant theological argumentation between the Lutherans and Calvinists. All of these developments had a decidedly negative impact on ecumenical relations between the French and German Protestant communities.

former Navarre) appointed Mornay governor of the Huguenot stronghold of Saumur, where the latter founded a highly respected Protestant academy.

Mornay was bitterly disappointed by Henry IV's conversion to the Roman Church in 1593. Even though Mornay helped draft the Edict of Nantes in 1598, two years later Henry dismissed him in disgrace for publishing a book on the Eucharist which the king deemed too anti-Roman and, hence, detrimental to his current delicate negotiations with the papacy. Mornay retired to Saumur and, until his death in 1623, continued to exercise a powerful and moderating influence in Huguenot affairs through his many books and other writings and through his position as a leading lay member of the French Reformed Church.[9]

Mornay always claimed that he was motivated by loyalty to "my God, my king, and my country," a somewhat rare combination which made him a theologian, soldier, and statesperson all in one. In general, his theological judgments and political activity were kept in a fine balance, with his highest and final loyalty always reserved for God. He was convinced that people properly accepted religious faith by persuasion and not by coercion and constantly preached that truth need never resort to violence. With such an outlook, he became known as the most tolerant of the Huguenot leaders and a promoter of Protestant unity. Politically, he wanted a strong and united France with a moderate constitutional monarchy. He felt that this could best be secured by weakening Hapsburg power abroad. Religiously, he wanted a united and reformed church which included both Roman Catholics and Protestants, but, failing that, he would accept a strong and unified national Reformed church that was faithful to biblical principles. In many ways, he was the French counterpart of the broad-minded and faithful William Cecil, Lord Burghley (d. 1598), who served his own monarch, Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), so long and so well. Like Cecil, Mornay was a convinced but moderate Protestant.[10]

Mornay personally regarded the Formula of Concord with a mixed sense of frustration and hope. Like nearly all Calvinists, he recognized that the Formula frankly condemned certain Calvinist doctrines. Like them, his response was to reaffirm his allegiance to biblical Christianity and evangelical principles. He was dismayed and embarrassed that the Lutherans continued to look upon the Reformed churches as strangers and heretics rather than co-laborers in the vineyard of Christian reform. On the other hand, he was encouraged that a number of Protestant princes in Germany as well as the King of Denmark had refused to

---

[9]The only reliable biography of Mornay is Raoul Patry, *Philippe du Plessis-Mornay: Un huguenot homme d'État (1549-1623)* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1933). Patry examines all available documents and studies all likely sources except, it appears, those related to Mornay's connections with England and the English. Although this massive work (670 pp.) is sympathetic, it is also critical and thorough. My own biographical sketch is based on Patry's work.

[10]For an example of his broad concern for the Christian faith as a whole, see Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, *De la verité de la religion chrestienne contre les athées, Epicureans, payens, Juifs, Muhamedistes, et autres infideles* (Antwerp: C. Plantin, 1581). Cf. Patry, *Mornay*, pp. 617-621.

sign the Formula–indicating, he felt, an opposition to the harshness of the document. Moreover, ever the optimist in this period before 1600, Mornay saw the possibility of some kind of rapprochement with the Lutherans if some sort of consultation could be arranged–particularly if the influence of the theologians could be minimized and that of the princes and the rank-and-file maximized. Thus, to his close friend Charles de Danzay, French ambassador to Denmark, he wrote concerning the Formula of Concord in February, 1580:

> Despite all, I hope that some good can come of this. A general synod can be convened and the German princes and the German people convinced that we are not heretics and that we are innocent of the charges against us by presenting to them our confession of faith. Also, we can show that we, like the common people of Germany, do not believe that the true body of Christ is communicated in the Holy Supper. . . . Further, those who accuse us are not motivated by a true zeal of the religion, but by the insatiable cupidity of revenge, or worse yet, they are so devoted to their own petty doctrines that they have deliberately and knowingly sinned and are nothing but wolves in sheep's clothing. But as God permits me, it is needful that the princes of Germany be informed. Then we can have true concord.[11]

The two friends continued to discuss the problem of Protestant unity in their letters for several more years. The tone was generally the same: cautious optimism and righteous indignation on the part of Mornay, and a warning not to expect too much on the part of his friend Danzay. In his opinion, Danzay scrawled in 1582, the Formula was inimical to true Christian unity and "a writing dedicated to establish a profound cleavage between the Lutherans of the Book of Concord and the other reformed churches."[12]

Not to be daunted by his friend's pessimism, Mornay tried to advance the cause of Christian unity whenever and wherever he could by writing, by exercis-

---

[11]Mornay to Charles de Danzay, February 28, 1580, in Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, *Mémoires et Correspondence de Duplessis-Mornay*, ed. A. D. de La Fontenelle de Vaudore and P. R. Auguis, 12 vols. (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1824-1825), 2: 84-87. These remarks, contained in a private letter between two Calvinist believers, probably demonstrates a certain naiveté on the part of Mornay. He appeared to believe that "the common people of Germany" not only agreed with the position of the Reformed church concerning the presence of "the true body of Christ" in Holy Communion but also that they had a major voice in the deliberations then underway. Although an unusually learned and sensitive layperson, Mornay did not appreciate the complex theological considerations involved in any discussion of the matter of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This probably explains why his letter sounds both overly optimistic and somewhat simplistic. Moreover, if Mornay carried these same assumptions concerning the Supper with him into his direct dealings with the German Lutherans, this may explain why Calvinist-Lutheran cooperation was so difficult to obtain. In any case, Mornay appears to favor an appeal to the German laity, a tactic which could easily be interpreted by the German Lutheran clergy as a threat to their leadership.

[12]Charles de Danzay to Mornay, September 28, 1582, in the Bibliotheque de la Societe de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Francais (hereafter BSHPF), MSS 753/3, lettres, memoires et

ing influence as a lay leader of the French Reformed Church, and by working through his mentor and monarch, Henry of Navarre. Mornay's greatest single attempt to establish inter-confessional understanding through his writings was his book entitled *De la verité de la religion chrestienne contre les athées, Epicureans, payens, Juifs, Muhamediste, et autres Infideles* (Concerning the Truth of the Christian Religion). In this work, written in the period 1579-1580 and first published in 1582, Mornay clearly states that his purpose is to vindicate the Christian faith above all other religions and to defend it against various threats: indifference, which dishonors Christianity; Epicureanism, which denies the possibility of divine providence; "deism," which gives equal value to all religions; and atheism, which denies the existence of God and the possibility of the Incarnation. In this volume he attacks neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the papacy, nor does he attempt to justify the Protestant Reformation. Many Protestants and Catholics were lavish in their praise of this work.[13]

In 1583, Mornay launched an all-out campaign to persuade the heads of all the Protestant nations and states to consider a common confession and some kind of general "Protestant union." He did this by means of personal correspondence and by working through Henry of Navarre. During the course of the year, Mornay wrote to William, Prince of Orange; the Dutch leader Philippe de Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde; Francis Walsingham, secretary of state to Elizabeth I of England; and Theodore Beza of Geneva—urging each and all of them to join in this grand project.[14] But he knew that more weight would be attached to an appeal coming from Henry of Navarre, the acknowledged head of French Protestantism and a prince among princes, than to one coming from himself. Therefore, according to his wife and confirmed by the course of events, Mornay saw to it that the King of Navarre proposed a scheme for a general Protestant consultation and eventual union at the national synod of the French Reformed Church held at Vitré in May, 1583.[15]

---

notes, originaux ou copies anciennes, 1511-1592, papiers de famille des Du Plessis-Mornay, folio. For more information on Danzay and his relationship with Mornay, see Alfred Richard, *Un diplomate poitevin du XVI^e siècle, Charles de Danzay, ambassadeur de France en Danemark* (Poitiers: Blaise et Roy, 1910).

[13]Mornay, *De la verité*; and Patry, *Mornay*, pp. 293-300.

[14]E.g., see Mornay to the Prince of Orange, February 14, 1583, in Mornay, *Mémoires et Correspondence*, 2: 225-226; Mornay to Marnix de Sainte Aldegonde, February 14, 1583, in ibid., 2: 226-227; Mornay to Francis Walsingham, May, 1583, in ibid., 2: 235-241; and Mornay to the MM. of the Synod of the Île de France, September 22, 1583, in ibid., 2: 376-378.

[15]John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata*, 2 vols. (London: J. Richardson, 1692), 1: 143-153; and Jean Aymon, *Tous les Synodes Nationaux des Eglises Réformées de France*, 2 vols. (La Haye: Charles Delo, 1719), 1: 157-170. Of these two collections, Quick is regarded as more reliable, since his volumes are based on a more careful collection and collation of original documents. Therefore, Quick will be cited hereafter as the main source for the deliberations of the national synods of the French Reformed Church in the latter part of the sixteenth and early years of the seventeenth centuries. Also see Charlotte Arbaleste de Mornay. *Mémoires de Madame de Mornay*, 2 vols. (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1868-1869), 1: 138-139.

Mornay spoke for the King of Navarre at Vitré, and the assembled delegates responded enthusiastically. The synod voted to ask the king to pursue the project and to send envoys to all the Protestant princes and states of Christendom to invite them to join in the quest for a common confessional bond. The synod apparently hoped and Mornay apparently assumed that he would be chosen to head such a delegation or perhaps to carry out the mission alone. However, he was disappointed when the king chose the irrascible and only nominally Protestant Jacques de Segur, seigneur de Pardaillan, instead. Segur was the superintendent of the king's household and finances at this time and exercised a major influence in the management of Henry's affairs. The more pious of the Huguenot political leaders considered his choice an ill omen for the future of the project.

In any case, Mornay drew up a detailed set of instructions for Segur and sent him off on his journey. Segur travelled to England, the Low Countries, Denmark, and Germany, but accomplished virtually nothing. His proposal for an international synod to discuss a general Protestant confession was received with warmth but no action in England and the Low Countries, with polite interest in Denmark, and with little enthusiasm in Germany, especially among those princes who had signed the Formula of Concord. Moreover, the increasingly troubled politics of the period 1583-1584 created problems for Mornay and other proponents of this plan in France. The Roman Catholics criticized it as a betrayal of the French nation into the hands of an international Protestant conspiracy. To many French people, it looked to be exactly that. Thus—hampered by a less than enthusiastic and able envoy, a cool reception from the German princes, and growing domestic discomfort with the plan—it collapsed.

The final blow to any sort of rapprochement with the German Protestants came in March, 1585, when the most militant of the German Lutheran princes wrote a collective letter to Henry of Navarre, informing him that they had no interest in a universal Protestant council. In addition, they lectured Henry on the perversions of Calvinism and declared that they felt the best way to promote concord in the Church of God was explicitly to reject and condemn such views. They claimed that they desired only to submit themselves to God's Word and, on this basis alone, to believe, decide, and instruct others. But they saw no reason to open up questions already resolved by the Formula of Concord. Finally, they included with the communication a copy of the Formula for Henry's edification so that he might study it and come to a knowledge of the "truth." They hinted that if he could subscribe to it, then there might be some hope of future peace in the Protestant communion.[16]

---

[16]Quick, *Synodicon*, 1: 153; Response of the German Princes to the King of Navarre, in the BSHPF, MSS 753/3, correspondence entre le roi de Navarre et les princes allemands, folios 2-7; Mornay, "Instructions pour traicter avec la royne d'Angleterre et aultres princes estrangers protestans, bailee par le roy de Navarre au sieur de Segur, y allant de sa part en juillet 1583," in Mornay, *Mémoires et Correspondence*, 2: 272-294; "Responsio Principium

This was the death blow to the scheme sponsored by Henry of Navarre. After 1585, he progressively lost interest in any plan to unite the Protestant world under one confession. After his accession to the throne of France in 1589 and his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith in 1593, he would reverse himself and oppose any sort of Protestant union–confessional or otherwise. In any case, he would not allow any sort of communications by the Protestant leaders of his kingdom with their counterparts in other countries without his personal knowledge and participation. He made this crystal clear on a number of occasions as, for example, in 1605, when he instructed the Duc de Sully to see that his wishes in this regard were carried out. Thus, Sully records in his memoirs:

> I then proceeded to acquaint the deputies (at the provincial synod of Châtellerault) with his majesty's intentions, in a manner that would admit of no doubt or equivocation; that they were for the future not to receive in their synods, or even in their houses, any deputies or letters from foreign princes, cities, communities, or French lords; namely, Messieurs de Rohan, de Bouillon, de Lesdiguières, de la Force, de Chatillon, and Du Plessis, because the king would not suffer any affairs of importance to be treated of in his kingdom without his participation.[17]

But even after he had lost the interest and support of Henry of Navarre, Mornay continued to pursue his dream of an international synod of the Protestant churches. After 1585, he chased his phantom as a Protestant churchleader rather than as a political figure. To be certain, he continued to be close to Henry until the last two or three years of the century, but the monarch's perspective simply had changed once he became de facto as well as de jure king of France.

In these circumstances, Mornay influenced several national synods to take the initiative in establishing closer ties with Protestants in other countries. In this regard, the Synod of Tonneins in May, 1614, was the most active and important. Mornay had urged several key French Protestant leaders and the Church of Geneva to join him in sending letters to the synod, urging its deputies to take every reasonable measure to establish closer ties with the other Protestants of the world–be they Reformed, Lutheran, or Anglican. Moreover, the king of England sent a communication to the synod, very likely at the suggestion of Mornay, since the French leader had been in contact with the English monarch on the subject of confessional unity since 1605.[18] It also should be noted that Mornay's own pastor, Samuel Bouchereau, was a deputy at this synod. Finally,

---

Electorum ad Regem Navarrae," in Gottlieb von Polenz, *Geschichte des französischen Calvinismus*, 5 vols. (Gotha: F. A. Berthes, 1857-1869), 4: 401-405; and Jacques-Auguste de Thou, *Histoire universelle*, 11 vols. (La Haye: H. Scheurleer, 1740), 6: 353-363.

[17]Maximilien de Bethune, duc de Sully, *Memoirs*, 4 vols., rev. ed. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1877-1892), 3: 210.

[18]For a thorough discussion of the role of James I (1603-1625) of England in the ecumenical deliberations of Tonneins in 1614, as well as his relationship with Mornay, see

a pale of unusual concern hung over the assemblage as the religious climate of France took a decided and increasingly anti-Protestant turn following the assassination of Henry IV in 1610 and the ascension to the throne of his young son Louis XIII under the regency of the latter's mother. By 1614, Sully and most of the other Protestants had been removed from high office and the last Estates-General to meet before the Revolution of 1789 had been summoned for a short and stormy session. Finally, several incidents in Germany since 1608 had increased religious tensions in the Empire to a new peak by 1614.[19]

Consequently, the Protestant deputies to the national Synod of Tonneins appeared eager to consider once again the theme of Protestant confessional unity, a goal which they pursued enthusiastically. Letters from James I of England and from the Ducs de Sully and de Rohan as well as from Mornay helped to establish the tone of the gathering as one of the pursuit of *concordia*, both within the French Reformed Church—which at this time was experiencing some problems of internal harmony—and in relation to the larger Protestant community. In the course of the proceedings, the delegates expressed their belief that a larger Protestant confessional union could not be achieved "without the concurrence, aid, and assistance, and conduct of those sovereign princes who have withdrawn themselves from the obedience of the pope."[20] They also officially indicated their deep concern for a better understanding with the German Lutherans. They discussed at length how, without compromising their fundamental beliefs, they might approach the Germans on the subject of the Lord's Supper in the most open manner. They forbade any further preaching or writing on any subject likely to cause schism within their own ranks or controversy with other Protestants. Finally, the minutes of the synod record what may have been the most lofty statement of ecumenical goals ever uttered in a Protestant conclave in this period. After establishing the very broad general outlines of a possible basis for future union, the deputies affirmed:

> It is very needful that some course should be taken to bring the several churches and peoples to embrace and practice the articles of this union, and that sovereign princes and estates do promise to exert their authority about it, and that those words of Lutheran, Calvinist, and Sacramentarian, being wicked badges of distinction, should be utterly abolished, and that our churches should ever after be called the Christian Reformed Churches. . . . And the German

---

W. Brown Patterson's excellent study, "James I and the Huguenot Synod of Tonneins of 1614," *The Harvard Theological Review* 65 (April, 1972): 241-270. Of related interest is Patterson's "The Anglican Reaction," in Spitz and Lohoff, *Discord*, pp. 150-165.

[19]Quick, *Synodicon*, 1: 392-448; De Thou, *Histoire universelle*, 9: 593; and Patry, *Mornay*, pp. 546-548. Mornay also spoke to many provincial synods about his desire for further Protestant unity, corresponded with the faculty of St. Andrews University in Scotland about it, and maintained the Academy of Saumur, which he founded as a center for the discussion of the possibility of inter-confessional agreement until he retired as governor of the area in 1621.

[20]Quick, *Synodicon*, 1: 434.

> princes should, at some certain days mutually agreed upon, send their pastors to the principal churches of their neighbor princes, and also admit and receive of their ministers into theirs, and so communicate together on some set and solemn day at the Lord's Table.[21]

The minutes of the synod concerned with the subject of future unity conclude on a highly ambitious note by stating that, after union of the Protestant churches is accomplished, then it will be time "to solicit the Romish Church unto a reconciliation." However, the record also indicates that it is doubtful this can be achieved until the pope is willing to step aside and not to insist on presiding over a general council of all Christians. The last sentence of the section sums up the hopes and fears of the French Protestant unionists: "But could this general union of all Christians be once accomplished, we should be then more effective, and ministers might preach with more authority, and enjoy greater success than ever."[22]

Such grandiose plans for unity took a step backward with the coming of the Arminian controversy in the Low Countries after 1610. The last national synods at which Mornay exercised considerable influence (second Vitré in 1617, and Alais in 1620) were devoted to the problem of internal unity in the wake of the Dutch theological rift. When Mornay died in 1623, his proposal for a larger unity of Protestants was still pending, and his dream of an international Protestant synod was still unrealized.

II

On the more official level, the French Protestants responded to the Formula of Concord with a document on how to achieve ecclesiastical harmony on their own. This was the *Harmonia confessionum fidei, orthodoxarum et reformatarum ecclesiarum* (A Harmony of the Confessions of the Faith of the Orthodox and Reformed Churches) attributed to François Salvard.[23] The *Harmonia confessionum fidei* apparently originated directly from a Calvinist move to counter the influence of the Formula of Concord in Germany. The Formula had hardly been

---

[21]Ibid., 1: 437. One of the weaknesses of this initiative by the French Calvinists was their apparent failure to come to grips with the fact that the Lord's Supper itself was in this period both a theological and political issue.

[22]Ibid.

[23]François Salvard (Salvart, Salnar), *Harmonia confessionum fidei, orthodoxarum et reformatarum ecclesiarum* (Geneva: P. Santandreanus, 1581). A preface was authorized by the national synod of the French Reformed Church at Vitré in 1583 and added to a French translation and to subsequent Latin editions of this work. However, oddly enough, it appears to have survived only in a 1586 English translation. Therefore, references to the preface will be to the English translation: *An Harmony of the Confessions of the Faith of the Christian and Reformed Churches* (Cambridge: Thomas Thomas, 1586). Salvard had been a student at Geneva in 1559; a pastor there from 1561-1563; then successively ministered at Lyon, 1565-1568, at Frankfurt, 1571-1579, and at Castres, 1572-1585. Paul F. Geisendorf, *Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva: Alexandre Jullien, 1949), pp. 347-350.

completed when the German Reformed churches held their own summit meeting at Frankfurt, where it was decided that they should promulgate a document in response to the Lutheran formula. The Calvinist faculty at the University of Heidelberg immediately began work on this new confession, but the matter was soon transferred to Geneva. There it became a team effort under the guidance of Beza and with the principal participation of Salvard, along with the French pastors Antoine de la Roche-Chandieu, Lambert Daneau, and Simon Goulart. The work was completed in 1581.

The *Harmonia* is basically a collection of twelve Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican confessions of faith, set down and harmonized to demonstrate their essential agreement and unity. This was supposed to demonstrate to the Lutherans that the Calvinists were not heretics and to establish a basis for further talks between the two communions. The explanation for the existence of this variety of confessions is that unsettled political conditions had prevented the convocation of a general Protestant council. In any case, the national synod of the French Reformed Church, meeting at Vitré in May, 1583, pronounced this document an "excellent work," endorsed it as the official response of that body to the Formula of Concord, and authorized its translation into French with the addition of a preface.[24]

Entitled "A Preface in the Name of the Churches of France and Belgium," the added portion spoke directly to the Formula of Concord and the question of Christian unity. It opened by noting that there were several confessions of faith commonly held by those professing the true Gospel and by lamenting the fact that no general council had yet been called to draft a common Reformed creed. The author of the preface then mentioned the Formula of Concord, which had been published shortly before in Germany. It complained that those who shared in suffering for the Gospel's sake expected better treatment at the hands of those who should have known better. The preface then stated the readiness of those in the Calvinist camp to sit down and discuss commonalities and differences with the Lutherans if they would but reciprocate:

> And even as we showed ourselves to be ready at all times to render a reason for the hope that is in us, so we thought it a matter worth our while to make all men a party to that which we consider at harmony with the holy and true Catholic Church of God. So that insofar as we can, every saint and sound member of that church might deliver themselves from those charges hurled at us by others accusing us of the most heinous crimes. As we have sought to do this we have thought it most appropriate that we publish this *Harmony* of confessions so that people may see that we have been falsely charged, that we have rejected popish errors and that we agreed substantially among ourselves. . . . And how narrow shall the boundaries of the Catholic faith of those who accuse us seem to be when

[24]Quick, *Synodicon*, 1: 151; and Aymon, *Tous les Synodes Nationaux*, 1: 167.

> it is openly known that there be so many of us who hold common views and who have renounced the abuses and orders of the Romish Church and profess the truth of the Gospel. As for those whom it please to count us with the Arians and Turks, they shall see how far through the grace of God we are from such heinous and wicked errors. And also they who accuse us of sedition shall see how reverently we treat the dignity of kings and the authority of the magistrates, and they not content with those public confessions of the churches of Germany will lay still further charges against us and thus sever themselves further from us. And those who have already been refuted by most learned writings, they shall be satisfied with this *Harmony* if they really desire true concord.[25]

The preface also stated the purpose of the *Harmonia confessionum fidei*:

> And this was the reason we desired to put the confession of Augsburg together with that of Saxony and Württemberg, that in this *Harmony* it might be the more easily understood that we agree with them in all particular points of the faith, and that there are very few matters of controversy between us.[26]

The preface then closed with a plaintive plea:

> Therefore most gracious kings, dukes, barons, noble lords, cities and principalities, wise pastors, teachers, and all Christian people professing the true Gospel, be present in soul and body; do not allow the poison of discord to spread any further. But kill this hurtful serpent and receive with a Christian mind as you should and as it is offered to you this most sure offer and token of the everlasting friendship of the French and Belgian churches for you, offered to you in front of the whole world, that we being in a friendly league bound together in Christ may vanquish anti-christ, and may sing that hymn to the Lord our God: "Behold how good and joyful it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."[27]

Thus, the officially sanctioned French Calvinist response to the Formula of Concord is a Protestant irenicum.

III

The third level of reaction to the Lutheran confessional formula was that of the national synods of the French Reformed Church. It was sustained and vigorous. Beginning with the Synod of St. Foy in February of 1578, and ending with

---

[25]Salvard, *Harmony*, preface, pp. [vi-viii]. I have translated the older English into modern idiom.

[26]Ibid., p. [x].

[27]Ibid., p. [xviii].